

A Trans Agenda – Foreword

Background

Lambeth Council commissioned an ethnographic research study of transgender people living, working and using public spaces in Lambeth. The objective of the research was to better understand the needs of this group of residents and how these are being met by public services. The study took place between July and September 2011. Key findings from the research include:

- The trans community exists across London and not on local or borough basis. It is no more homogenous or uniform than the non-trans population. Different services, settings and organisations appeal to different segments of the trans population.

Many trans people continue to encounter transphobic harassment; from stares, jibes, verbal attack and physical assault. These occur in many environments including education, work, public spaces and transport.

- Trans people have mixed experiences of public services responses. Their perceptions of using services range from being satisfied through to feelings that barriers exist for trans people and that they tend to be served less well than others.
- Customer access and service processes used in certain transactional services can alienate trans people.
- The failure of services to meet some trans people's needs or deliver services in a way appropriate for, or sensitive to their needs can have significant consequences, from long-term unemployment to risky self-medication.

Stakeholder involvement

Following publication of the research, an action planning workshop was held which brought together key stakeholders including: council departments, partner agencies and a diverse range of pan-London based equalities professionals to reflect on the research findings and co-produce actions in response to emerging issues. The workshop also provided attendees with the opportunity to learn about the experiences of trans people and consider how they might introduce trans best practice within their respective organisations. Attendees at the workshop were asked to identify activities they would undertake in their own teams, services and organisations. These have been compiled in an action log which is monitored by Lambeth Council as evidence of the direct impact of this piece of research. Lambeth Council has developed its own action plan to raise awareness of the research and the implications for the council in terms of what it needs to do to deliver trans-friendly services. The main areas of focus centre around the need for better and more trans friendly monitoring practices; better organised and sponsored networking opportunities; and revision of customer service protocols. The action plan reflects both ongoing and planned areas of work and is being overseen by the Policy, Equalities and Performance Division.

Next steps

Lambeth Council is continuing to promote trans equality both locally, working alongside a local trans organisation to deliver training, and nationally, sharing the research findings and our approach to trans equality.



esro
revealing reality

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Report authors

Oliver Hopwood, Dr Robin
Pharoah

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Introduction

About this report

This report documents the findings from ESRO and Lambeth Council's ethnographic study of transgender people living, working and using public spaces in Lambeth. The study was commissioned by the London Borough of Lambeth's Policy, Equalities and Partnerships team in 2011 and fieldwork was undertaken from July to September 2011.

This report aims to complement existing local and national data and knowledge of the lives and needs of transgender ('trans') people. Being an ethnographic study, it does not make claims to document universal experience or trends. Nor can it make quantitative statements about population size or characteristics.

This resolutely descriptive report does, however, draw upon data from real people, real lives and real contexts. Our researchers were not only able to engage in long and deeply personal conversations, but we were also invited into respondents' homes, circles of friends, places of work, and into their secrets, fantasies, ambitions and anxieties. ESRO is deeply grateful to those who agreed to take part and spend time with one of our researchers.

The objectives of the research

The London Borough of Lambeth commissioned research in 2006 relating to needs and issues in the borough's LGBT community¹. This report highlighted that trans people living

¹ Keogh P, Reid D, Hickson F, Weatherburn P (2006), *The Full Report of Lambeth LGBT Matters*, Sigma Research
<http://www.sigmaresearch.org.uk/files/report2006c.pdf>

in Lambeth reported high levels of discrimination, hate crime, fear of hate crime and mental health problems associated with the trans experience. Additional issues such as housing, social isolation and perceptions of the police were also identified.

But the 2006 report also stated that “trans respondents were mindful of the very fragmented nature of their own population in terms of experiences, concerns and needs”, and concluded that “more work is necessary to describe the variety and extent of trans need and transform this into a coherent policy and service agenda”. This ethnographic report seeks to deliver on this.

Subsequent analysis of the 2006 data by local officials, drawing upon a wider body of research into the needs of the trans population in the United Kingdom, highlighted the need for consideration of additional issues. In particular, it raised the question of the need and viability of trans-specific resources and services and of the role of the voluntary and community sector (VCS). In addition, this analysis pointed to the need for an understanding of barriers to access of any particular council services.

The objectives of this ethnographic study, therefore, were:

- To understand trans lives in Lambeth in context: how and to what extent do lived experiences reflect what is known from surveys and other research?
- What are experiences of ‘transphobia’?
- What role is played by the voluntary sector in individuals’ lives?
- Are there barriers to accessing Council services for trans people?
- Are there needs for services in the trans community that are not currently being met by public agencies, and how might they be met in the future?
- What might a better approach to equalities monitoring look like?
- To what extent are personal challenges or difficulties related to being transgender?

Method

Data collection: The research consisted of ethnographic observation, whereby a researcher spent a full day with the respondent, and the content of this day was determined by the respondent. ESRO researchers also undertook five ‘social space’ ethnographies at trans events and locations –

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including a support group, bars, clubs and campaigning events. In addition to ethnographic observation, the project included depth interviews and short interviews with stakeholders to the trans community (writers, commentators, activists). A full breakdown of the sample is provided below.

Analysis: In addition to ongoing discussion and collation of emergent findings within the research team, several analysis workshops were held with the researchers involved. This report has been subject to peer review by experienced qualitative researchers.

Ethics: All of ESRO's research is fully compliant with established codes of conduct, including the Market Research Society, the Association of Social Anthropologists and the Social Research Association. All names have been changed for this report and personal information is anonymised to protect the confidentiality of those involved. ESRO operates a principle of ongoing consent with all respondents. Care was taken to ensure that all respondents were fully informed of the purposes and outputs of this research.

Audience and Readability

It is the intention of the author that this report be highly accessible and readable for all stakeholders. These include policymakers, social commentators, politicians, front line professionals, and interested individuals in the trans and non-trans community. Attempts have been made to ensure the language used is not codified or laden with jargon. This report may be seen as an effort to achieve 'cultural translation' through ethnographic means: using accounts of real people and real lives to familiarise the reader with life as it is lived by other people in a manner which is fair, and which does not alienate or 'other' the respondents themselves.

Report Structure

This report is composed of several main sections which can be outlined as follows:

1. **'Transgender' and 'Lambeth':** This section looks at definitions of 'transgender' and to what extent 'Lambeth' exists as a community for transgender people. It also discusses trans in the context of LGBT and describes the sample of respondents we spoke to.

2. **Commonality of experience:** This section asks to what extent there is shared experience within the trans community.
3. **Different people, different lives:** This section attempts to give due time and space to the diversity within the trans population
4. **Services in the public, voluntary and private sectors:** This section talks about access to services, barriers, appeal and experience and is of particular interest to public officials, politicians and policymakers.

‘Transgender’ – and ‘Lambeth’

In the brief to “conduct ethnographic research in the transgender community in Lambeth”, there are two assumptions which may or may not be true:

1. Can ‘transgender’ be defined?
2. Is there a transgender community in Lambeth?

Transgender

Transgender is the ‘T’ of LGBT. It is therefore commonly associated with descriptions of a person’s **sexuality** (lesbian, gay, bisexual). But transgender does not refer to somebody’s sexuality. It refers to a person’s gender – as male, or female, ‘gender queer’ or ‘non binary-identifying’, or simply as ‘something else’. A transgender person might be heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual or polysexual just like a non-trans person.

It annoys me that T gets lumped with LGBT. Being a trans woman has nothing to do with my sexuality. People make assumptions that I must be gay or something, but it isn’t true.

Some of our respondents felt that the association of trans with LGB was unhelpful, often because it gets confused with sexuality, meaning that the trans perspective is not properly understood. Others we spoke to identified common ground between trans people and the wider LGB population – because everybody was challenging the heteronormative trends in society – i.e. heterosexual relationships and the pressure to conform to traditional descriptions of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ and to accept the gender that one was assigned at birth.

I see ‘my community’ as anyone who challenges the heteronormative majority in society. So, yeah, that includes trans people, drag queens, gender queers, gays, lesbians, all sorts.

Lambeth’s 2006 *LGBT Matters* survey, which forms the background for this ethnographic study, did not insist upon a definition for transgender. Instead, it allowed respondents to self-identify and then to specify a gender description.

For the purposes of scoping and sampling, it was felt a definition of ‘transgender’ was necessary for this study. We borrowed existing published definitions as follows:

1. The terms ‘trans people’ and ‘transgender people’ are both often used as umbrella terms for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from their birth sex, including transsexual people (those who intend to undergo, are undergoing, or have undergone a process of gender

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reassignment to live permanently in their acquired gender), transvestite/cross-dressing people (those who wear clothing traditionally associated with the other gender either occasionally or more regularly), androgyne/polygender people (those who have non-binary gender identities and do not identify as male or female), and others who define as gender variant.²

2. Transgender describes the general case of a person adopting clothing, appearance or lifestyle of the gender opposite to that assigned to them at birth. The term embraces all aspects of gender variation³

Common to both of these definitions are the notion of a gender identity which is different from that which the individual was assigned at birth. Our intention was to be as inclusive as possible in this study, as it was felt that exclusion or marginalisation was neither necessary nor useful in terms of gathering insight and understanding.

Our respondents, though, did not all agree with these definitions of transgender. For Charlize/Paul, transgender didn't mean anything. "I'm not trans-ing from anything to anything else", he remarked. Indeed, when the research was introduced as being about the transgender community, Charlize/Paul initially said that it did not apply to her. When we first met Charlize/Paul, she was presenting as female. During our ethnography, he⁴ was presenting as male. Assigned male at birth, Charlize/Paul sees his job as to "bring the boy and the girl together". In practice, his female wardrobe is as extensive as his male wardrobe, as are his behaviours and habits. "I am a girly girl, a showgirl, and a mummy's boy", he said, nail-varnish on his hands, wearing a low-cut men's vest and drinking a pint of lager in a local Irish pub. Gabi, too, took issue with the term 'transgender' as it did not mean anything to her. For her, it failed to describe her identity: she is a 'transwoman' – "always have been and always will be". Transgender didn't capture this for her.

I never joined a group like 'transgender' or 'transvestite' or 'drag queen'. I always rocked on my own, you see?

Charlize/Paul

Moreover, the study included individuals who do not identify as transgender because this implies a relationship with the gender they were assigned at birth, with which they

²'Transman' refers to someone who was assigned female at birth but has become, and is now living as, male. 'Transwoman' refers to someone who was assigned male at birth but has become, and is now living as, female.

³ The Beaumont Society, <http://www.beaumontsociety.org.uk/Help%20&%20advice/Beaumont%20Training/Guide%20to%20BS.pdf>

⁴ In this report, Charlize/Paul is referred to with the pronoun 'he' as he presented as male during our ethnography.

no longer associate at all. For example, a man who was assigned female at birth, but who now sees himself as a man – not trans, transsexual, ‘transman’, or anything ‘transgender’.

The shorter term ‘trans’ is used in this report for ease of communication and understanding, with apologies to those respondents who do not regularly use the term ‘transgender’ to articulate their identities. This is not an attempt by the authors to eclipse their self-identification, merely an attempt to ensure accessibility for the lay reader.

Lambeth: the significance of the local authority as a geographical unit

This study was commissioned by the London Borough of Lambeth, whose interest is in, primarily, the wellbeing of trans people living in the borough. It was necessary to test the resonance of ‘Lambeth’ as a significant unit of space and place with the respondents in the study.



Abi lives in Surrey, but describes herself as part of the London trans scene. Ian lives in Hemel Hempstead, but works in Lambeth and regularly socialises there. His trans friends live all over London. Miya has just moved from Brixton to Bow, but insisted that that didn’t make her any more or less relevant to our research. Fran, Alex and Kate were puzzled as to why Lambeth would want to research only Lambeth residents: “what has Lambeth got to do with me being trans?” asked Alex. Charlize/Paul wasn’t sure which borough he lived in (Wandsworth or Lambeth), but said it didn’t matter: “I hang out in Lambeth, and I live my life all over London. I wouldn’t be different regardless of what council I live in”.

During recruitment activities, too, it became clear that there is no specific trans community that identifies as local to the borough of Lambeth, any more than there is within or between any other London boroughs. The trans people we spoke to and met at support groups and in trans and LGB social spaces in and near Lambeth came from all over London and the Home Counties.

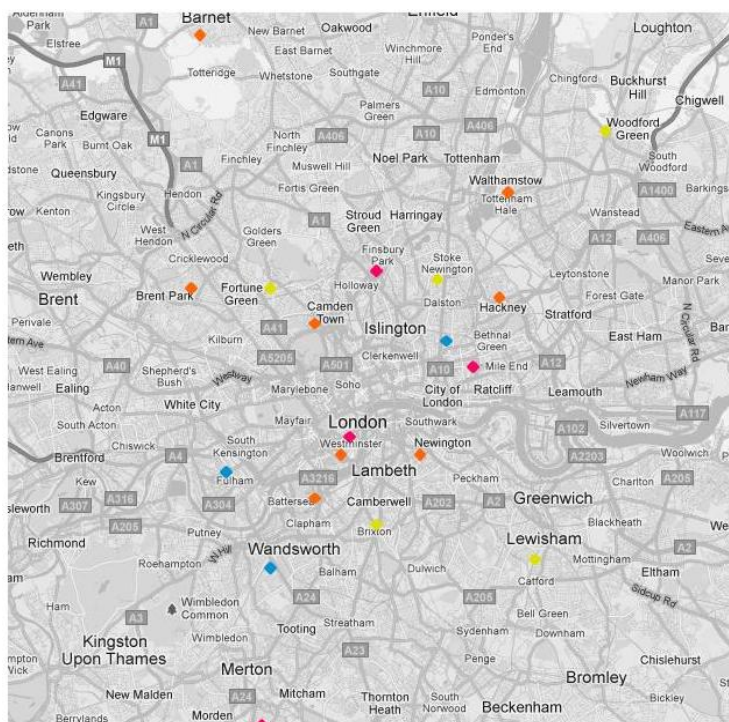
We found that resources, services and artefacts in the trans community do not exist on a local basis. The Charing Cross Gender Identity Clinic serves the whole of London and beyond. Clubs and bars with trans nights attract crowds

They’re going to have to realise that the trans community doesn’t work in boroughs. You won’t find anything special about Lambeth as opposed to other councils.

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from all over the South East, and trans-related social networking sites are used by people all over the UK. VCS services (such as those offered by the Terrence Higgins Trust, Spectrum, Queer Youth Network, Beaumont Society, T-House, Gendered Intelligence) do not specify borough of residence for eligibility or access.

This doesn't mean that councils shouldn't be interested in the needs of trans people in their areas. Many of our respondents were pleased that Lambeth was taking such proactive steps. "I think it's great that they're taking an interest", said Charlize/Paul. This report attempts to document the reasons why and ways in which local public bodies need to understand trans citizens and design their services with this understanding in mind – even if the 'community' is easiest researched and understood on a regional or national scale.



The dots on this map show where people live that we spoke to at trans events and services. Each colour designates a particular event or service.

With whom did we speak?

During this project, we spoke to 23 people. Approximately three quarters of these lived, worked or socialised in Lambeth. Our sample covered a range of socio-economic groups – from the benefits-dependent to those living in luxury central London apartments with high levels of disposable income. The sample includes those who have undergone gender-reassignment surgery and those who

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have not. Also included are some who are undecided about whether to have surgery and others who have decided against it.

Contact type	Full ethnography	7
	Depth interview	4
	Short interview	12
Gender identity	Binary identifying	15
	Non-binary identifying	5
	(not known)	3
Age	Under 40	12
	40 or above	11
Ethnicity	BME	9
	White / white British	14
Gender assigned at birth	Assigned male at birth	17
	Assigned female at birth	6

Towards a framework of understanding

Given the complexity of the terminology and identity politics that we encountered during research, this report seeks to demystify ‘transgender’ for those unfamiliar with the community, and provide useful information for public servants and policymakers.

Much of the published literature available to policymakers on wellbeing in the transgender community discusses the needs and challenges faced by trans folk, and recent collaborative attempts to document them have culminated in the Transgender Statement of Need⁵. This ESRO/Lambeth study affords the opportunity to understand these challenges in the context of real lives.

In public service, particularly as agencies move towards commissioning models, the concept of positive and negative outcomes has come to the fore. A standard model of **deficit** and **asset** has therefore been used to describe many minority populations, and has become very much *de rigueur* in describing the transgender community too. The vernacular commonly focuses of the “needs” or ‘deficit’ in the transgender population, describing what the trans community lacks (in terms of opportunities, resources,

⁵ www.tranzwiki.net

justice) or suffers (in crime, inequality, misrepresentation, discrimination). Articulation of assets and strength is rare.

Indeed, while it is striking that much *policy* discourse is dominated by the deficits in the trans community, *media* discourse is even more problematic. Some attention is given to supposed assets of the trans community (glamour, hedonism and transgression), but a lot of coverage in mainstream media continues to be transphobic and negative⁶.

Both are limiting. Policy discourses might fail to account for the richness of transgender lives, and media discourses might be of little value; often glib and even stigmatising.

A model of *deficits* and *assets* would not be suitable for this report. Our data does not support this as an accurate paradigm for description. It encourages generalisations about a community which we have not found to be homogenous, and describing our respondents in terms of deficits and assets would not be an accurate representation of life as they experience it. Instead, rich understanding of our respondents – and a picture of what life looks like through **their** eyes – is necessary to answer the questions stated in the research objectives.

An emerging framework for individuality and subjectivity

This report will, therefore, strive to describe the transgender community through their eyes: in a nuanced manner which accounts for the difference and uniqueness of individuals within that wider ‘community’. It will attempt to understand trans equality from the point of view of individuals with individual experiences and perspectives, rather than make general statements about equalities from the perspective of a presumed community. Deficits, assets, needs, challenges and strengths will of course be explored, but always with respect paid to the individuality of circumstance. Ethnographic data lends itself well to such a model.

In this way, in the chapters which follow, this report will attempt to describe the transgender people we met in terms of:

⁶ www.transmediawatch.org.uk

- what our respondents have in common – and therefore what might be more consistently true of the transgender community in general
- how our respondents differ – and what the transgender community might really look like in its true nuanced diversity

Any commonality of trans experience?

This section describes what respondents had in common: what might it mean to be 'trans'? Is there a 'community' and if so, what are the things that bind individuals together into this community?

Ladies and Gentlemen, your attention please

"You see, these two, restrictive versions of gender are everywhere, from the moment you are born, even from before you are born," said Claire. Dressed in everyday girls' clothes for uni, and talking confidently in the busy and crowded environment of a central London café. Claire went on to explain that throughout school, media and society, from Jack and Jill to Action Man and Barbie, there was little space for anything other than "limiting" models of 'boy' and 'girl' as she grew up. As for Miya, she knew from secondary school that neither 'boy' nor 'girl' did justice to the way she felt as a person, and still gets annoyed when people try to pigeon-hole her as 'Sir' or 'Madam' in the shops she visits. Not because they might get the gender wrong, but because constant reference to male or female seemed unnecessary.

Charlize/Paul and Chris didn't see the relevance of 'either/or' gender models to their lives either. It doesn't help them articulate their identity or sense of self. Charlize/Paul presents as a woman one night – inspired by Madonna, Cher, Marlene Dietrich and others, clutching an expensive purse containing lipstick, perfume, a few notes and some cocaine – and the next, he's wearing a loose gym vest and shorts, drinking a pint and urinating behind a tree in the park. "My job is to bring the boy and the girl together".

For others we spoke to, it wasn't until they came across particular writers or stories that they began to be able to conceive of different gender definitions. Gabi had always felt uncomfortable in herself – and not at home in the social groups she moved in – an unease and tension which, she says, expressed itself in the form of criminal activity, depression and isolation. It wasn't until she saw a transsexual in the newspaper that she even realised it was possible. Fran and Alex, meanwhile, read the works by the

academic Judith Butler⁷ and the pieces began to fall together. For Fran, life had been a confusing cocktail of feeling out of place as a young person, and coming out as lesbian during adolescence – an experience which left him feeling even more disoriented and angry than before.

Kate was introduced to us with her daughter, who was visiting during the summer holidays. “I love coming to London during the summer and spending time with Dad,” Kate’s daughter said. Kate is very much a loving Dad to her daughter - but society doesn’t usually allow Dads to be called Kate.

Common to all of our respondents is the notion that heteronormative gender definitions fail to represent or cater for their identity. “Male”, “female”, “man”, “woman”, in their restrictive constructions, don’t work. A majority of our respondents felt that they were assigned the wrong gender at birth, and feel more comfortable (or can only conceive of life) in the opposite gender. A few of our respondents don’t identify with the gender opposite to the one they were assigned at birth – they don’t want to attach to either of two genders (‘non binary identifying’).

This amounts to more than just a description of what it is to be transgender. It describes the feeling, expressed or evidenced by our respondents, that society propagates models of gender that make them feel irrelevant, othered or excluded. For all of our respondents then, society seems to propagate these models in a number of ways:

- In services designated as being for ‘men’ and ‘women’
- In everyday language: ‘he’ and ‘she’, ‘Sir’, ‘Madam’
- In the expectation that a person lives in the gender assigned at birth

Can I see some ID please?

“I’m like a butterfly. I used to be a caterpillar, and then I turned into a butterfly. But I’m still me, I haven’t changed. If you asked a butterfly, it would say it is still the same person inside, and I’m the same”. This was Gabi’s way of describing her identity. Claire described herself as a boy secretly desperate to be a girl – but ultimately “living in a glass closet”. Others we met were less poetic or vivid in their description. But they were no less able to give a considered

⁷ E.g. “Gender Trouble”, Judith Butler 2009

and powerful description of how they felt and consider themselves in terms of self and gender.

A consequence of this ‘otherness’ to society’s shorthand models of gender is that our respondents were all able to discuss self and identity in a highly thoughtful and articulate way – more so, it seemed, than an equivalent sample of non-trans respondents might have done.

For example, all of our respondents introduced themselves with a name which is not the same as the one they were given at birth. In many cases this name was carefully chosen, a potent act of self-articulation in an identity which challenges society’s dominant ways of thinking and talking. Respondents had chosen their names from idols, scripture, friends and family, or they were chosen for their etymological significance. In other cases, it was just a name which felt right and comfortable. But in all cases, the choice of a new and different name is the most visible representation of an identity which has been more deliberately and deliberately articulated and considered than in the social mainstream.

Could you describe that for me please?

“Pronouns please!” said Ian and Chris as they walked into a local bar hosting a trans night. In turn, the people he was with expressed their preference for being ‘he’, ‘she’ or ‘they’.

A sensitivity towards language and the use of specific terms and expressions was common to all of our respondents. Claire always referred to her best friend – who is gender queer but still in the closet – as ‘they’. It felt entirely unnecessary – and would have been wholly inappropriate – for our researcher to ask whether they were assigned ‘he’ or ‘she’ at birth.

Similar to the semantic characteristics of the LGBT community, a rich lexicon has developed within the trans community to help express gender identities, navigate social situations and describe common experiences. Our respondents were able and willing to explain these terms, indeed often enjoyed doing so. A very small selection is provided here:

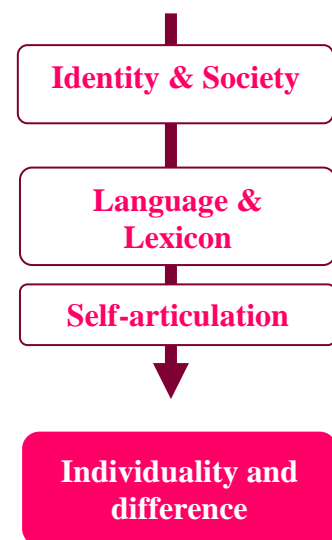
To pass means to be convincing in	To read somebody means to
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your gender – so that people don't notice or stare	recognise the gender someone was assigned at birth, despite the person's attempt to appear otherwise. To be read is often traumatic or upsetting for a trans person attempting to pass.
To mis-pronoun: to use the wrong pronoun when describing somebody	To present as male or female means to adopt the appearance of a particular gender
Chaser A non-trans man looking to pick up a trans girl, e.g. in a nightclub	Tranx is shorted for trans-related anxiety or gender dysphoria
R'n'She is slang for some of the R'n'B which is popular in some transvestite / transgender clubs (particularly MTF)	MTF, FTM, GQ Male-to-female and female-to-male respectively. GQ is short for gender queer.
Safe storage is a service offered by some trans venues which is a means of anonymously and safely storing possessions over a medium-long term	Self-medicate In the specific context of transgender, this means to source one's own hormones and treat oneself without medical supervision
Cis is short for cisgender, i.e. a person whose sex and gender behaviour 'match'	

Same Difference?

To conclude this chapter, our study did pick up a certain commonality of the trans experience: respondents shared a frustration with society's restrictive boundaries of gender type, and a rich lexicon to describe and facilitate trans narratives is also shared. Respondents shared, too, a willingness and ability to explain identities and a sense of self with colour, sensitivity and thoughtfulness – an ability than one would not necessarily encounter in the wider non-trans population. Does this mean that the trans community is homogenous and cohesive – that trans people are the same or similar, with similar needs and experiences? Indeed, the 2006 *LGBT Matters* report concluded that “m-f Trans people” would be a suitable sub-population within which to understand more unifying needs.

The data from our study suggests emphatically that this is *not* the case. The most striking finding from our fieldwork is that our respondents were different from one to the next in



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almost every way: in their identities, experiences, opinions and preferences. Indeed our data challenges some of the most common assumptions and widely echoed statements about the trans community, as will be detailed below.

Our study did not just include transgender people. It included mixed race women, black men, gay people, straight people, richer people, poorer people, younger and older, believers and atheists, victims of crime and former offenders. Our respondents were staunch socialists, politically indifferent and vocal right-wing sympathisers, self-declared couch potatoes and martial arts enthusiasts. We spoke to zoophobes and hedgehog-keepers who are into the Pre-Raphaelites, hip-hop, German Romanticism and experimental post-hardcore punk. Our respondents were no less diverse than a sample of non-trans individuals would have been.

It is crucial to appreciate this diversity before any consideration of public service needs or implications can be undertaken. To ignore this diversity and reduce our respondents to 'transgender and nothing else' would be inaccurate and unfair. This section has outlined the commonality of trans experience. The following pages will nuance this commonality to bring difference and individuals to the fore.

Different people; different lives

This section will illustrate the diversity of circumstances, perspectives and opinions of our respondents. A total and exhaustive recounting of every difference of opinion and characteristic would be unnecessary and unwieldy. Instead, the section below principally describes the range of experiences of living in central London as a transgender person, focussing on what constitutes necessary background understanding for policymakers and public servants. In other words, this chapter does not make statements what trans needs categorically *are*: rather, it explores how needs are experienced in different ways by different people, allowing individuals to have totally different, very low-level or contradictory needs, too. Demographic and other significant data about the respondents is included in the text where relevant.

Abuse, harassment and public safety

“I walk down the street and people shout and jeer at me. *Are you a boy or girl or what?*”. Gabi’s anxiety about harassment and verbal abuse was very evident. In particular, she was wary of meeting people who she used to hang out with before she came out as trans. She is anxious, too, about walking around in public with her young nieces and nephews: she doesn’t want them to see how people stare and make comments.

She still lived on the same estate as she did before she came out and transitioned – but has no intention to move away. Gabi was insistent that by not drawing attention to herself, and by not dressing conspicuously, she can manage her own safety, and thinks that other trans people should do the same. Whether readers of this report will sympathise with Gabi’s comments and accept a state of affairs that requires self-censorship of trans people is a different question entirely.

Claire made similar remarks about harassment in public. Jeering, bullish remarks – coming principally, she said hesitantly, from young men with a BME background – were a frequent experience, although less now that she passes

There is such a thing as etiquette, whether you like it or not. You’ve got to play the game.

Gabi

more easily. More frequent though, were the stares from passers by, who nudge their companions and whisper into their ears, turning their heads as Claire walks past. This was exactly what our researchers experienced with Helen and Sharon as they walked towards a bus stop in Kings Cross. As for Abi, she prefers to run her business from home, where she can present as she pleases and not worry about passing or not passing – and the comments or remarks that might come from clients.

Miya, meanwhile, has experienced violence on more than one occasion. In the last year, she was mugged outside an off licence. More recently, Miya was stalked by a former lover who broke into and entered her apartment and held her captive in her own bedroom. Vigilant housemates noticed what had happened and called 999.

From the people we spoke to, it is clear that for some trans people, abuse and harassment – as well as the fear of harassment – are a common and regular experience, as much for those on Council estates as those in luxury flats and in owner-occupied properties in residential areas. Individuals had very different ways of managing this risk.

But Charlize/Paul was adamant that she had never experienced transphobic comment or abuse. Since coming out as trans and since presenting regularly as male, Alex too has never really experienced the transphobia that is often feared. Two of our respondents, who have known each other for a while, disagreed with each other about how dangerous and threatening London was for trans people in the 21st Century. “Oh it’s nothing like it used to be. These days anything goes. Nobody bats an eyelid,” said one. “That’s not true,” said the other, “there’s just as much transphobia as there always was.” “I don’t get any comments or anything like that,” said Li-Hung, “but that’s because I pass isn’t it.”

From the data presented by our respondents, experiences of harassment and abuse appear to be common but not universal. The comments cited above – from those who experience harassment and transphobia, and from those who say they have not been exposed to it – add colour to the statistics in the *LGBT Matters* research.

Evidence from this study suggests that it might also be the case that certain factors influence vulnerability or anxiety:

LGBT Matters: Consequences of fear of transphobia

29% trans respondents avoided going to certain areas; 33% avoided going out at certain times of day/night.

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these might be the degree to which the individual passes, age and gender. This would echo the finding of the *LGBT Matters* research, which found that those who do not ‘pass’ were more likely to experience violence.

But to **equate “transgender” with automatically being a victim of crime or harassment is potentially disempowering and unfair**. Indeed, a number of respondents particularly took issue with the public perception of trans people as victims of society. Perhaps controversially, one respondent said it was up to trans people themselves to limit and manage the risks and dangers they are exposed to in life.

Discrimination and Employment

It is widely stated that trans people continue to suffer restricted opportunities and discrimination at work despite the introduction of anti-discrimination and equalities legislation.

None of the respondents reported discrimination at the hands of employers or potential employers. Our sample included people who were ‘out’ to their employers as well as some who are not. It is, of course, possible that:

- a) Some respondents have been victims of discrimination but are unaware of it
- b) Some respondents have been victims of discrimination but chose not to disclose it

It is, however, the case that some of the respondents have adopted strategies to avoid discrimination to which they would have otherwise been subjected. Abi, for example, decided several years ago to run a business which enabled her to work from home. Only on rare occasions does Abi have to meet clients – and for this, she continues to present as male rather than be openly trans. Sharon didn’t come out at all until after she retired.

Many in our sample were comfortable with the stance of their employer towards their trans identity. At the time of research, Alex had just secured a new job with a leading high-end retailer, and a casual email to his new boss explaining that he was transitioning was sufficient for him to feel at ease presenting as male in the work environment. Miya’s career has taken off in the last few years – moving from PR into the entertainment industry. In neither sector had being trans had an adverse impact on her career

LGBT Matters: Experiences of discrimination

17% trans respondents reported having experienced discrimination in the context of skills, training and job

progression. Before entering postgraduate study, Claire had been working as a waiter – and waitress – and begun presenting as female more and more regularly, causing no noticeable difficulties for her work. Kate, who works in nursing, said that she has not knowingly encountered discrimination in her career.

Miya wondered whether it was easier to be out and trans in some industries than others. Respondents in this study worked in the health, entertainment, IT, academia, retail, trans organisations and the arts. Others were unemployed. Is it as easy to be trans and work in teaching, finance, construction or the police? Probably not as easy – but our respondents say that it is getting easier.

What is more striking in terms of employment is the **underemployment** experienced. “I’ve never been able to hold down a job,” said Li-Hung, now retired, who has been in and out of low-paid work throughout life. “My head has always just been all over the place,” she explained.

Gabi is currently out of work. This is not for lack of skill: a qualified counsellor, Gabi is a highly articulate, enterprising and motivated individual. In the final stages of gender reassignment, though, and still suffering mental health difficulties, Gabi feels unable to work and is signed off sick. She also dislikes the Job Centre and into-work programmes, finding them unhelpful and unpleasant. At the moment, Gabi is unemployed but does several days per week of voluntary work. This voluntary work, though, is more highly skilled and more valuable than anything she could do as paid work, she says.

Charlize/Paul, meanwhile, does not seek regular paid employment. He earns as and when the opportunity presents itself. He has waited in trans venues, performed as a drag queen, “hustled” and had short-term low-skilled work at various points. Asked whether he had ever sought more permanent work, he replied explaining that his life had never been settled in that way. Since moving to London at 15 without finishing school, he has lived an unpredictable, picaresque life, including earning income in the night-time economy.

To say that discrimination prevents trans people from succeeding in the world of work is an unjust simplification. Discrimination may well be widespread. Further,

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respondents spoken to in this study demonstrate that the mental health complications which some or many trans people experience also partly explain the underemployment suffered by some trans folk. This may apply both to those who are 'out' at work **and** those who are not.

Yet, as with harassment and abuse, to automatically draw a link between transgender and unemployment, unemployment and discrimination is to refuse trans people the success that at least some – perhaps many - are enjoying in their careers.

A further key finding in terms of employment and discrimination are the strategies used by some to deal with potential, perceived or actual discrimination or disadvantage. These include self-employment, not coming out, or presenting a more 'conformist' identity at work while still being openly trans. These are, of course, strategies which no individual should feel obliged by society to adopt.

Self-perception

"I don't really have any issues in life that are to do with trans," said Miya, sipping a Martini cocktail in an exclusive central London private members' club where she spends many daytimes during the working week. "I can't really complain, I'm pretty sorted". Yet at other points in during research, Miya recounted in vivid detail recent episodes in her life where difficulties and anxieties had been legion. It became apparent, for example, that Miya does not use public transport, spending hundreds of pounds per month on taxis instead, and that she prefers to avoid certain parts of London (including Brixton) when presenting as female.

Likewise, Abi said that she doesn't see herself as someone who experiences challenges or 'problems' associated with being trans, partly because she passes and is so convincing as a woman. But this is somebody who chooses to work from home, alone, because she is unsure how her clients would react to her. Moreover, when Abi was leaving a central London night club, young men across the street, recognising that Abi was trans, stared and made comments to each other.

While some respondents understated or under-recognised the extent to which they had personally faced adversity or been a victim of crime or harassment, others appeared to

It's easier for me. I pass. The only thing I don't pass on is a voice. I look like a proper woman, so I don't get grief.

Abi

exaggerate the difficulty they face in day-to-day life. “You do get a lot of abuse as a trans person. And violence,” said one respondent, who later remarked that so far, since coming out, she has experienced no violence or harassment. Gabi, meanwhile, talked at length about the way people stare at her, particularly in enclosed environments. During the ethnography, it did not appear to the researcher that people noticed or stared at Gabi. It is possible that Gabi had become ‘hyper-sensitive’ to what goes on around her, perhaps seeing stares where there is no more than a roving gaze. This is **not** an accusation that Gabi was lying or dramatising for deliberate effect.

This discrepancy between levels of difficulty and adversity as **reported** and as **experienced** – both in terms of understatement and overstatement – *may* call into question much of the data about the needs and experiences of trans people in previous research. Further, in-depth research may need to be conducted to establish the accuracy of existing needs data.

The ‘trans-inclusiveness’ of the trans community

Nightlife

Miya was a regular attendee at a well-known London trans night, which attracts a mix of transvestites, transsexuals, single males, gay couples and lesbians of all ages. Her wardrobe is as impressive as her social life is rich and active. “A lot of my friends are “T-girls and trannies,” she said, and true enough, when we went into the club, Miya’s face was widely recognised and she knew a lot of people. Sharon also goes there. At 66, she still enjoys a good night out and meeting new people at the club.

Miya said it was rare to see a trans man at the event: it is almost exclusively attended by trans girls and transwomen. She loves going there and always has lots of fun – but she warned our researcher not to be fooled: “There’s a lot of bitchiness here. One group won’t talk to another group and some people there are complete loners. People laugh at each other and criticise each other”. It was clear at this nightclub that some punters were clearly very much alone, and spoke to nobody during a whole evening.

In the club we met Lili, from Thailand. Accompanied for the night by another Thai transwoman, Lili was there because

she hoped to meet a man. When asked about her life and experience in the London trans community, it became clear that Lili's social network consists almost entirely (apart from her boss at the bar which she does flyering for) of other Thai trans people, all assigned male at birth. Many of these work in the sex industry, she said.

On a different night, Ian and Chris went to a different venue for another trans night, attended more by female-to-male trans and gender queer people, with just one or two trans women. Both knew the venue well and knew a lot of other people there – either as friends or by acquaintance. This particular venue was their favourite – and a regular haunt, a place where they had made lots of trans and gender queer friends.

On the other hand, Claire has never been to either of these venues. She is not familiar with them or what they are like. In fact, she's never been to a trans club. Paul/Charlize also tends not to go to trans clubs. Instead, he goes to straight clubs and gay clubs, presenting as male and as female on different occasions. Gabi has been to a trans club before, but she really didn't like it. She didn't find like-minded people in the clubs she went to. In particular, she found that drag queens and some transvestites presented a caricatured version of femininity which she felt was making fun of her.

Clearly, while they are a social keystone for some, trans clubs aren't enjoyed by all trans people and cannot be mistaken as 'social spaces' for the whole trans community. In particular, assumptions should not be made about the age demographics that these social spaces attract.

Services in the voluntary and community sector

Chris and Ian attend a youth group for trans people in their teens and early 20s. Chris in particular could not overstate how important support from VCS services has been to them (to Chris). In particular, they had been able to find a community of support where none existed at school, allowing them to find comfort and understanding as they explored their gender identity⁸.

Similarly, Kate's social network and support resource has been massively enriched by the availability and openness of trans groups in civil society. She showed the researcher her

Pronouns

Chris describes "themselves" as gender queer, preferring to be referred to as 'they' or 'them' in the third person rather than as 'he' or 'she'.

⁸ In this paragraph, *they* refers to Chris in the singular

calendar for the following weeks – and pointed out the various events and groups she was attending. For Jenny too, such groups were the only places she felt safe to present: providing space and facilities to get changed and a welcoming environment to meet people. Miya also recognised the importance of support and advocacy services for trans people – and has been invited to them by referral – although she has never wanted to access them personally.

Following her disappointment with the trans scene in pubs and bars, Gabi turned to voluntary groups to make contacts in the community, with some success. But she subsequently felt that there are no VCS organisations which really represent her in particular, as a BME transwoman.

Contrastingly, Claire was signposted to a support group for trans women in the voluntary sector, which she attended once, but she has never been back. “I didn’t have anything in common with anyone there,” she said. She has since built her own network by using web resources and “shied away” from trans organisations. Rightly or wrongly, she saw them as less relevant for her generation. Referring to the more acute suffering and discrimination experienced by trans people older than her, and sympathising with what they have been through, she nevertheless said that she dislikes the “tribalism” [sic.] of LGBT voluntary organisations and their tendency to focus on negative trans narratives. “There’s a lot of bitterness and hopelessness, I’ve got a lot of sympathy for them, but it’s not good to be around,” she explained.

Alex was wary about trans services and organisations in the voluntary sector, worrying that it is not good for the trans community to be “self-ghettoising”. He worried, too, about the vernacular coming from some of these organisations – and whether it is all too negative. “It’s not helpful to say *it’s all awful, I’m always suffering, oh God look at my great big trans cross I have to bear*”.

I don’t just want to be queer with queer people. I don’t want to be in a trans ghetto.

Alex

While trans services in LGBT or trans-specific organisations are immensely valuable and incredibly important for some – indeed perhaps many – in the trans community, evidence from this study suggests that it is *unwise* to assume that these services are entirely inclusive, or that these organisations are fully representative of trans individuals.

Again, based on data from this study, assumptions should not be made about the relevance of these groups by age group, and it is not the case that participation in or rejection of VCS activities is limited to a certain age demographic.

Web resources

A third sphere in which the trans community is 'visible' in society, is online. Both Alex and Claire have made a number of friends using forums and social networking – both mainstream and trans-specific. For Claire in particular, this has been a primary means of building a network of friends and contacts in a new city. Miya has met other trans people using web resources for gay men.

But neither Charlize nor Gabi have internet access, and some respondents still required information about trans events and services to be available in printed form as they have no internet access, or are wary of using shared computers (public computers or computers shared in the home) to access this information.

This section demonstrates that generalisations about the trans community – and in particular about perceptions of public safety, discrimination and victimisation – are fraught with complexity and ultimately fail when they encounter the subtle and nuanced experiences and opinions of individuals. It is therefore virtually impossible to make statements about universal “needs” in the trans population. It is also shown that the ‘trans community’ – in its social and virtual spaces and in its own organisations and services – is not wholly trans-inclusive. This is not an accusation of malintent, rather an observation that within the trans community there are sub-communities, splinters, sub-groups and outsiders. There also appears to be an immigrant trans community which lives very much in parallel to the wider trans community, and within which there may be wholly different needs and experiences. The sense of ‘togetherness’ is perhaps less strong in real lives than it is in people’s minds.

Transgender and public services

The section above signalled the diversity of perspectives within the transgender population and warns against common assumption that trans people present a homogeneous set of needs, requirements or opinions. This reflects the demographic mix of the sample of respondents included in this study. This section will describe respondents' specific experiences of public services in Lambeth and London.

The Metropolitan Police

Charlize/Paul was strongly supportive of public services and offered nothing but praise for the experience he has had, particularly with police officers. Police officers, whom he described as gentle and incredibly good-humoured, have helped him on journeys home and located lost handbags and other articles on several occasions. Charlize/Paul has been involved with the police at several periods in his life, including living under police protection as a child during a period of family conflict.

But this gushing praise for the police was not shared by other respondents. Gabi has never trusted the police, ever since growing up in south London's black Caribbean community, where she regularly experienced what she felt were aggressive and, she said, "racist" police practices. For Gabi, the Met was just as "bigoted" as it ever was. Gabi has noticed that Met officers tend not to intervene if they hear transphobic comments or abuse in the streets. She was quick to clarify that she does not see the force *itself* as transphobic – but is angry that so little is done to clamp down on transphobia in society more widely. "It wouldn't be accepted if it was racist abuse, would it?"

Claire had negative feelings, too, but as with Gabi, these were more attributable to Claire's dealings with the police during adolescence when her family was struggling to deal with an abusive and violent neighbour, and finding the police indifferent and uninterested. "I'm just not confident that the police ever listen to what people on the ground say, they don't believe you when you say stuff is happening," she explained. Claire's bad experiences were in fact with the

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Thanks for today. Do our public services proud.

Charlize/Paul

LGBT Matters: Perceptions of the police

58% trans respondents said they were not confident that they would be treated fairly if they were victims of crime



Staffordshire force – but her distrust has moved with her to London.

Miya had recently called the police to her home after a former lover broke into and entered her room, locking Miya in. The police attended the scene once the man had already fled. “They just didn’t know what to do,” Miya recounted. “They looked so awkward, they had no idea how to deal with me. I think they thought it was a hooker job gone wrong. They thought I was a prostitute”. Miya was not at all confident that police officers are able to deal sensitively and adequately with trans people.

Health Services

Services for transgender people

From the very first day Fran sought medical services for his transitioning, he has felt that he has been the one having to tell the professionals what to do. He felt he had to explain to his GP what his condition is, what the next steps should be, what his entitlements are, and so on. In more specialist services like psychiatry and the Gender Identity Clinic (GIC), Fran was the one setting the agenda. He considers himself expert in the entitlement of trans people to medical treatments.

Claire was equally disgruntled with the services she has been offered by the NHS in transitioning and gender reassignment. On her first visit to a GP in London, the doctor made quick assumptions and mistook Claire’s birth gender: “Have you had your ovaries removed yet?” he asked. Transitioning has been a fast and irresistible process for Claire. As soon as she began presenting more confidently and regularly as female, she quickly grew impatient and unable to wait for referrals to psychiatric and GIC services. She stretched her student budget massively to pay for private services at a clinic on Harley St. Now that she is out to her parents, she has been able to ask for their financial help in paying for appointments, hormones and hair removal. Waiting any longer to transition using NHS services was utterly unthinkable: living as a male made Claire physically sick and her arms bear the scars of self-harm.

Claire’s perception was that the NHS, through its PCTs, offers a “one-size-fits-all” solution for transgender people.

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Hormones are offered in standard doses, she said, and GPs don't have to prescribe them if they don't feel confident to do so – which in turn leads to a further delay in the provision of services. Fran, too, was angry about the extent to which the quality and expediency of care depends so much on individual GPs and PCTs.

Private treatment simply wouldn't have been an option for Gabi, who has lived on benefits for several years. Gabi felt she has been able to access services as and when she needed them – and she wouldn't have wanted to rush anything. "Taking hormones is like going through a second puberty. Your head is like scrambled eggs". Having the time and space to think and be peaceful was of paramount importance to Gabi – so waiting lists to access psychiatric and GIC referrals caused less anxiety.

But Gabi has learned how to play the system at its own game. Lambeth PCT, she said, does not offer electrolysis for hair removal as standard for gender dysphoria patients...

"So I went along to my GP with my mental issues so that I could get it for free". This detailed knowledge of what services are available for whom, how and when was common among respondents in the study. They had obtained information from a variety of sources, including NHS publications, websites, professional advice and, most importantly, through word-of-mouth. The topic came up frequently in casual conversation between respondents and researchers and also between respondents themselves.

Alex was quite happy with services offered by the NHS so far. His GP dealt with his case with the sensitivity and professionalism that he had expected, and subsequent referrals been made. Alex didn't want to take hormones – he felt comfortable and balanced and didn't want to jeopardise that.

Universal health services including sexual health

Miya and Charlize spoke highly of sexual health services in London. Miya commended their ability to engage with her on her level and using her language, and Charlize was pleased that there seemed to be so much outreach work going on.

But Chris was less enthusiastic. They had recently done a mystery shopping exercise on behalf of a trans VCS

LGBT Matters: Health Needs

67% trans respondents said that they had experienced a problem with their mental and emotional health; 81% of these said their LGBT

organisation in a South London GUM clinic to evaluate processes and services from the perspective of a higher needs transman. During this exercise, a range of insensitivities and poor practices were identified. Clearly, voluntary organisations in the trans community are scrutinising GUM provision and highlighting its shortcomings.

Self-medication

Miya's recourse in her late teens and early twenties, when she was experiencing confusion, depression and dysphoria, was not to her GP. The easiest and most obvious way for Miya to identify her true gender identity was to buy hormones through friends of friends in Brighton and self-medicate. Looking back, she thinks that this wasn't perhaps the wisest course to take – but can't imagine herself having acted in any other way at the time. During this period of her life, Miya was living a colourful and "wild" lifestyle at the time and hormones were readily available.

Charlize/Paul has never sought advice or help from the health service. He was first given hormones by a manager in a West End nightclub. When he turned up for work as a teenager, he was thrown a dress and a box of hormone medication. He was encouraged to take higher and higher doses. Aware of self-medication options through talking with friends, Claire considered self-medication too but personally felt the risks involved were too high. Hormones, though, are readily available online and very inexpensive, she explained. One respondent in this study had worked as a prostitute to earn money for transitioning.

Education

Younger respondents, in particular, had experienced distress, bullying or difficulty related to their LGBT identity when in school. Miya described herself as "a real outsider" at school, and said she had no real friends until later in life at University. This wasn't because her school friends were transphobic, indeed Miya hadn't even recognised herself as trans at the time. Similarly, Claire and Alex were not 'out' as trans during school.

Chris talked about their very recent experience at college, where they hadn't been bullied as such, but where they had felt very different and found it difficult to find close friends. They weren't out to many people at school as trans, and

LGBT Matters: Homophobia in schools

The research showed that homophobia was a "normal part of [...] everyday experience in school" for many respondents.

they said that many of their peers just thought they were gay. Meeting other trans and genderqueer young people at a youth group had been incredibly valuable for them.

Respondents did not say that they had experienced transphobia or transphobic bullying in school – indeed they had, in all but one cases, not been ‘out’ as trans at school. Rather, the experience was one of a confused identity and a sense of detachment from the mainstream, with nobody really available to talk to

Social Care

One respondent had grown up in local authority care in Lambeth and in other parts of south London, in a series of children’s homes and foster placements of variable stability. The respondent’s experiences of children’s social care are not recent but may still have some relevance. The respondent described a rigid and punishing care system, where “boys had to be boys and girls had to be girls”. The respondent, experiencing intense confusion and distress related to gender and sexuality, did not feel there was anybody to confide in – neither social workers nor foster parents.

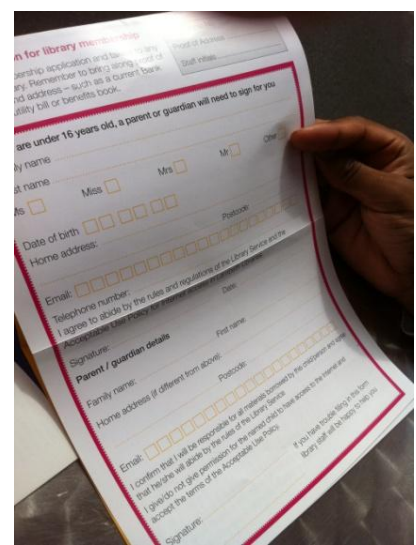
Further research may be needed to explore the experiences of older trans folk and adult social care. Some findings from other service areas may, of course, be applicable.

Services involving home visits

Gabi lives in social housing on an estate in Lambeth. The heating has been on all summer – it is broken and she can’t turn it off. She has been putting off calling the engineers into her flat to fix it because she’s uneasy about having somebody she doesn’t know in her home. Will they read her? What would happen if they did?

This unease is significant enough for Gabi to prefer to live in discomfort for the summer. It is likely to be the case that other trans people who share Gabi’s anxiety about passing and preference to avoid close contact with strangers will be equally hesitant to use services which involve home visits – such as adult social care, environmental health, home library services.

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Customer Services Environments

Miya went to fill in a library application form at a Lambeth library and filled in her name and address as required. Taking the form to the desk, Miya was asked to present her ID to confirm her details. This left Miya in an “awkward and embarrassing” situation – because she has not changed her name on her Driving Licence to ‘Miya’.

Relatively common elements in any transactional customer service process can be of particular difficulty to a trans person. “Good morning, Sir” said the customer services assistant last time Miya called her bank. Is it necessary to say Sir/Madam? Miya feels strongly that it is not.

Customer Services environments were particularly stressful for Gabi. She loathed visiting her local job centre – where the staff, lingering at the entrance, swarmed around her, each vying to be the first to ask how they can help. The invasion of personal space was difficult to handle for Gabi, who worried about passing. Moreover, she found that the Job Centre and skills training centres are often full of young, macho men, whom she finds very intimidating. Poorly trained staff, she said, often show no understanding of Gabi’s situation and of why she finds work contexts difficult or impossible.

At a visit to the local housing office in Brixton, Gabi was made to feel deeply uncomfortable as a colleague of the assistant behind the counter shouted Gabi’s name and address audibly across the office. For someone who was worried about being seen, noticed and ‘read’ – this was quite distressing. In another example of poor training down the road at Lambeth Council, a few years ago, a member of staff incorrectly advised Gabi that she would require a new contract for her tenancy agreement, as she was changing her name.

Abi avoided conversational exchange when using any services. Paying for something at a shop, she often didn’t say anything, or used self checkout if possible. The worst thing, she said, “is when you notice someone has read you, you see the hesitation in their faces, it’s so embarrassing”.

In contrast, Sharon is often read using telephone services or in face-to-face situations. But for whatever reason, it doesn’t bother her. If somebody addresses her as Sir, she corrects

Change of name / address

Tell us once?

Many respondents had changed their name formally – but not all. Those who had said that it was quite an easy process – but that going to each and every public service to inform them was tiresome. Gabi had to inform each and every service separately that her name had changed. It wasn’t very nice to continually receive letters with the wrong name – let alone wrong form of address. Fran commented that when you tell someone in a service that you want to change your name, the assumption is that you want to change your

them, and mirthfully explains, “I used to be a bloke, you see”.

Indeed not all customer services experiences are unpleasant – even for Gabi and Miya, who are particularly sensitive to these situations. Gabi has been pleased with the sensitivity and professionalism of many of Lambeth’s customer service staff. She was particularly fond of the new customer services centre in Lambeth: it is spacious, airy and there are partitions between desks. Seating is arranged such that customers don’t glare blankly at one another while they wait. Small, cramped environments, on the other hand, where customers wait in lines for long periods of time, staring at each other face to face are particularly uncomfortable, Gabi explained – but in Lambeth at least, these seem to be increasingly a thing of the past.

Many respondents involved in the study do not think twice about mainstream customer services processes. For most, that was because they do not generally worry about passing. Claire said that for her, it was particularly important not to avoid mainstream services and places for fear of being read.

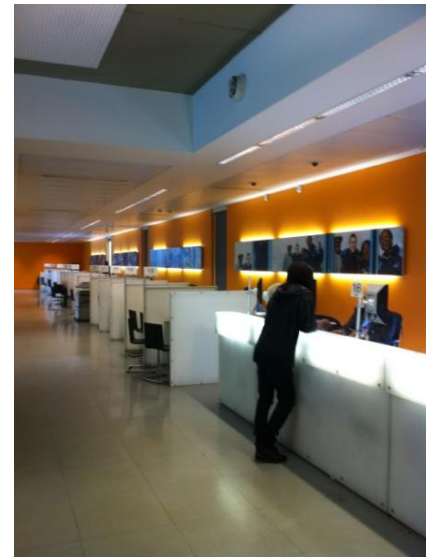
Leisure Services

Claire is a keen athlete – a marathon runner and martial arts enthusiast. But she doesn’t use a gym – Council or otherwise - due to the anxieties of getting changed or showing flesh in public places. The ideal for Claire would be an allocated regular slot when trans people are encouraged to use the gym, perhaps exclusively – but even then, she isn’t sure whether she would go. Miya has similar anxieties. She felt that she would be more comfortable using a more expensive and more exclusive gym, such as the one at her members’ club. As for Ian, he would only use a gym where he knew *for sure* that there were cubicles rather than communal changing facilities.

Public Transport in London

One of the reasons Gabi found the idea of full time work difficult is commuting. She avoided buses and tubes because of how close passengers have stand next to each other. During the research, Gabi was wearing a scarf around her neck to cover up stubble which she had let grow in preparation for electrolysis. She was keen to ensure she didn’t put herself in any situation that meant that people look closely at her skin or face. In general, Gabi walked from place to place, and was thinking about getting a bicycle.

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LGBT Matters: Leisure Services

In a focus group, trans respondents reported they had encountered difficulties which prohibited their use of recreation and leisure facilities

LGBT Matters: Mobility

29% trans respondents had experienced problems with mobility

When travelling longer distances, she took the bus rather than the tube.

Miya, though, avoided public transport full stop: she spent several hundred pounds per month on taxi fares. Abi, meanwhile, drove everywhere – even when going on a night out. She'd rather not drink than use tubes or nightbuses.

Again, though, it would be inaccurate to say that public transport is a no-go for trans people. Alex quite happily discussed the intricate details of wearing a bind on his chest on a busy Victoria Line train, unphased by the idea that people could hear the conversation. Charlize/Paul had nothing but praise for the good-natured night bus drivers he has met on many a journey across town. Helen and Sharon did not hesitate to take buses and trains across town late on a Sunday evening – despite the heads that were turning on the street as they walked to the station.

Conclusions

This study represents a valuable opportunity to frame existing knowledge and understanding – both local and national – of the transgender community in real life contexts, giving a voice to real people and space for them to tell their stories. As researchers we are heavily indebted to those who agreed to take part, who granted to us privileged access to their lives, homes, opinions, social circles, private lives, secrets, dreams and anxieties.

The data presented in this report adds real life colour to many aspects of the transgender experience which have captured the attention of policymakers in the past. These include the ongoing harassment and abuse that is experienced by many transgender people on a regular basis, a mistrust of the police, dissatisfaction with trans-specific health services and widespread underemployment. The study also highlights the critical importance of voluntary sector organisations in the lives of some in the trans community. This study also affords examples of the pervasive heteronormative values of British society – and how this affects day-to-day life for those whose gender identity does not conform to inherited and limiting models of self.

But ESRO's ethnography does not paint a picture of a community *defined* by its needs and difficulties. The respondents in this study cannot and should not be reduced to their additional needs associated with their trans identities. For the trans people involved in this project are not just trans. Their needs are not just trans needs, and their perspectives are not just trans perspectives. Each individual presents a unique and rich set of preferences, assets, skills and weaknesses.

Besides, this study finds the trans community not sufficiently cohesive or homogeneous to warrant generalising statements of need, quality or character. To make such generalisations is to refuse the trans community the subjectivity which is enjoyed by the non-trans majority in society. This is a community which cannot be fully understood or represented via blanket statements or through the voluntary sector as a proxy. It warrants the same attention to the individual as any other community within society. To be trans is not to be the same as other trans.

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Policy implications

On the one hand, many of the inequalities suffered by the respondents in this study might be most effectively tackled at national and regional level.

In addition, this report highlights the difficulty of studying a dispersed urban community such as the trans community on the relatively arbitrary or artificial geographical basis of a local authority area. The population studied in this area was not a “local” population – so the efforts made by the public bodies of one specific local area might only have a limited impact on the total quality of life of an individual.

But this report demonstrates that there *are* several implications for local authority services in terms of accessibility and equality for trans residents. These implications are unlikely to be dramatically – or even slightly – different from Council to Council across inner London. No single Council can ‘own’ the agenda, or guarantee that its trans residents will not experience poor quality council service in the future – as individuals access services provided by councils across the capital. Conversely, if no councils act at all, then no progress can be made.

Recommendations and points for consideration

Lambeth in London	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lambeth LB is advised, on the back of this research, to take a lead on trans equality work with other councils in Greater London and the GLA, to raise awareness of trans equality issues and disseminate the findings of their research. 2. Councils, acting together, would be well advised to consider what might be done differently across councils to eliminate inequalities experienced by the trans population – indeed by other minority groups
Customer Services processes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Consider ways for service users to be able to use their preferred name without embarrassment or disruption if their ‘official’ name is different 4. Design processes where ID verification is necessary as carefully as possible to minimise risk of trans customers being forced to disclose their trans identity where they would prefer

	<p>not to or in a manner they find uncomfortable or alienating.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce best practice in terms of asking customers to declare gender on the web and on paper forms: i.e. do this only where necessary, and where it is necessary, allow for trans identities to be expressed Ensure waiting rooms are spacious, relaxed and enable customers to be inconspicuous if they prefer Where staff greet customers as they enter buildings, ensure personal space is respected and allow customers time to orientate themselves.
Staff training	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Train staff on how to act if they encounter a customer whose identity documentation does not match the identity presented verbally. Train staff on how to navigate situation of ambiguity or uncertainty regarding a customer's gender, and to recognise where gender is relevant and where not.
Children's social care and education	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate LGBT awareness and sensitivity in local authority care services Assess whether progress has been made in tackling homophobia and transphobia in schools and colleges since <i>LGBT Matters</i>
Cooperative council	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Consider Cooperative Council models in terms of the potential they offer to ensure equalities and standards of customer service are upheld across a diverse group of delivery partners.
Policing, TfL, Health, JobCentre	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Share the relevant findings of this report and challenge local partners on their provision for LGBT and specifically trans equality
Trans specific services	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Assess whether local frontline professionals in education, social care etc are aware of specialist services Ensure trans specific services are signposted to effectively
Monitoring	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Review trans equality monitoring using examples of good practice.



ESRO Ltd

2 Graphite Square
Vauxhall Walk
London SE11 5EE

+44 (0)20 7735 8040
contactus@esro.co.uk
www.esro.co.uk

