

Sexuality Summer School 2017: Why Be Normal Report for Researcher-Led Initiative Funding

As part of this year's Sexuality Summer School we held a special public event exploring ideas of the abnormal body through performance on Thursday 25th May. This featured work by performance artist Brian Lobel (Chichester) and by actor, comedian and international disability rights activist Liz Carr (BBC *Silent Witness*). A performance dialogue, this event featured short pieces by Lobel and Carr from their works on topics such as queer experiences of cancer and narratives of cancer survivorship, assisted suicide, the social model of disability, and the intersections between sexuality, disability and gender. Together these short pieces combined audio and video recordings, interactive performance art, stand-up comedy, and critical reflections on ideas of norms, normativities and the normal.

This free event was open to the public as well as registered delegates of this year's Sexuality Summer School. We collaborated with the LGBT Cancer Support Alliance through Macmillan LGBT project worker Lawrence Roberts, who helped us secure the Manchester Royal Infirmary Undergraduate Lecture Theatre for our event. Support from this organisation (through, for example, publicity networks) enabled us to reach beyond the academic world to the local LGBT and disabled communities, cancer survivorship networks and members of the medical profession. It was important to have a venue like the Manchester Royal Infirmary for this event as moving to this space highlighted the interdisciplinary nature of the medical humanities. We attracted around 70 attendees, who were invited to watch, listen and interact in the performance dialogue. Holly Hughes, another performer who took part in other events at this year's Sexuality Summer School, even returned early from another engagement in Brighton to attend the performance dialogue.

The public event was paired with a workshop for the registered delegates – forty postgraduates and researchers spending a week together to discuss this year's theme. Lobel and Carr's remarkably intimate workshop explored the idea of 'lightbulb moments': significant moments that shift our awareness of the social issues in which we are implicated, that alter our sense of what is normal. After briefly introducing the exercise with their own examples, Carr and Lobel divided the seminar into smaller groups to discuss these 'lightbulb moments' and consider the conditions out of which they arise. Following the social model of disability described by Carr at the start of the session, delegates were able to similarly analyse the construction of norms around bodies, ability and illness. Moreover, the deeply personal and emotional nature of this activity was welcomed by many students as an opportunity to think theory and performance differently.

Following the public event, we held a wine reception and networking dinner at The Café at the Museum attended by Brian Lobel, Liz Carr, her partner, a friend and disability rights activist, Lawrence Roberts from Macmillan LGBT, [someone from Sick! Festival], as well as the event organisers and a few delegates. This meal offered the opportunity to discuss the ideas from the performance and workshop informally, and to strengthen connections for future events that cross disciplinary boundaries. Due to the time restraints of film shooting for *Silent Witness*, Liz Carr was only able to attend for the day, so we were pleased to be able to offer our speakers and organisers a meal before their travel.

We are pleased with the smooth running of the event and the positive responses from attendees and delegates. Many students expressed an interest in exploring ways their own research might reach wider public audiences and activist communities. Feedback from our delegates collected at the end of the Summer School indicates the value of this mixed-methods event and workshop in encouraging researchers to incorporate a range of media and analytical tools in their work. Several mentioned improved confidence in discussing film and performance work. From the perspective of

the student organisers, the performance dialogue and workshop were crucial in highlighting the necessity to pay attention to accessibility during preparation for events, to help make projects such as this not only interdisciplinary, but intersectional.

The funding from ArtsMethods@Manchester was crucial to this smooth running. Through our collaboration with the LGBT Cancer Support Alliance we were able to secure the venue at an unexpectedly low cost, which gave us more flexibility, and we secured extra funding last minute for lunch catering for the Sexuality Summer School. With this added financial support on top of the ArtsMethods@Manchester funding, we were able to offer our speakers refreshment following the event with the added benefit of fostering networking to support future collaborative events. Moreover, we were able to contribute towards the cost of the speakers' fees, without which the Sexuality Summer School would not have had such a diverse schedule. In the feedback forms, students have repeatedly remarked on the quality and diversity of the speakers at this year's Sexuality Summer School, in which Lobel and Carr's performance dialogue and workshop undoubtedly played a part.

