

problems, which can be different from the needs of cis-heterosexuals and therefore require a different approach.

These facts form a distinct counter-narrative to the one we experience in the media where everyone is happy and married and 'openly gay' (a phrase highly popular with writers of Wikipedia articles). They are the reality that many of us experience every day and continue to live quietly – out of sight or mind.

In 2014, a small group of friends, all queer, many with mental health problems, sat down in their living room and decided they'd had enough of being invisible. If no-one else was telling our stories, then it had to be us. From those late night conversations came The Polarised Project. We're making an independent documentary that is going to take the stories of our communities, the stories that we don't talk about, and put them on-screen so they can no longer be ignored.

We're now fundraising for our third and final round of filming for the feature length documentary for release in August 2016. We completed the first round of filming at the end of summer 2014 and a second round last summer, ultimately producing a short film, also called Polarised, that we are now touring around film festivals, film groups and student societies, in order to start the public conversation this issue so badly needs.

We're aiming our documentary at both the LGBT community and wider society. The film will look at the parallel structures that we've created for ourselves. For example, how many of our straight friends know of the prevalence of 'Queermas',

a festive gathering of friends in a safe space, as a joyful alternative to the family Christmases that many people in our community cannot take part in or



find alienating because of a denial of their identities (for example, by being misgendered)? They say that your friends are the family you choose. In Polarised, we explore the creation of familial structures and support networks within queer friendship groups, and little pockets of queerness that spontaneously form within local areas.

We'll also be looking at people within intersectional identities within our community – the stories of LGBT people of colour, of queers with mental health conditions and disabilities and more. We'll be looking at the difficulties LGBT people of faith experience trying to exist in religious communities where institutional homophobia keeps many on the margins while the discrimination and/or racism within the LGBT community marginalises them here as well. And we'll be looking at the pressures on people on the scene to look good, play hard, and never poop the party. We'll be asking what effect these struggles have on how we feel about ourselves, how we live day to day, and how we manage when life gets tough.

By making this film, uncovering these stories and breaking the silence that exists around mental health issues across our culture, we hope to put up resistance to the idea that everything is fine now that we have marriage equality. The removal of legal barriers is only the beginning of our journey to full gender and sexual liberation.

It's been really exciting being involved in such a cutting-edge project, and we've received a lot of interest from mental health groups. Mind has partially funded us, and in January we screened our short film at their Suicide Prevention Conference in Bristol. At our fundraising gig in November 2015, we had local mental health groups come along to give out literature and speak to our community about services available.

Building these links is so important to us: anything we can do to relieve the pressure on our community.



For a long time, LGBT and mental health issues have been marginalised, kept in the closet, and silently suppressed. Great leaps forward have seen both causes rocket up the social and political agenda, but not anywhere near where we need them to be in order to care for and support people who continue to live with feelings of alienation, exclusion and hopelessness. It's time to talk about LGBT mental health – the closet is for clothes!

**Polarised** is out August 2016 - you can learn more at their website [PolarisedProject.com](http://PolarisedProject.com).



**Sarah McCulloch** is an Executive Producer for The Polarised Project.