

Beyond Opposition Closing Conference

The Beyond Opposition project culminated in a vibrant and thought-provoking closing conference held on March 12th, 2025, at University College Dublin. Attendees gathered to reflect on the project's explorations of social polarizations related to gender, sexuality, and abortion. The day offered a comprehensive overview of the project's key findings, stemming from both the initial interview phase, which explored the day to day experiences of those concerned about or opposed to recent changes, and the ground-breaking second phase with discussion groups and arts-based research workshops. These workshops, which brought together individuals with diverse positions, examined how we interact across difference, and imagined new utopias.

The conference showcased the innovative arts practices that informed the project, offering attendees engaging opportunities to connect with the work on a deeper level. We were delighted to welcome back some of our artistic collaborators: [Leah Hilliard](#), who worked on the Dublin workshop; Karen McGrady-Parker and Fraser McLeod from Glasgow-based [Culture Junction](#); and [Tim Fish](#), who created the comic strips from the Glasgow workshop. A stimulating panel discussion featuring leading academics in related research areas provided further context and broadened the conversation. Panellists included [Dr. Paul Simpson](#), [Dr. Finn Mackay](#), [Dr. Aoife Neary](#), [Dr. Sarah Lamble](#), [Dr. Ulrika Dahl](#) and [Dr. Jay Todd](#). Insights gleaned from the workshops were also brought to life through the project's online exhibition, [Imperfect Utopias](#), which served as a compelling backdrop to the day's events. A huge thank you to all who attended and contributed to the success of the Beyond Opposition closing conference.

Launch of our key findings report

The closing conference saw the launch of the Beyond Opposition key findings report (see summary, below). The report is supported by our virtual exhibition [Imperfect Utopias](#), and it will be followed by threetwo books, to be published by Bloomsbury in 2026. Download the full report [here](#).

Summary of the Final Report

Polarisation is a key issue of our time, and is increasingly focused on gender, sexuality and/or abortion, areas where rights have advanced for some in the 21st century. Beyond Opposition is a project that seeks to develop understandings about the experiences of these divisions, and experiment in living together where we cannot change everyone's mind.

Exploring the experiences of those opposed to or concerned about social and legal changes to gender, sexuality and/or abortion, 161 interviews were held with people living in Ireland, Canada and Great Britain. The interviews found that:

- Those who are opposed to or concerned about socio-legal changes to gender, sexuality and/or abortion are not all the same, and are not all rightwing
- Everyday lives can be affected by holding these positions, particularly at work and home
- Some participants were very careful about where they went and what they said regarding their positions on gender, sexuality and/or abortion
- Participants said that they found support and developed their activisms *because of* their experiences, including confrontations
- Negative experiences can embolden and entrench positions that oppose socio-legal changes on gender, sexuality and/or abortion

Bringing people together across divisions around gender, sexuality and/or abortion, three discussion groups (n. 39) and three creative artist-led workshops (n. 35 using visual art, sound and theatre) were carefully created in Dublin, Vancouver and Glasgow. These events brought people together to imagine new worlds in which to live and create across division, without changing minds or debating the issues. The discussion groups and artist-led workshops found that:

- It is possible to bring *some*, but not all, people together in workshops that include those who disagree with you on gender, sexuality and/or abortion
- There is a desire to engage beyond division and polarisation around gender, sexuality and/or abortion
- The ideal worlds we want to live in are sometimes incompatible with diverging positions on gender, sexuality and/or abortion
- Art can be used in ways that work across division in gender, sexuality and/or abortion
- Through curating research via the imperfectutopias.eu virtual exhibition, the project seeks to spark conversations and experiences beyond reporting on findings

