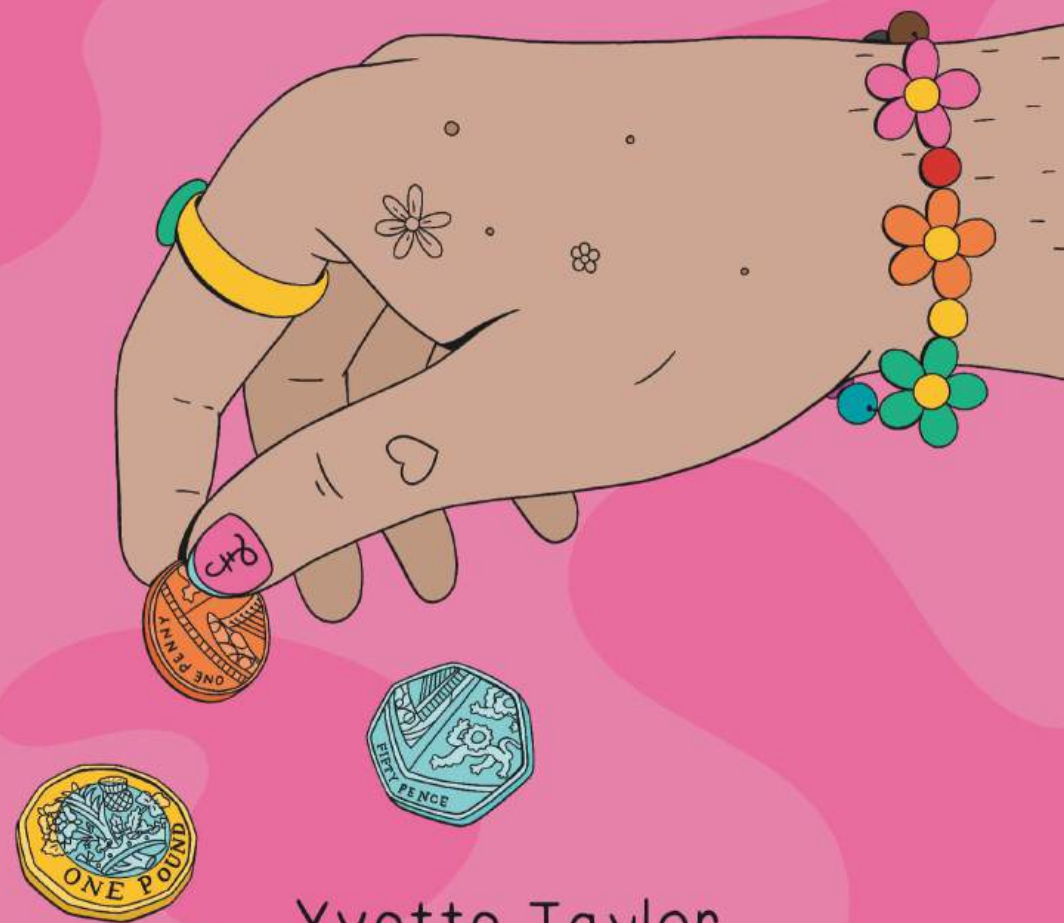




Queer and the Cost of Living Crisis



Yvette Taylor

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Scan for text-only version

Written by Yvette Taylor

Illustrated by Madeleine Leisk

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QUEER
SOCIAL
JUSTICE

INTRODUCTION

The Queer and the Cost of Living Crisis Seminar Series ran across 2024-2025, funded by the Royal Society of Edinburgh as part of the Queer Social Justice project. [1] The Series included a variety of topics, speakers and attendees across seven seminars, with presentations from journalists, cross-party politicians, LGBTQ+ organisations, creative practitioners, academics from across disciplines, and LGBTQ+ students in higher education. This summary report considers what we've learned from these voices and experiences, and to share where we are coming from, in order to think about ways forward through 'Crisis times'.



[1] Thanks to the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) for funding the Queer and the Cost of Living Crisis Seminar as part of Yvette Taylor's Queer Social Justice Personal Research Fellowship see: <https://rse.org.uk/queer-futures-alternative-models-for-social-justice/@queersocialjustice>

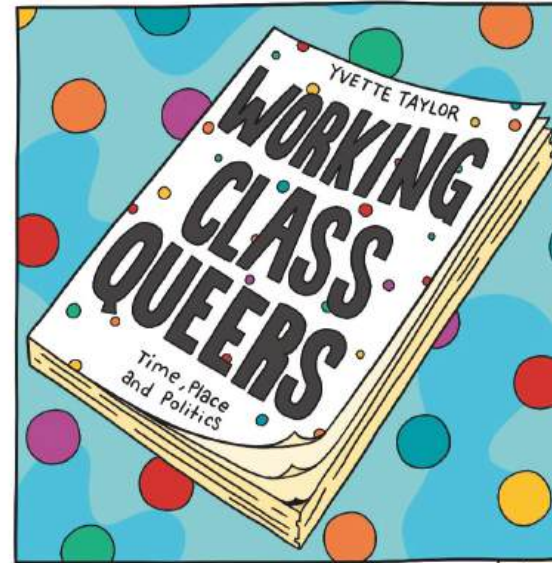
Transcripts of all seven events are available online: <https://pureportal.strath.ac.uk/en/persons/yvette-taylor/publications/>.

Thanks to all participants, and for 'turning up' for each other, including LGBTQ+ student representatives, Lou Brodie, Rebecca Crowther, Rohit K. Dasgupta, Jj Fadaka, L.E. Fox, Kevin Guyan, Patrick Harvie, Esraa Husain, Sanjay Lago, Hazel Marzetti, Peter Matthews, Emma Roddick, Vic Valentine.

Queer life is often subject to inequality and discrimination. Unfortunately, we still hear about the injustices surrounding queer experiences, with legislative progress threatened by political, social, and economic pressures. The Series occurred in the context of Crisis becoming an increasingly recognisable and common state. The Cost of living can mean death with war, conflict, pandemics, securitisation, and borders, stretching across time and place, evident in our local neighbourhoods, as well as in our inevitable connection to global networks, communities and countries. To be deemed as inhabiting the wrong body or territory can mean a denial of rights, including the right to life. Crises are often made over years, becoming embedded in neglectful and harmful policies:



One motivation for continuing to think with and through 'Crisis times', and what this means for different LGBTQ+ people and communities, come from the long-term research cumulating in the publication *Working-Class Queers: Time, Place and Politics* (Pluto, May 2023). Based on over 250 interviews across the UK, the book explores class, gender, and sexuality intersectionally, framed by feminist-queer theory, activism and practice.



5
Queers and Austerity

... it's [same-sex marriage] creating a sort of two-tiered world where you are kind of jolly and out and no problems and equal to straight people and then the kind of slightly grotty ones who decide not to. You know, like an underclass, and I'm in that! (laughter). I'm in that underclass ... again!

—Katerina, 52, white, lesbian, interviewed 2008

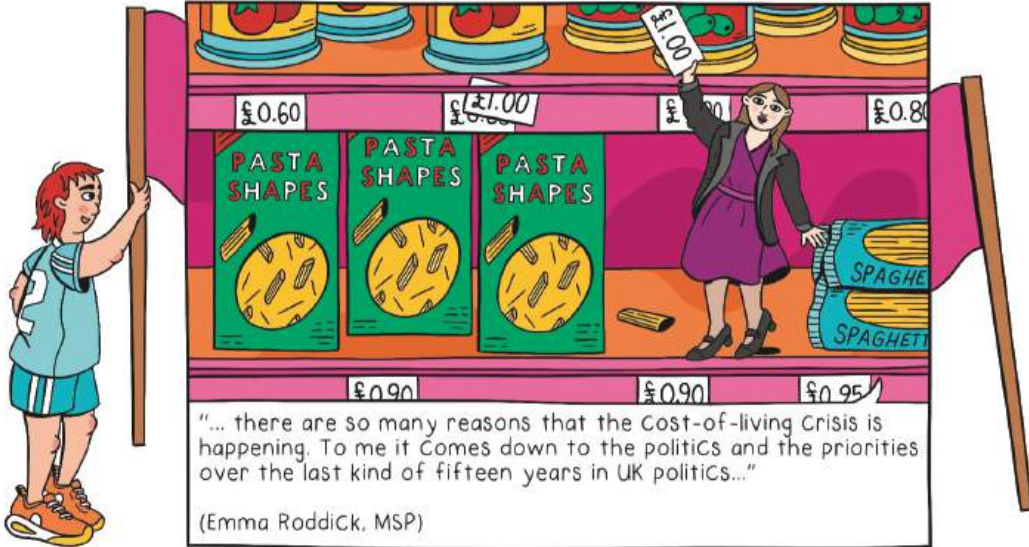
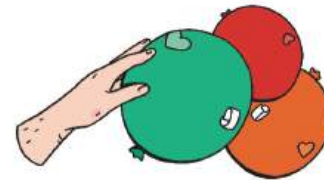
I'm not going to blame being trans, I'm just going to blame the recession.

—Leigh, 35, white, straight, trans woman, interviewed 2009

I've been quite involved with the anti-austerity, anti-cuts stuff, a lot of direct action when I've been well enough. I got arrested, that's not an experience I want to repeat ... I started doing creative protests, getting into shop windows of dodgy companies and posing as mannequins with messages and obviously the shops hate it but the public really love dressing up!

—Estelle, 25, white, queer, interviewed 2008

... to the global ... wide-

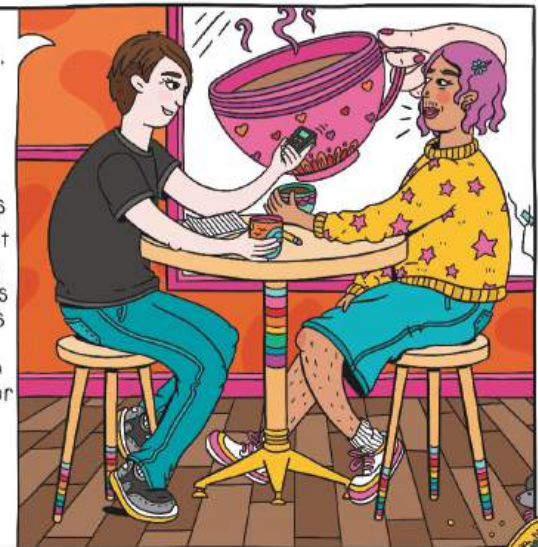


"... there are so many reasons that the cost-of-living crisis is happening. To me it comes down to the politics and the priorities over the last kind of fifteen years in UK politics..."

(Emma Roddick, MSP)

"My research participants have faced homelessness, poor housing, unemployment, underemployment, educational exclusion, workplace discrimination, precarity, benefits cuts, inadequate health services, and racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia ... I've been involved in the pursuit of healthcare, housing, and benefits entitlement for interviewees — pursuits not conveyed in the ethics pages of university research committees, or easily captured as academic use or impact. These experiences are more than an appendix to proper theory or policy progression, and they also surpass a listing of individual associations or characteristics ('hard-working', 'undeserving', 'failing', 'ambitious'), instead being understood as social and collective."

(Yvette Taylor, University of Strathclyde)



The long-term nature of Crisis is witnessed in persisting precarity across everyday contexts and in, for example, housing, employment and health. People live in and challenge these crisis states, including through campaigns, via protests and in turning-up in the classrooms, workplaces, relationships and communities, we exist and persist in.

Within the year-long series discussion centred on lived experiences, organisational, research, community and policy expertise and engagement, with hopeful gestures towards imagined queerer futures and liveable lives beyond crisis. This meant telling stories, including as part of a 'queer patchwork' practice, evident in the series through the range of approaches, which stretch beyond 'deficit data', in thinking of LGBTQ+ people and communities only in terms of risk or disadvantage:



"I also offer queer patchwork as a framework to refer to a state of mind which includes encounters with the precarities we witness and the injuries we've personally suffered during this pandemic ... patchwork is not just about the process of doing fieldwork, but also the very writing of it, given the multiple disruptions and tough life conditions which has also required a need of creative interpretation of concepts and stories that are built within these queer patchworks."

(Rohit K. Dasgupta, University of Glasgow)

The series offered an intersectional focus on queer life, hoping to re-imagine and respond to contemporary crisis, including through the circulation of stories, which demand to be heard:



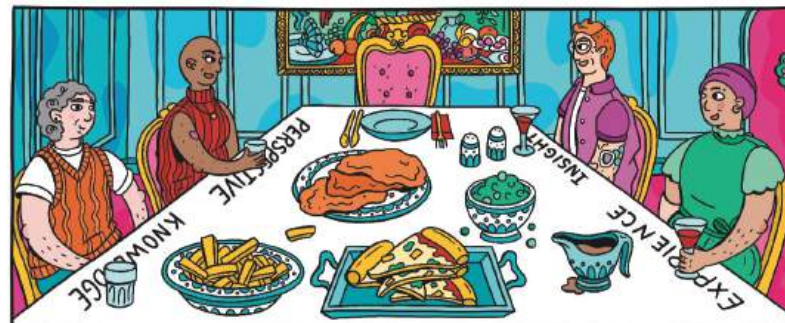
"Data doesn't mean anything if it doesn't have a story that goes with it."

(LE Fox, Author of This Has Always Been A War: The Radicalization of a Working-Class Queer)

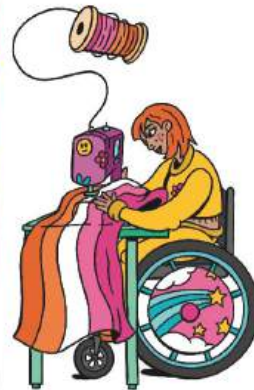
The people who lost their homes in the wildfires

Stories behind the data

Impact of crisis on relationships



LGBTQ+ stories circulate, and some can be heard but caution still needs to be exercised about who is speaking and listening. In thinking about creating inclusive practices and discussions, we need to still pause on who is not at the table. While queer individuals and organisations are often self-reflective about this, such conscious efforts need to be mainstreamed:



"...organisations like ours being like self-reflective about like not holding onto resources and knowledge, and like 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 like, you know, to certain types of tables or discussions..."

(Vic Valentine, Scottish Trans Alliance)

Some collective questions and provocations from the series included:

- What has the cost of living crisis got to do with being LGBTQ+? How are different queers impacted?
- What forms of response exist in this context? What pressures and possibilities exist? How is the state implicated in crisis-generation including via welfare?
- How might queer life compel state, organisation, collective and individual solutions to crisis?
- What forms of queer resilience, resistance and creativity exist?



The Cost of living Crisis as an LGBTQ+ issue

As has been reported, many speakers noted the disproportionate impact of the Cost of living Crisis on LGBTQ+ people, and advocated for a holistic or intersectional approach to imagining these effects:



"... we [LGBTQ+ people] 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."

(Rebecca Crowther, Equality Network)



Sometimes navigating Welfare systems can worsen rather than ease a range of discrimination, with institutional procedures intended for protection and privacy, then failing to deliver on financial or emotional protection:



"People also experience a range of discrimination in kind of services, housing, and employment ... if you change your name as a trans person, with the DWP ... 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 ... and people sometimes wait like weeks and weeks and weeks for a callback when they're in like really, really precarious financial situations."

(Vic Valentine, Equality Network)



Being illegible in the world — despite equalities legislation — can mean feeling and being out of place. Normative ideals of family, housing and employment can collide with a sense of queer difference, impacting on basic rights and provisions. Again, the everyday interaction with mediators across the public and private sector can take an emotional and financial toll:

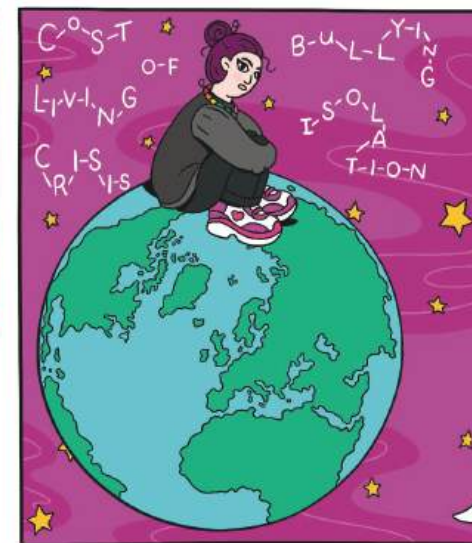


"...even applying for houses ... they really want you to be married, they want you to like replicate a certain type of family, and queerness is not justified in that, like it doesn't have a place to fit. I can't say 'oh this is my friend that I'm like very dedicated to. This is my chosen family', right? They want your parent to be a guarantor, they want like some rich family member, that of course we all have, to be your guarantor and to earn forty times as much as you ... It's not like queer people get chased out of their homes or, yeah, people have to migrate for loads of different reasons! ... If you, yeah, can barely afford your rent how do you find time to like make life around that?"

(Jj Fadaka, Writer, Facilitator and Radical)



Encountering such hardships can fundamentally affect life and death decisions, with a higher rate of suicide amongst LGBTQ+ populations:



"... a constellation of multiple of these experiences that came together in ways that made the participants feel the cost-of-living had become too high, and that life therefore had become unlivable for them ... suicide could become visibilised as a way of escaping from the situation to which the participants felt there was no alternative available resolution."

(Hazel Marzetti, University of Edinburgh)

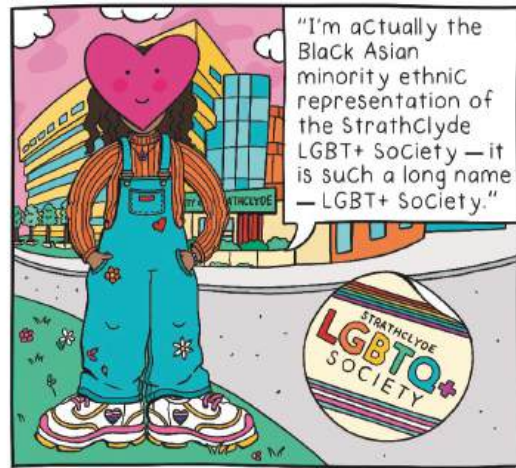
Sometimes established infrastructure around well-being, including via educational institutions, fail in affirming well-being holistically, with LGBTQ+ student societies also underfunded in many cases, or skewed towards certain demographics, which make it harder for more marginalized groups to participate:



"I'm also part of the LGBTQIA+ Society. I'm one of the executives. So far we've only had a few nights out in Glasgow for like drinking events, which just isn't as accessible ... for recovering addicts, and for like the demographics of our students. We are a wider access university, so we have lots of mature students, lots of people with like needs for their disabilities, who just aren't getting seen..."

(LGBTQ+ student Representative)

Here it is important to think through experiences of multiple marginalisation, or intersectional inequalities:



"I'm actually the Black Asian minority ethnic representation of the Strathclyde LGBTQ+ Society — it is such a long name — LGBTQ+ Society."



"I often joke about being like the minority of minorities. My friends keep telling me like 'go on dating apps and stuff', and I'm like 'I Can't. I'm Muslim, genderfluid, bisexual, potentially have autism, ADHD, disabled. I will get hate Crimed'."



While establishing the cost of living crisis as an LGBTQ+ issue, it is clear that this is experienced differently within the queer community, with intersectional inequalities of age, class, disability, gender, and race significantly shaping experiences. When LGBT groups might be formally counted in public information — such as the Census — this inclusion may in fact make it harder to see intersectional experiences and the complexities within the data:



"But like living within all these like minorities it feels like I'm just like on the edge of everything."

(LGBTQ+ student Representative)

"The Census counts people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, but at the same time there was a lot of other parts of the queer community who were not being counted in something like a census ... the task of then shining light on those communities who are further marginalised and minoritised by the data collection exercise actually becomes a bit harder, because we're almost pushing against something which has this veneer of inclusion"

(Kevin Guyan, University of Edinburgh)



"...queer people face a lot of challenging of housing especially, and especially queer people of colour, and especially queer women. And then you have queer women with disability, and then it goes on and on, and all these intersections are in it."

(Esraa Husain, Creative Writer, Academic, Community Organiser)





"BeCause what does the topic of queer and the Cost-of-living Crisis mean to me? ... I already get the barrier of being Asian in a society, subject to racism, and then you get the barrier of being gay. So you've got the barrier of being gay in a western society but also being gay in an Indian society, which is two different barriers. Then you've also got a barrier about being neurodiverse ... And then you've got the barrier of Coming from Ibrox in Glasgow, which is not well off ..."

(Sanjay Lago, Actor, Writer, Facilitator)

Challenging Crisis times

In thinking about ways through the Cost of living Crisis, many pointed to the failure of the State in mediating and granting welfare provisions. Yet others held out hope and even excitement in Continuing to press for Change, including positive state reforms:



"...I am excited by things that we are doing, albeit knowing that we could do more if situations were different. So the likes of the Human Rights Bill that we're bringing forward, that's really exciting to me. ReCOgnising eCOmic, soCial, and Cultural rights as well as Civic and political rights in SCotland, it's huge. It's a huge step forward."

(Emma Roddick, MSP)

State action Can still be tied to specific ideas about families and households. As with long-standing feminist thinking on the Constraining and enabling role of the State, some asked if welfare provision Could be queered, unlinked from CoupledDom:



The realization of rights was still far from universal, with this reality being animated across various places, from the local Glasgow neighbourhood, itself made through global social and economic realities, as Rohit K. Dasgupta also highlighted in relation to global North/Global South inequalities. Patrick Harvie (MSP) pointed to the need for conversations around structural advantage as well as disadvantage. Where some LGBTQ+ groups may experience progression in the UK equalities landscape, others have not benefitted from such provisions:



"... I think going back to that idea of how the welfare state was Created, one thing that has really Come out of this project is we, to queer social security benefits we need to focus these around individual needs."

(Peter Matthews, University of Stirling)



Scotland's LGBT+ History

Gender Recognition Reform

- 1995: First Pride
- 2014: Same sex marriage legalised
- 2000: Section 28 repealed
- 2021: LGBT+ inclusive education

FIGHT FOR OUR RIGHTS

"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 ... 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?'"

(Patrick Harvie, MSP)

"...I think there's something that we need to Challenge in ourselves as a Community ... the idea of the kind of financially stable, usually gay male Couple, you know, double income, no kids pulling the ladder up after themselves ..."



When the State fails to include LGBTQ+ realities an alternative option is to collectivise rather than individualise provisions, with queer Community effectively operating DIY and mutual aid networks, and a Compassionate flexibility:

"... 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 ... 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 ..."

(Rebecca Crowther)



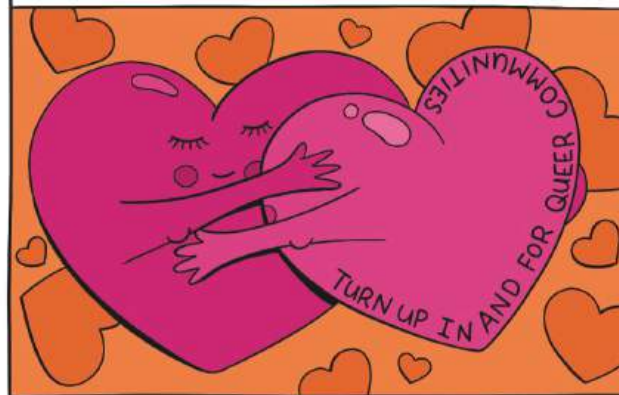
Everyday actions around care, mutual aid, volunteering, often exist as simply getting by in an often hostile world, created choice and necessity. There can also be considerable resistance and push back against getting on in a system viewed as already broken, with more abolitionist rather than reformist approaches centred.



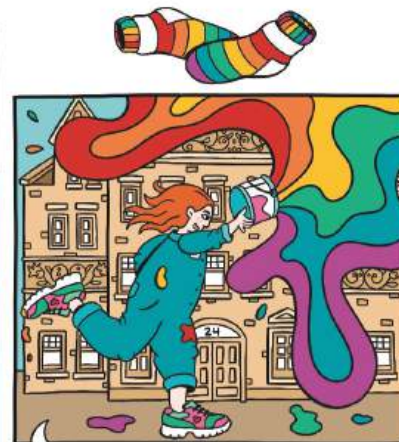
"... what if working-class people stopped working? What if we refused to let the upper classes have so much more than us, and told them that they couldn't any more? How can we have feminism without queer women and non-binary people?"

(L.E. Fox)

This is expressed through a desire to live otherwise, as expressed by Jj Fadaka's wish "to defy expectations, to like push boundaries, and be more than someone said I could be", or in the sense to "turn up" in and for queer communities:



In turning-up, challenges are made across normative industries, expectations and employment trajectories:



"...is like turning up in those spaces and, I don't know if I would describe myself as thriving, but I think I'm doing slightly better than surviving ... and so actually for me turning up into those spaces and trying to be completely me in those spaces is an act of queering that space."

(Lou Brodie, Applied Artist, Project Manager, Performer)



"The reason I've stayed in this industry, and I stay in the world that I'm in, is because if we don't keep the work going we will lose a generation of young artists, we will lose a generation of young queers. A lot of the work I create, especially when I'm working with young people is, especially for the Asian community, you already don't see many Asians in Scottish theatre, you don't see many people of colour, and it's working with those young people, I'm like 'you can exist in this industry, not only as an Asian but also as a queer Asian'. And I'll never forget, the first time I did a job ... in a school in Glasgow and there was two young Asian boys who as I walked in they thought I was just there to like be an assistant. When I told them I was leading they went [makes a surprised face], and that's always stayed with me because that's the reason I'm in this industry."

(Sanjay)

The Series took place against the backdrop of annual LGBTQ+ History events and the range of Pride events across the UK. Panel discussions took place as part of the Portobello Pride programme and again we were reminded of cultural and political visibility and challenge across a long-term. In response to 'Crisis times', we can cast attention backwards and forwards, and across time and place, mindful of continued challenges, and the variety of experiences and voices within LGBTQ+ communities:



"... when I think of Pride and understanding Pride. Claiming Pride. I go back to of course to the Stonewall riot, and I think of the people who started it, including Marsha P Johnson, which, she was an African American sex worker from the working-class and an activist, advocating for gay and trans rights. And for me it's this living crisis, like sorry the class struggle and the living crisis, is it a part of Pride? Of course. It was founded in Pride and it was part of the reasons why Pride came about."

(Esraa Husain)



In times of crisis, there is much creativity, persistence and resistance. Series' participants 'turned up' to voice our experiences, to support across intersecting social and economic inequalities and to do so as an act of solidarity, labour and care. Thanks to all!



Further Reading

Equality Network. Taylor, Y., & Harvie, P. (2024, Jan 29). Queer and the Cost of living Crisis (RSE Seminar Series): political Crisis.

Fox, L. E., & Taylor, Y. (2023, Dec 14). Queer and the Cost of living Crisis: queer(s) through Crisis.

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Singh, S., & Taylor, Y. (2020). Feminism in Our Times: Crises, Connections & Cares. University of Strathclyde.

Taylor, Y., Dasgupta, R. K., Marzetti, H., & Matthews, P. (2024, Apr 19). Queer Cost of Living Crisis: Interdisciplinarity (RSE Seminar Series).

Taylor, Y., Fadaka, J., Brodie, L., Lago, S., & Husain, E. (2024, Aug). Queer and the Cost of living Crisis (RSE Seminar Series): Pride.

Taylor, Y., & Roddick, E. (2024, Mar 6). Queer and the Cost of Living Crisis (Royal Society of Edinburgh Seminar Series): With Emma Roddick, MSP Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees and MSP for Highlands and Islands and Yvette Taylor, University of Strathclyde. University of Strathclyde.

Taylor, Y., & University Student Representatives (2024, Feb 16). Queer and the Cost of living Crisis (RSE Seminar Series): educational Crisis.

