

# Sexuality

## Contents:

[About sexual identity](#)

[About gender identity](#)

[Coming out](#)

[Sexual health](#)

[Homophobia and harassment](#)

[Further resources](#)

## About sexual identity

In its broadest sense sexuality describes the way a person expresses themselves as a sexual being. It describes how important or unimportant sexual expression is in a person's life; how they choose to express that sexuality and any preference they may have towards the type of sex they want sexual partners they choose. Every survey of human sexual behaviour reveals that there is a huge variety of sexual expression - the way we choose to behave sexually is usually as individual and as complicated as the ways we choose to dress or to earn a living. Human sexuality rarely falls into neat categories or lends itself to simple labelling. Human sexuality is a rich and complex area of human experience. Authors, artists, poets, philosophers and composers have worked to explore sexuality from earliest times without coming up with any enduring answers.

In recent times however, the word sexuality has come to also have a more limited meaning. Sexuality is now often defined by who we are attracted to and more specifically whether the gender of the sexual partners we choose is the same as our own or different. Some feel this more restrictive definition can create problems since it attempts to fit a complex, subtle experience into simple categories: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, or Heterosexual etc. However, it also offers solutions since it can give people who do not feel they share the major assumptions of the dominant heterosexual mainstream the voice, pride and sense of validation that comes from discovering an identity and a shared experience with others. Today, more people are learning about pansexuality, and some will prefer to use the term "queer" as they wish not to specify their identity. You can find a longer list of identities and labels used by some people on the [LSU LGBT Association page](#).

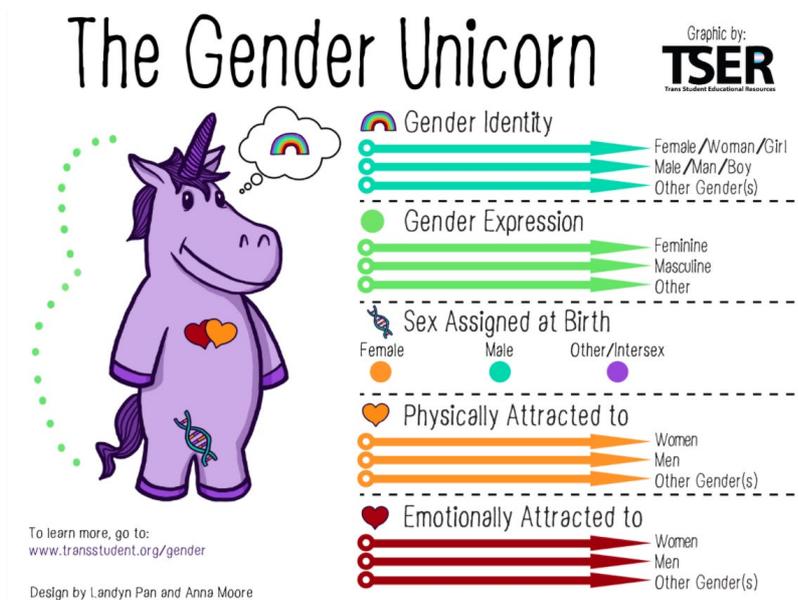
A hot debate has endured over recent years about why people's sexuality differs. Many theories have been put forward - citing genetic predetermination, childhood influences and peer-pressure amongst other reasons. However, attempts to find a single cause for individual's sexual orientation have not been successful. Nor have attempts to influence or change individual's sexuality. Like many of our other characteristics, sexuality seems to be largely a chance product of our individual nature which is then further developed by our early interactions. Like many other personality traits, our sexuality seems to begin forming by the time we reach teenage - although it may be many years later before we each understand and accept our sexuality. The University Counsellors are happy to help explore any issues you may wish to bring about your gender or identity and to support you in this.

## About gender identity

To understand any category of gender we must understand *what gender is*. A person's gender is a way of categorising them – normally using measures of masculinity and femininity. Everyone has their own balance of traits which we think of as masculine or feminine. Some people may be very masculine and not very feminine, or very feminine and not at all masculine. Most people are a mix of both.

Someone's gender identity is their own experience of their measures of the masculine and feminine. Their gender expression is how they display that outwardly through their behaviour and appearance. The two might be quite different, depending on how free a person feels to "be themselves".

In most countries when a baby is born it is assigned a sex of either "male" or "female" depending on their genitals. Most people's gender identity matches the sex they are assigned at birth. These people are cis-gendered. Some people feel their gender identity is different and they may identify as transgender or trans. Someone assigned male may feel that they are female and vice-versa, or they may feel that their gender identity doesn't fit within the male/female binary. These people may identify with terms like non-binary, genderqueer or genderfluid. You can find a longer list of identities and their meanings on the [LSU LGBT Association page](http://www.lsu.edu/lgbt).



For more on gender, and the difference between identity and expression see <http://www.transstudent.org>

## Coming out

Coming out means telling someone about your sexuality or gender identity. You are under absolutely no obligation to come out to anyone, but it is well understood that we tend to be happier and more productive when we can be ourselves and not have to expend energy hiding parts of our identity from other people. Your decisions about coming out will depend on all sorts of factors such as the laws which apply to you and the attitudes and beliefs of the people in your life. Coming out is often made to sound like a big one-time event. In reality LGBT+ people come out over and over throughout their lives as they meet and interact with new people.

### Coming out to yourself

Before you can come out to anyone else, you need to come out to yourself. There is no hard and fast rule when this happens. Some people are certain of their sexuality or gender identity from a very young age; for others it can happen much later in life. Accepting your identity is hopefully easier nowadays than it has been in the past. Attitudes in many countries are somewhat more accepting and there are now more people living openly with their sexuality and gender identity than there has been in the recent past. Though we recognise there are many parts of the world where this is not the case.

Loughborough University seeks to offer a supportive environment to students of all sexual orientation and gender identity, and the Student Union is active in offering support to LGBT+ students and in challenging homophobic attitudes. However, the decision to come out to yourself can still be a very scary one and can be a period of upheaval and uncertainty. If you want someone to talk to during this time, the University Counselling Team will be happy to help you as will the Loughborough LGBT Association in the Students Union - [w&dlgbtofficer@lsu.co.uk](mailto:w&dlgbtofficer@lsu.co.uk). There is also LGBT+ helpline Switchboard, contacts below.

### Coming out to others

Families often have detailed plans for their children and can be upset when it becomes clear that not all their expectations are going to be realised. Similarly, friends and other groups may have their own very definite opinions or prejudices. You may want to talk over the situation in detail before you begin to come out to anyone.

- Look for people you know will be understanding to come out to first.
- Follow your own timetable - it's your life and your identity. Don't feel you have to tell people until you are ready.
- Don't assume people will react badly if you have witnessed them previously making homophobic jokes. Having a conversation may educate them into understanding why the jokes are offensive. Only have this conversation if, or when, you are ready to.
- Sadly, the opposite can also be true. Just because people claim to be inclusive doesn't mean that they cannot be quite fixed and judgmental in their view of the LGBT+ community.
- Do not feel that you have to tell everyone. Many people - such as Department Staff - will consider your sexuality and identity as your own business. You don't have to share it with them unless you particularly want to.

- Try not to let an initial bad reaction put you off talking about it. Many people react badly when they are faced with something that has shocked them. However, what is said can always be unsaid - even if it doesn't feel like it at the time. Sometimes people can be battling their own views vs the beliefs they have been taught, so it may take them longer to digest this information.
- Choose your medium. If you are worried that someone will be very hostile, writing might give them time to assimilate the news better.
- Never feel guilty! There is no need to blame ourselves or apologise for others' bad reactions and should instead celebrate our differences and who we are.

## Sexual health

It is important that anyone who is sexually active takes care of their health. Even though sex education is taught in schools, until very recent legal changes it has included only information about straight sex. It is important for everyone to look after both their own and their partner's sexual health and decide which form of contraception is right for you. The NHS has a webpage on [what to ask your partner before sex](#), and Brook offers advice on helping you to find out [which method of contraception is best for you](#). You can obtain products and information about safe sex from organisations such as [Trade Sexual Health](#).

Unprotected sex nearly always carries risks of sexually transmitted infections. If unprotected sex happens unintentionally, do seek help.

You do not have to go to your GP for advice if you are concerned about them knowing about your sexuality. There is a [sexual health clinic](#) at Pinfold Gate, Loughborough, Tel: 0300 124 0102. It is completely confidential, and you are known by a number not a name. They can give help and advice on all infections including HIV.

## Homophobia and harassment

The University adheres strictly to Equal Opportunities and Anti-bullying and Harassment Policies. The Students' Union is the same. Thus, homophobic bullying or discrimination is not permissible, and both the University and the Students' Union will support you.

If it happens in the Union, contact a member of security for immediate help and [Student Advice](#) for further support.

If you receive offensive emails, please contact [IT Services](#).

You can also ask for support from [Hall Wardens](#) and your Head of Department/ School. If it happens in town you can report it to the [police](#). Incidents of homophobic bullying can be very distressing, and the University Counsellors are here to support you too.

## Further resources

### Support on campus:

#### [Loughborough LGBT Association](#)

[w&dlgbtofficer@lsu.co.uk](mailto:w&dlgbtofficer@lsu.co.uk)

A support network for every student who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and all other denominations of sexuality and gender at Loughborough University, Loughborough College and the RNIB College.

#### [Student Wellbeing and Inclusivity team](#): 01509 228338

[studentwellbeing@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:studentwellbeing@lboro.ac.uk)

To book an appointment with any of our services within Student Wellbeing and Inclusivity (including the Counselling Team, Mental Health Support Team and the Wellbeing Advisers), please complete [the referral form](#).

### Websites

- [Stonewall](#)

Campaigns for the equality of lesbian, gay, bi and trans people across Britain.

- [LGBT Foundation](#)

National charity delivering advice, support and information services to lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) communities.

- [Leicester Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender Centre](#)

Voluntary organisation established to support lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.

- [Gay Youth UK](#)

Information about rights for LGBT British citizens.

- [Mind LGBTIQ+ mental health](#)

Gives information about mental health support for people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer or questioning.

- [FFLAG](#)

National voluntary organisation and registered charity supporting the LGBT+ community and their parents.

- [Trans Student Educational Resources \(TSER\)](#)

Youth-led organization based in the United States dedicated to transforming the educational environment for trans students through advocacy and empowerment.

- [Trade Sexual Health](#)

Free, confidential health advice, information, services & support for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans communities of Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland.

## Helplines:

- [Stonewall](#): FREEPHONE 0800 0502020  
(Lines are open 9:30 - 4:30 Monday to Friday.)
- [Switchboard](#): 0300 330 0630  
[chris@switchboard.lgbt](mailto:chris@switchboard.lgbt) (online chat also available)  
Information, support and referral service for lesbians, gay men and bisexual and trans people – and anyone considering issues around their sexuality and/or gender identity.
- [The Beaumont Society](#): 01582 412220 (24/7/365)  
Help and support for the transgender community
- [LASS Leicester AIDS Support Services](#): 0116 255 9995  
For help on HIV/AIDS, HIV testing or safer sex. This is confidential.
- [Loughborough Sexual Health Clinic](#): 0300 124 0102  
Pinfold Gate Loughborough LE11 1DQ.

## Books

- [‘This Book is Gay’](#), Juno Dawson, 2014
- [‘Queer: A Graphic History’](#), Meg-John Barker, 2016
- [‘How to Cope with Doubts about your Sexual Identity’](#), MIND booklet.