



Exploring the experiences of LGBTQIA+ young people with visible differences

We surveyed **75 LGBTQIA+ young people with a range of visible differences** about their experiences. This is a summary of the results.

Demographic descriptions are in participants' own words.

*"When you're queer with a visible difference, you're different from the queer people AND the cis/straight people. It can feel **so isolating and alienating to be SO different**" - bisexual transgender man with eczema*

*"Being LGBTQIA+ and having a visible difference will result in **a lot more challenges** than being cishet with a visible difference as it will lead to being different in several ways, which will likely be an opportunity for **bullying and discrimination**" - asexual female with an amputated limb*

Young people talked about how **having multiple marginalised identities could be overwhelming** and contributed to other people treating them poorly. They felt their experiences differed substantially from those who were either LGBTQIA+ **or** had a visible difference (but not both) and that it was **harder to hold both of these identities simultaneously**.

*"Having a visible difference makes me less inclined to share my identity as **it adds yet another "other" to me**" - bisexual woman with neurofibromatosis*

*"Our experiences are **rich and unique**. I love intersecting multiple identities and I feel it has overall made me a **kinder, more accepting, more loving, and more compassionate** person than if I only identified with one or none" - bisexual/pansexual non-binary agender person with cleft lip and palate*

Young people felt it was **hard to come out** due to already feeling different because of their visible difference. Some were fearful of the social consequences of having multiple marginalised identities. However, **some viewed their intersecting identities as a strength** that offered them unique perspectives and opportunities!

"I often feel **isolated** in queer spaces because of my facial disfigurement. A big part of that is **never looking up to par**" - queer transgender man with facial scars

"It has made me **reluctant to join LGBTQIA spaces** such as gyms etc., out of **fear of judgement** of my body" - gay man with pectus excavatum

Young people felt that appearance was **highly valued** in LGBTQIA+ communities and that **having a visible difference could be a barrier to meeting LGBTQIA+ appearance standards**. Many lacked a sense of belonging in LGBTQIA+ spaces and described being judged and excluded by other LGBTQIA+ people.

"I always feel **less attractive** and even ugly because of it. I'm sure that people would take liking to me if it weren't for it" - pansexual female with cleft lip and palate

"It makes me feel unwanted. Queer spaces feel like a place **you should feel safe to be different**, so being put down even then makes it feel hopeless and bleak" - asexual demipanromantic non-binary person with cleft lip and palate

Many young people experienced **challenges making meaningful connections** with other LGBTQIA+ people, especially when it came to **dating and romantic relationships**. Negative experiences were **jarring**, as young people had expected LGBTQIA+ people to accept them. This made rejection in these spaces especially hurtful.

*"I believe that the community being so accepting and supportive makes it easier to have a visible difference. There's **not as much shame** and **the community makes it feel okay** to have a difference"* –
biromantic asexual female with scars

*"More accepting than cis-het peers, however **still feel left out** due to appearance"* –
lesbian woman with neurofibromatosis

But, some young people felt that LGBTQIA+ people **did** accept their visible difference – this ranged from feeling wholeheartedly accepted to simply **more** accepted in these spaces than when with cisgender, heterosexual people. Overall, it was felt that **there was room for improvement** in LGBTQIA+ people's attitudes towards visible difference.

So What?

- This study provided valuable information about what it is like to be an LGBTQIA+ young person with a visible difference.
- We will be combining these results with results from an interview study focused on the experiences and support needs of LGBTQIA+ adults with visible differences.
 - Our findings will be used to create a **support resource** tailored to the unique needs of LGBTQIA+ people with visible differences, as most existing support is based on cisgender, heterosexual people.
 - When ready, this resource will be added to **The Visible Difference Support Hub**, which offers access to free, evidence-based support for people whose lives are impacted by a visible difference: www.VisibleDifferenceSupportHub.com

If you have any questions or would like to know more about our research, please contact:
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