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Queer and the Cost of Living Crisis (RSE Seminar Series)

'Political Crisis', with Dr Rebecca Crowther and Vic Valentine, from the Equality Network, Patrick Harvie MSP and Professor Yvette Taylor, University of Strathclyde

Professor Yvette Taylor: Thanks, and welcome to the 3rd in the Series of [Queer and the Cost of Living Crisis](#), it's nice to see new – and familiar – faces. The seminar series is funded by the Royal Society of Edinburgh [RSE], part of my Queer Social Justice Personal Research Fellowship – and I'm still recruiting for this project, and I've put information on your chairs, so please share and participate if of interest. Questions of cost, or crisis, and living, are always going to be questions of social justice.

The Series hopes to think through how queer lives, investments and resistance – materially, culturally, politically and emotionally – might help inform solutions to, or ways in living with, through and beyond crisis. This reimagining might include how people and communities respond without – and outwith – State support, or without and beyond our institutional contexts. Crisis might be the wrong frame, it suggests an interruption, a point, rather than a continuation and e.g. poverty will not go away with an economic adjustment, or personal resilience. Some crises are long-standing, and I'm sure we'll here today how these are multifaceted and intersectional, impacting on questions of welfare, health, housing, employment, relationships, the realisation (or not) of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policies and protections, and the environment (across different scales).

The Series runs as a continued conversation and forthcoming dates on the Eventbrite page have been posted: we'll soon hear from LGBTQ+ student union representatives across Scotland, and some postgraduate students, on the 16th Feb. at 12noon, so please do join us if you can, to explore what does the student voice say about the cost of living crisis? And we'll likely hear about student and graduate choices and experiences in the context of the cost of living crisis. There are also open access transcripts of previous events – including a conversation on [Queer Data In/As Crisis](#)¹, and watch out for the transcript upload of my conversation with Canadian author of the *This Has Always Been A War. The Radicalisation of a Working-Class Queer*, L.E. Fox. In the spirit of open access, we are going to record this discussion – and I'll stop when we come into audience participation and Q+A. And in the spirit of collectively working together to create safer spaces, I'll know we'll commit to the principles of equality, diversity, and inclusion, creating an environment in which all students,

¹ Full transcript available here: Guyan, K., & Taylor, Y. (2023, Nov 30). Queer and the cost of living crisis: data in/as crisis. <https://pureportal.strath.ac.uk/en/publications/queer-and-the-cost-of-living-crisis-data-in-as-crisis>

staff and visitors feel welcome, respected, and able to fully participate in events and activities.

The structure of the day will be that I'll introduce speakers and I'll give a bit of an introduction to the Series, we'll hear from Patrick Harvie MSP for about 20-30 mins, and we'll hear from Dr Rebecca Crowther and Vic Valentine, from the Equality Network, for about 20-30 mins. We'll open up to a general discussion with questions and answers.

For those of you who don't know me I'm Yvette Taylor, I'm a Professor in the Strathclyde Institute of Education, and I describe myself as queer-feminist sociologist, amongst other descriptions. I've worked with the Scottish Government researching LGBTQ+ lives in the pandemic, as a Parliamentary Fellow – so I've some sense of working within formal political or institutional structures, including university ones - and with Scottish Ballet on Safe to be Me, exploring inclusive curriculum in schools. I've researched and written books on queer life and class inequality, recently including [*Working-Class Queers. Time, Place and Politics.*](#)

It's my pleasure to introduce Patrick Harvie, who has been a Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) for the Glasgow region since 2003, having served as one of two co-leaders of the Scottish Greens since 2008 (and as one of the first Green politicians in the UK to serve as a government minister) and serving as Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights since 2021. Patrick has long been involved in equality work, including over the repeal of Section 28, as a youth worker, and in HIV prevention campaigning. Thanks for being with us today!

I'm also delighted to introduce two members of the Equality Network, Chief Executive Officer, Dr Rebecca Crowther, and Scottish Trans Manager, Vic Valentine. For those of you not familiar with the Equality Network, please do check out their website, and their – again long-term work – for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) equality and human rights in Scotland. The Equality Network was founded back in 1997 as a national organisation working for LGBT rights and equality in Scotland, and is a registered charity governed by a volunteer Board of Trustees. Scottish Trans Alliance has been an Equality Network project since 2007. Welcome to Rebecca and Vic and thanks for being with us today!

Starting with Rebecca, what should we be talking about when it comes to queer and the cost of living crisis?

Dr Rebecca Crowther: So there's a lot that should and can be explored when it comes to financial stability, our human rights, and the realisation of them. Both discrimination in the cost-of-living and being afforded a life of dignity – dignity is something I'll come back to – there are many sociocultural aspects that impact upon one another and exacerbate structural inequalities, financial precarity, and ongoing difficult situations for many within our community. The knowledge and data that I'm going to share today is shared from our cost-of-living themed stakeholder events we've been doing for a couple of years I would say. We are involved with Stirling University on LGBT+ access to welfare and assets, and from our recent survey looking at LGBTI experiences of human rights, which was done when the Scottish government was doing their consultation on the Human Rights Incorporation Bill.

Particularly relevant here are issues around Article 11 of the International Covenant of Economic and Social Rights, also to do with adequate standards of living, the right to healthy environment, and issues here also tie into our realisation of rights around health, mental health, cultural access and dignity. So first up there's big issues with housing, there are significant issues with both housing, living situations, and experiences of one's neighbourhood for the LGBTI community. This includes housing insecurity, ability to access one's own property, dangerous living situations, vermin, unstable housing, damp conditions, collapsed structures, mould, drafts, faulty windows, lack of central heating, cold buildings, obviously the cost-of-living crisis and the threat of eviction.

And some examples that we've seen demonstrate the threat to Article 11 and the right to healthy living environment. And this may seem like it's not unique to the LGBT community, which it's not, but LGBTI people are far more likely to live in urban environments and far more likely to rent their homes than non-LGBTI people. Therefore, LGBTI people are more subject to unhealthy living environments that plague renters – damp, mould, poor insulation, inefficient heating systems, inability to make repairs, tight housing markets forcing us to accept poorer conditions, and insecure housing. There's higher rates of renting, which can also mean more susceptibility to the cost-of-living crisis, due to rent increases in non-rent-controlled properties. And that's without even beginning to mention the experiences faced because of discrimination or access to housing at all when faced with discrimination or discriminatory landlords, and within the workplace, which obviously would lead to having issues with income and therefore access to housing.

Living in urban environments can also mean higher exposure to air pollution, poor environment, and having less access to green spaces. And some cities in Scotland have been built to be car-dominated, making active travel difficult and increasing exposure to pollution. This can contribute to unhealthy environments experienced by populations such as the LGBTI community, who are more likely to live in these urban areas. We've heard of real despair in relation to the rise of the cost-of-living and it's become clear that the community is disproportionately affected by this cost-of-living crisis. LGBTI people are more likely to be single, more likely to live in the private rented sector, more likely to be affected by the benefits cap. The findings of the research have indicated that cis LGB people – so originally when the research was done they only had a pool of cis LGB people, but then went back to work with trans people, which I'll come to – the findings of the research with the University

of Stirling indicated that cis LGB people become significantly more likely than heterosexual people to receive benefits as they get older. The research also found that women were more commonly receiving benefits, probably not much of a surprise, and a larger proportion of gay men received benefits at higher levels than heterosexual men. This research, through qualitative interviews, found that trans and non-binary people struggled with denied identities in interactions with the welfare state administration.

Much like in other walks of life, people suffered threat to safety, discrimination and humiliation within real life benefit environments, and felt access was easier when online during the COVID pandemic. It was also found that hyper-masculine and heteronormative work environments made obtaining employment even harder. Initial findings highlighted substantive concerns regarding the community and financial precarity within this crisis. These included what was referred to as the queer cushion, which is a survival mechanism – this is how it's described – where people were sharing and lending very small amounts of money, amounts of cash back and forth, you know, the same tenner doing the rounds – and they had fewer support networks, and that was particularly true for trans people. Some community members, which we've found in our human rights work, are turning to survival and sex work in order to get by. Some are unable to afford gender affirming items or to socialise.

For respondents the current financial crisis presents a need to merely survive, but many have no ability to weather change or any sudden expenses, as they have no savings nor any means to save money. Our survey further evidenced that the cost-of-living crisis is having significant impacts. Difficulties in job attainment and job security, financial precarity, unaffordable utilities and rent, and struggles accessing benefits comes with an inevitable impact on living circumstances – that's also access to food, adequate housing, amenities, and this in turn is obviously having an impact on mental health and physical health, an issue that is already huge within the community. Historically also our community having been neglected by wider society and subject to discrimination, alienation and estrangement, form different kinds of kinship networks. They're more likely to prioritise found family and to have strained relationships with biological family, and are less likely to have children of their own, so this can also impact access to financial support. As is often the case – not surprising again – it's evident that things are even harder for disabled and older members of our community.

We found that twenty-one per cent of respondents to our survey had in the past been homeless, and currently three per cent were still without fixed abode, and obviously this can contribute to experiencing unhealthy environments, whether sleeping rough, in temporary accommodation, or in shelters. Many respondents had experienced homelessness because of being LGBTI, and some were estranged from those familial support networks. And some faced homelessness because of domestic abuse. Understanding domestic abuse in the queer community is a whole other issue that's not currently done very well.

And finally, in relation to access to our cultural rights, current and historical persecution of LGBTI people deeply affect our access to those rights. A lack of access to places where we can be assured physical and emotional safety, which is becoming increasingly an issue, and experiences of violence, abuse and trauma within public and social spaces impact the

realisation of these rights. Because we can't just go anywhere. And there's often a cost, a financial cost, involved to accessing safe cultural and social spaces, whether that's pay on entry or whether you're coming from rural areas to find LGBT-friendly spaces. There's also a cost to accessing online social spaces of course, because the internet isn't free, and there's some digital poverty being experienced in the community. And it seems like a luxury that many people can't afford. That too leads to isolation. Financial mobility is difficult. People were not only struggling to go out, but they were also unable to move away from dangerous living situations. So where people were experiencing hate crime, hate incidences, abuse in their neighbourhoods, they couldn't leave.

And finally, just coming to dignity, dignity is essential to ensuring not only formal equality for LGBTI people but that we can flourish. And this is something that, thankfully, the new Human Rights Incorporation Bill is hoping to deal with. As a marginalised community, historically and presently, often considered and treated as without dignity, the LGBTI community has long experienced othering, being treated as inherently wrong and without equal worth, and further dehumanised. As the community is affected by the rise of the cost-of-living some are looking to alternate means of income and sustenance of income. Some are feeling that that sense of dignity is at a risk. For some without access to gender affirmative care this can also include costly private healthcare, procedures, gender affirming treatments et cetera, which Vic, I'll leave that to Vic.

Some big examples of economic, social and cultural rights, as that are presently being limited by this inability to access them in a way that is compatible with human dignity include, the right to social security – so trans people without a GRC are unable to access services from the DWP in the same manner as cisgender people, since their records can't be updated. The right to adequate standard of living – LGBTI people have a formal right to not be discriminated against in housing but are at higher risk of unsafe, unhealthy living conditions, both due to living disproportionately in the private rented sector and due to hostility from neighbours. And some leave themselves in precarious financial situations due to seeking private healthcare beyond their financial means, which leads to precarity in other aspects of their life.

So we are disproportionately affected by the cost-of-living crisis and inequality in the welfare system, financial precarity is leaving us in situations of poor living conditions without adequate food or means to pay bills and a reliance on friends for financial support, for some a turn to survival work and a low ability for social interaction. And I will pass onto Vic to home in on the trans and non-binary community.

Vic Valentine: So yes, my name's Vic, I'm from the trans-specific bit of the Equality Network. So we also did a separate survey. The great thing about working in the third sector is that we're brilliant at doing surveys but not so good at publishing them, so this is also to be put out there. But yeah, we did that from March to July of last year [2023] and we spoke to nearly six hundred trans people. And we asked people about kind of their local area where they lived, their experience of public services, housing and homelessness, benefits, employment, and the cost-of-living crisis. And in particular one of the reasons that we decided to focus on these kinds of things is that we find quite often that policymakers and

governments are really bad at understanding that trans people, or more widely LGBT+ people, are people who can face kind of structural barriers in those kind of daily issues of substance. We're often seen very specifically through an identity lens, right? And when people are thinking about policy and legislation they're thinking about stuff that kind of speaks to our identities, and they're thinking less about what barriers are in place for people having equal access to the kinds of public services that the state is supposed to provide to everyone.

In terms of thinking about the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis on trans people I kind of wanted to highlight what, a kind of, yeah, cycle of experiences that trans people tend to have that become a bit of a feedback loop that kind of result in us seeing that there's a disproportionate affect on trans and non-binary people. So we find that people have kind of negative experiences in their local communities and with their neighbours, and that's often on like a spectrum. From quite low-level things, where people maybe just notice that people tend to stare at them a lot when they're out and about, up to kind of maybe slightly kind of under the breath comments, all the way to like verbal, and then even up to physical assault. And obviously those things on the kind of worse end of the spectrum are happening less frequently, but we're a small community who talks to each other, and I'm sure lots of people in the room know about minority stress. So, lots of people end up in this situation where even if they haven't explicitly themselves had an experience of a kind of physical assault for example, people can become really anxious about their physical safety in public spaces.

People also experience a range of discrimination in kind of services, housing, and employment. Becky touched a little bit there on some of the stuff around benefits. So if you change your name as a trans person, with the DWP, before you have got a gender recognition certificate, to maintain your privacy, because they won't update the gender on your file but they'll update your name, for argument's sake say you've now got an F marker on your benefits file but you've changed your name to David, and they're like 'okay so pretty much anyone looking at that is probably going to be able to take an educated guess that this person is trans. So to maintain your privacy we'll put your records on a lockdown, so that only a small number of DWP workers can access them'. In theory sounds great. I'm not exaggerating when I say that there are fewer than ten people across the country who are then able to access those sensitive records, and they're not just available when you call up and ask for them, right? So if your benefits are stopped unexpectedly and then you're trying to call to find out why that's happened all that happens is you get someone who goes 'oh I'm really sorry, I can't seem to see your file. Do you want to try again tomorrow?' And that can happen, you know, several times, and people sometimes wait like weeks and weeks and weeks for a callback when they're in really, really precarious financial situations. It was actually, the system was actually set up for celebrities and members of the royal family, but obviously very few of them actually are on benefits. So it's kind of fine for them to wait a little bit for a callback. It's much more difficult for trans people.

There's also kind of, we also heard a lot about people who felt like they experienced a range of discrimination in housing. So sometimes again that was like quite kind of overt discrimination. Like on realising that someone was trans they were no longer kind of

considered to be a suitable tenant. Maybe they would experience kind of abuse or harassment from flatmates and be forced out of housing. But again there's some of that more insidious stuff, stuff around how you prove your identity, and kind of letting agencies just having no idea about name changes and sort of like questioning whether people were able to prove their identity in sufficient ways to be able to sign on to rental agreements. So just kind of little things like that mean, I mean it's a nightmare enough, right, trying to rent a flat, without forty per cent of the places you're trying to rent feeling like somehow your paperwork is too confusing for you to even be considered?

And then kind of all of this I'd say then feeds then back into that then sense of people not wanting or feeling able to access the sort of small amount of mitigation and support that has been put in place around the cost-of-living. And I think that was, kind of thinking about what you were saying as well at the beginning in your intro Yvette, about like this idea of personal responsibility and thinking about, what is it that we can all do to kind of minimise the impact that the cost-of-living crisis is having on us? But who is it that this advice is for? Like what kind of a person are we imagining? What are we taking for granted about their ability to feel like they can trust their local community or that they can rely on services?

One thing that we found in our survey, and again not particularly surprisingly, but was just that disabled respondents were massively more impacted by pretty much everything that we asked about, around kind of the cost-of-living and financial security. I think sixty-nine per cent of our respondents were disabled. We define that really broadly using a social model of disability. So it's, you know, it's self-selecting, it's not like we ask people about impairments or conditions or anything. We always find that we have really high levels of responses from disabled people, when we do trans work, when we do broader LGBT+ work. There's a lot of theorising around why that is, I don't know why it is. But yeah we always see it.

But yeah just, I guess, you can see some of the comparisons, but some of them are fairly stark, particularly the figure around homelessness. Because we also then saw disabled respondents were more likely to be in social housing situations, they were much more likely to be dissatisfied with their housing, they were much more likely to be worried about making their next housing payment. And then also some of the kind of qualitative stuff that came through was that housing was often unsuitable, it didn't actually meet their accessibility needs, people who had had to rely on homelessness services, if they were a disabled person had found that kind of temporary or emergency accommodation had been inappropriate and hadn't been accessible for them. So yeah, it seems like disabled people are really, really on the sharp end of all of this, and it's something that we're hoping to do quite a lot of work on kind of, yeah, partnering with disabled people's organisations to really see how we can get at some of the really pointy end of this stuff. Because it was, yeah, some of the differences were really quite concerning, if, yeah, not all that surprising.

And then the final thing that I just wanted to kind of come to as well is like when we talk about the cost-of-living what is it that we mean by living quite often? I think that we've got into a space where so many people are in such a kind of desperate situation that we're kind of starting to think that if you're not so cold that you've got three layers on and you're wrapped in a blanket and you're not starving to death like that's, at the minute, in the

current situation, that's sort of an okay baseline, because so many people are struggling so much.

But some of the trans-specific stuff that came out around the impacts around the cost-of-living crisis, we kind of asked people 'has the cost-of-living crisis caused you to have to take decisions between like necessities and gender affirming or transition-related costs?' And yeah, a huge proportion of people said that they did. And it was largely focused on these three main areas: so gender affirming purchases and social spaces were the two littler ones, but the biggest one was healthcare. I can't really go anywhere without talking about the state of NHS gender affirming healthcare. But yeah there was, people are, services, the NHS services for gender affirming care were in crisis long before the COVID pandemic, the pandemic massively kind of exacerbated those problems, and now for example in the biggest clinic here in Glasgow people right now have been waiting about six years by the time they have their first appointment. And at the minute about three times as many people join the list every quarter as are seen for a new appointment. So I don't want to do the maths of what that actually means for people who are currently joining the list. I think it's barely a service if you're waiting six years for an appointment. If we're starting to talk in decades you're not running a service for people.

And for lots of trans people accessing gender affirming healthcare is like a vital part of us feeling like we can actually live happy and healthy lives. So people then end up in situations where they're trying, if they can, to pay for private healthcare. For some people that's never been possible, because private healthcare is expensive, but for, we saw lots of people talking about kind of restricting the amount they were eating so that they could afford prescriptions and appointments, people who maybe had been on the route to being able to access surgery, they'd sort of paid for all their consultation appointments, but now because of changing financial situation they're not actually able to go ahead with any surgical interventions. Like people who are really kind of stuck with this sense of, well am I supposed to just wait forever, and what am I, you know, what am I expected to, or do I need to, give up to be able to kind of access just the healthcare that I need really?

And then, yeah, the, as I say it did, healthcare specifically really did dominate what people told us. But then yeah there were just other things, like Becky mentioned, around social spaces, and particularly for people who live in rural and remote parts of Scotland as well, right? Trans people are quite a, we're quite a small community, and for people who are in more like isolated parts of Scotland, if you then factor in the costs of public transport, in theory for what might just be a monthly opportunity to be in maybe the one space where they feel kind of seen and held and heard by other people, and all of a sudden that's no longer an option because it would mean not having the heating on for two days. That, you know, people were saying to us that there was, I think one of the things someone said was 'it just feels like choosing between paying my bills or being myself, which doesn't feel very good'.

So yeah, not lots of particularly cheery things that we found out to be honest, but hopefully some of it is kind of interesting to start a bit of a discussion.

Yvette Taylor: Thank you so much. So over to yourself, Patrick.

Patrick Harvie MSP: Thanks very much. Thanks for the invitation to come and speak. In my day job we get told we've got six minutes to speak, and somebody starts tapping the microphone angrily when we get close to it. So when you said twenty to thirty my heart stopped for a moment. Forgive me if I don't use all of that time. I was going to go back in time a little bit, well quite a lot actually, partly because I feel like I'm getting to the age now where all I've got to talk about is how things used to be. But also I thought moving through the different stages of my life might relate to how things are the same and how things have changed, for different cohorts of people and different life stages. And also because each of the phases of the crises, plural, that we're talking about have not arrived just in the abstract, but they've arrived in a context of what came before.

I suppose starting this at school, young people, when I was growing up, and I think to a large extent now, even though there's so much more awareness, so much more openness than there used to be, it's still a very charged and polarised, and kind of insecure period in which to be starting to explore these issues of identity. And when I was growing up we didn't all have a device like this [mobile phone] screaming abuse at you through the one thing that you think you're connecting to your friends and to information about the world through. And there's always been some people who have a nightmare experience through that and some people who have a very supported experience through that, and some people who end up having a supported experience but are really, really worried before it happens that it's going to be problematic or stressful or they'll get kicked out of home or whatever. And that worry and that anxiety that comes with the risk of facing that can be every bit as real for people as they fear it becoming a reality. And certainly when I was at school I knew young people who just disappeared off the map, and rumours about 'so-and-so's gay, so-and-so's', you know? I'm not going to use the words that were actually used in this context, but you can imagine them. Those kind of rumours would swirl around somebody, and if they just stopped coming to school some time and you never saw them again nobody ever knew why. And that kind of experience, even observing it, exacerbates the anxiety that people would have.

A little bit later I, just after school I started going along to a youth group that existed in Glasgow, an LGBT youth group. Well that's what we would call it now. At the time it was the Strathclyde Lesbian and Gay Youth Movement, totally self-organised little group of young people because nobody else was doing anything for them. And even that, starting to self-organise, was precarious, because they were constantly having to borrow a room in somebody else's organisation to meet in, and if you found them you would be told, over the helpline, of the place that you would go and see and look for somebody holding a blue folder, because that was the secret signal to how you found the youth group.

Now that's probably a very, very different experience than a lot of young people who can access a service like that would have now, but that's where those services exist, and they don't exist in every community. They probably are more prominent in the cities, but they don't exist in every community and they certainly aren't signposted to from every school or every youth service or every health service or whatever that people might need to find

those routes. And for those who did face the precarity of, you know, knowing or fearing that their parents would not tolerate, or would not support, or would not accept who they were, the immediate question was how to get out, and how to establish some kind of independence. And in a scene where almost all the queer space or LGBT space, or however we want to frame it, is commercial and is booze-focused that's quite an expensive, as well as a vulnerable, place to be. And even if it, you know there would've been some who, because of that context, because that was the only space they felt they could be themselves, that was the only space they had, some went as far as getting drawn into sex work or whatever. But even if it wasn't what you would formally recognise as sex work, if somebody else who is more secure in, financially secure in their lives, is buying the drinks or letting you sleep on their sofa or their spare room when you need it, that's a form of vulnerability to exploitation, even if it's not intentional exploitation. It's a form of vulnerability that plays out in ways that can stay with people.

You did ask [Yvette], when you started to talk, about how queer lives actually can find solutions to these problems, not just how they experience these problems. And one of the things that emerges is the self-selected family, the queer family group that comes together and creates that space. And just like other forms of family it doesn't always work well for everybody, but when it does it can be incredibly empowering and long-lasting, and can create bonds that are really, really strong for the long-term. So that, I think, is one of the positive experiences that sometimes comes out of that vulnerability.

I'll go forward to when I was at uni, and again lots of people use higher education as the excuse to get away from where they were growing up. I thought I wanted a degree when I went to uni, but actually I wanted to get away, and when I discovered that, that was what I threw my time and my energy into and I never came away with a degree. I would've made a very bad academic. But I discovered what it was to have a life. And I think that is still an experience that's relevant now, as it was back in those days, of that experience of getting away to education as the first space that you've got to explore your own life and your own identity and a life that you define for yourself. And again that's not an experience that everybody has, it's not something that everyone feels they can access, and those that do, it can work well for some, but it doesn't always, and it can create, whether it's around the private rented sector, whether it's around needing, you know, extra income through working in, you know, sometimes quite exploitative environments, you know, the commercial venues, the scene venues that a lot of young people, when I was at uni working on the scene was, that was the aspirational thing. That was what you wanted to do, because you got to live your entire life in a queer context. And they were not good employers then, just like they're not good employers now. And there's an economic exploitation as well as an impact on people's health and wellbeing that comes out of that.

I then, a few years later, after I moved back here, I was working as an LGBT youth worker with what that youth group that I'd come out to had evolved into, still in Glasgow. And I think I became more aware then of the incredibly polarised and wide range of experiences that young people were having. You know, the issues around precarity and - whether that's housing, employment, or anything else - they're not experienced equally in our society as a

whole, for young people that thought they were coming from a fairly kind of financially secure, you know, reasonably kind of well set up background, suddenly losing that, they were facing that precarity without having the life skills, perhaps the street skills, that somebody who thought that was what life was all about had built up. And so that's a very different experience of precarity, suddenly coming new into it as opposed to having always known it. Those are not the same experiences. There's not necessarily a value judgement about what's more or less valid there, but they're both very, very real.

I'm going to move into politics now because at this time, when I was working with the youth group in Glasgow, it became very, very polarised around the repeal of Section 28, or Section 2A as it was called in Scotland. And I used to think that there was no chance I would ever say something like this, but that is now very, very much the experience that's being had again, you know, actually, you know, in a more intensified and rarefied way in some respects. That sense that our rights, our equality, our dignity was a matter for public debate and polarised and hostile and weaponised public debate, I thought at the time that was the kind of death rattle of that kind of era, that repeal of Section 28 was one of the last big battles of that kind we'd have. I never imagined that it would be rebooted and reinvented in the way that's happening right now.

So this, I would say, is something that's very, very common with, you know, previous decades, and is now part of people's experience in a way that I thought would never come back again. And it is horrific to see things like, not happening in Scotland at the moment, but advice and guidance being sent to schools worse even than Section 28. Even in the days of Section 28 schools were not told 'you should out young people to their parents when they're not ready'. That's particularly targeted at trans and non-binary young people, or just young people who are wanting to explore those questions about who they are. Even, you know, in the days of Margaret Thatcher schools were not told to do that. And so once again you've got that sense of people's autonomy and dignity and right to make decisions about themselves and their own lives just being pulled out from under them. And that is going to have, once again, a very, very different impact on those who are lucky enough to be growing up in a family, even if they lose control, a family that will still support them, as opposed to one that won't.

Vic talked a little bit about the issues around access to things like healthcare and the pressures on people to go private, and I'm not going to rehash that. But there's something about the way that many, many public services responded to the first wave of austerity politics after the financial crash, or the first wave of modern era austerity politics after the financial crash in 2008. It's not necessarily that those services that were specifically geared toward LGBT+ people were axed or were, you know, more defunded than anything else. But those services that were suddenly finding themselves just about managing to keep a service going no longer had the time to sit back and take a breath and think, are we designing and delivering this service in an inclusive way? Who are the people we might be missing? That sense of being able to reexamine how we deliver services and how open and accessible they are, and how responsive they are to the diverse needs of a community, those questions were much, much more difficult to even ask, let alone find the answers and try and address

those issues about how those services are to access. So public services in the round didn't necessarily get whipped away from people, but we didn't necessarily manage to keep a cycle of improvement of those services, because that relies on the people delivering those services having the time and the space to do some imaginative work and self-reflection, rather than just firefighting and keeping the thing going.

And then I guess I'm going to finish just by looking forward a wee bit, because, you know, we've talked a little bit about financial precarity, we've talked a little bit about the kind of, well the stuff that we've already experienced, and I suppose I'd like to think about the stuff that we're yet to experience.

Ours is not one of the countries in which the climate and nature emergency is hitting hardest, compared with some other countries around the world, but it's going to happen, and when COP came to Glasgow we tried to create some space for those delegates who were interested, but also communities in Glasgow who were interested, to come together and talk about, what is the relationship between LGBT people, or a wider take on equality and diversity around the world, and the climate emergency? And some of the discussions were really provocative actually, in the sense of not just the political and cultural landscape of countries that are affected, but the economic relationships within and between countries that are going to be tested to breaking point by an environmental crisis that's already unfolding and that we are not globally yet responding to. And I think we need to be, I'm not going to suggest on this that I have a set of answers, I think we need to be willing to challenge ourselves to think about, where is that going to go, and to know that we don't yet have the answers to that. There will be stuff around, you know, any country, just as any individual, who's faced with increasingly desperate and urgent circumstances, may well contract their scope of vision, you know, go into a kind of survival mode, not be willing to, or have the space to, self-reflect and think about the needs of marginalised people. But that also the systems that are creating this global crisis are themselves, they derive from an economic model that is setting on top of many, many different forms of inequality and, I mean we've used the word precarity a lot, but there's so many different forms of it almost defies one word.

Yeah, I suppose the last thing I wanted to say, again, is there is something about the polarisation of our political culture which, I mean sometimes it's about these kind of social media bubbles that we all live in, sometimes it's about a media landscape that wants us to be hostile to each other and that conflict, you know, sells, clicks and it sells eyeballs on screens and it creates that kind of dynamic that certain parts of the media landscape thrive off. But there is something about the ways in which LGBT progress and equality has happened over the decades, in those countries where it has happened. It's been about reaching out, it's been about being seen, it's been about people who might previously have been perceived only as a stereotype, or as a kind of caricature, you know, on a sitcom or in a movie or whatever, those human lives becoming perceived in a real sense. And so I think that story of how we got over those stereotypes, how we changed those perceptions, and what coming out actually does, what it is, I think it's got something valuable to say to us about how our wider political culture deals with this polarisation, this sense of mutual

othering, that's happening across so many different fronts. Not just sexuality or gender or class, but, you know, so many aspects of what's happening to fracture our political culture at the moment is about us being encouraged not to see each other for who we really are, and not to see each other as human beings but merely as stereotypes. And I think there's something about the story of coming out and what coming out is that's got a wider application potentially.

I was intending to make that sound like a hopeful final thought, and I'm not very good at being hopeful any more. It's hard work being hopeful these days. But, well if it's any use I'll put it on the table.

Yvette: Definitely. Thank you, that was so rich in terms of the data in the present and some of the stories that yourselves, Vic and Becky, showed, but also looking back to the past and forward into the future. And I wondered about your own thoughts in terms of sustaining yourselves in organisational political structures where these debates can be on repeat, and kind of frustratingly on repeat, and can lead to a point of exhaustion. Do you have any thoughts about, you know, what is it we do to sustain each other to move forward in these moments? Maybe that's a story of hope?

Rebecca: It's certainly something we talk about a lot. It's certainly something that is of immediate importance, whether that's the wellbeing of the community at large or the wellbeing of those in the sector who are working on issues. In fact, when people were talking I started writing about what else can we do to support our staff at Equality Network who are really struggling with the cost-of-living crisis and everything else. You know, when you're expose, not exposing yourself, but you're exposed as a person on a daily basis, trying to change the situations for people like you, and you are the person that you are and it's being torn apart in the media, on top of struggling with the cost-of-living, perhaps your own gender affirming care, perhaps your own housing issues. It's really difficult to keep going.

So we don't have answers, but as we've said kinship within the queer community has always been so strong, and there are so many lessons that can be learnt from how we support one another to get through these things. And as an organisation we're trying to think about all of the different things we might consider, you know, policy-wise, internal policy-wise, whether that's things to do with pay or cost-of-living additional payments, to working from home, flexible hours, all of the different things you can do to just make life that little bit easier. And kind of maintaining some of that real empathy that arose in the pandemic, that perhaps workforces and workplaces hadn't experienced before. A real openness about mental health, an openness about struggling, of being a bit more allowing of people to make mistakes, to not work the long hours, to just be a bit more flexible to humanity I think. But yeah, it's a struggle, and it's constantly at the forefront when we're battling on all fronts, whether it's the media or the cost-of-living or the environment or.

Patrick: I think there's something that we need to challenge in ourselves as a community as well though, because, you know, every civil rights kind of issue has experienced this, there have always been, you know, some, you know, the idea of the kind of financially stable, usually gay male couple, you know, double income, no kids pulling the ladder up after

themselves. It's not exactly a stereotype, there is a bit of truth in there. It can be used, overused as a stereotype sometimes. But, you know, the LGBT+, the queer community, however we frame it, it does have many, many strengths about creating community because people felt the absence of it. But it's not universal, it's absolutely not universal. And the experience of selfishness and of exclusion is part of the community as well. And that, you know, in numbers that are far smaller than the media would have us believe, but it is certainly part of the anti-trans sentiment that's being deliberately cultivated at the moment. There are, you know, I'm really sorry to say, a small proportion of my generation who are pulling the ladder up. Like 'we got our rights. That's fine then isn't it?' And we need to find ways to challenge that that don't end up getting people's backs up and making them feel that they're just going to retreat even more into that. But we need to talk about that tendency and why it happens and how we, you know, how we be better than that.

Rebecca: Yeah, you're absolutely right. There's two things there. One, we shouldn't have to rely on only our community. The structures and systems and establishments should change.

Patrick: Yeah. But it'd be nice if we could.

Rebecca: Yeah. I would agree, quite a lot of older gay men do seem a lot more comfortable and do that pulling up of the ladder once everything's fine for them, and a very, very small proportion of white, cis, lesbian women. But I think it's about challenging that within the community. We're not all on the same page.

Patrick: Yeah.

Rebecca: We're not all in the same situation, and there's so much more that we could be doing to acknowledge our privilege in where things have got to, before it rolls back for everybody, and reach out to those that are just not in the same space.

Yvette: It makes me think of a word that's often in sort of policy language, and even cultural or social media language, and when intersectionality has become a bit of a list does it still have purchase to be, how do we talk about intersectionality, and then beyond sort of queer communities?

Vic: I, something that, I was in a meeting recently with a guy who runs an organisation that looks at LGBT people of colours' experiences of health inequalities, and I found something he said like very simply summarised for me what has happened to the term intersectionality. Which was that he said 'I think we're saying intersectionality when what we're describing is being multi-faceted'. And like saying that it's really not, it's not very profound to acknowledge the fact that people, that like you can describe people with a range of adjectives. That wasn't what intersectionality was supposed to help us with, right? So yes, I think that, of course I think like actually intersectionality is still vitally important, but in exactly the same way that words like inclusion and diversity and equality kind of become part of the machinery of business as usual, we need to also kind of resist the idea that intersectionality should become like a word of the machinery of the business as usual.

And kind of, I think that some of that as well is actually about organisations like ours being self-reflective about not holding onto resources and knowledge, and thinking about the

extent to which we do community building and capacity building with people. Because I would hate to, I'm always very mindful of the idea that we might end up almost as like gatekeepers to, you know, to certain types of tables or discussions, or we kind of set the baseline of 'this is the, you've got to have at least like sixty per cent shared views with us to then be able to do x, y or z'. And actually I think it's really incumbent on people who are able, or have some greater access to these levers and tables, to be really, really mindful of the ways that you don't end up actually sometimes pulling a table up behind you while you're criticising people who, sorry, the ladder up behind you while you think you're just criticising other people who are doing it and you're not doing it yourself.

So yeah I think intersectionality is still really important, but it's about getting back to the idea that it's like, it's not just describing the fact that people are multi-faceted. It's about actually what does it look like to be right at the junction of two types of discrimination? That's what we're talking about. We're not talking about a list of what you're like.

Patrick: Can I make a confession here? I think the idea of what intersectionality is is really important. The word has always bugged me a lot, I've never liked the word. The thing is in American English an intersection is a bit of everyday language, it's like a, it's what we would call a crossroads. And so you can talk about intersectionality and it's immediately clear to people what that is, what it's physically describing, it's a metaphor for a crossroads. And in UK English it sounds like something from a geometry lesson, and so it hasn't ever moved away from being something that feels jargony and feels, if you'll forgive me, academic. You know, it's not a very accessible term. The word cross-roads-iness doesn't sound good. It doesn't feel like it's a real word. But intersectionality, it would be really, really helpful if we had a more everyday kind of spoken English word that captures the same idea. And I don't think for most people it ever will.

Rebecca: We've started using multiply marginalised, which I think is probably more accurate if you're talking about the different ways in which people are experiencing discrimination. Structural or otherwise. To experience that on multiple levels. It doesn't necessarily touch on that crossover though, because, as Vic was saying, that's what we're really interested in, is understanding, okay if you're a gay woman how do you experience that discrimination with let's say the health services? Add onto that that you're a black woman. How does that then change the experience of the services? Add on that you're an asylum seeker. So you're an asylum seeking, black, lesbian woman. That experience is so fundamentally different to anything that any other individual would experience, or any one kind of discrimination. And unless we understand why that's different we're not going to better services for people. So I think multiply marginalised helps, but it doesn't quite nail it.

Yvette: It might not be something to name ourselves as multiply marginalised, but do we need it as a term for people to identify with, or is it more about the practice or process? And I guess I'll, I'm all up for taking a knock at academia (laughs) and I know that you weren't doing that. But I also think, if we go back to the stories, your story [Patrick] about university being kind of life-changing and not necessarily about the credentialization, but about the experience. I do want to hold onto education as a space, and I know we've got teachers across sectors in the room - so watch out! But I do want to hold on that possibility,

like might we think university or academia even differently? And for me the language of intersectionality is a political concept linking back to Black feminism in particular. And I know that that's different from how it might be used popularly, but for me there's some worth in holding onto those spaces and that vocabulary, and also making them activist. So, but maybe on that practical note, because I know that there's people in the room that can remember the blue folder, as that activist practice, we'll turn to our audience now for their thoughts, questions, experiences. Thanks to our speakers and to the funders, the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

[End]