



Words we live by: a guide to LGBTQ+ language

Written by young people aged 12-20

Funded by
 The British Academy

Hello

The words in this glossary have been defined by young LGBTQ+ people in England, as part of a project with the University of Nottingham. We hope our guide will help you to better understand the language we use to describe our lives.

Thanks for reading!

Binders: an item of clothing to help flatten the chest safely. This can be very important for some LGBTQ+ people.

Biphobia: being prejudiced towards someone and/or discriminating them based on the fact they identify as bisexual.

Bisexual (bi):

being attracted to more than just one gender. Some bisexual people might be more attracted to one particular gender more than another.

Family: LGBTQ+ families come in all shapes and sizes, and LGBTQ+ people can still have children if they want to (whether biologically or through adoption and fostering). Just because somebody's LGBTQ+, you shouldn't assume they necessarily do or don't want a family.

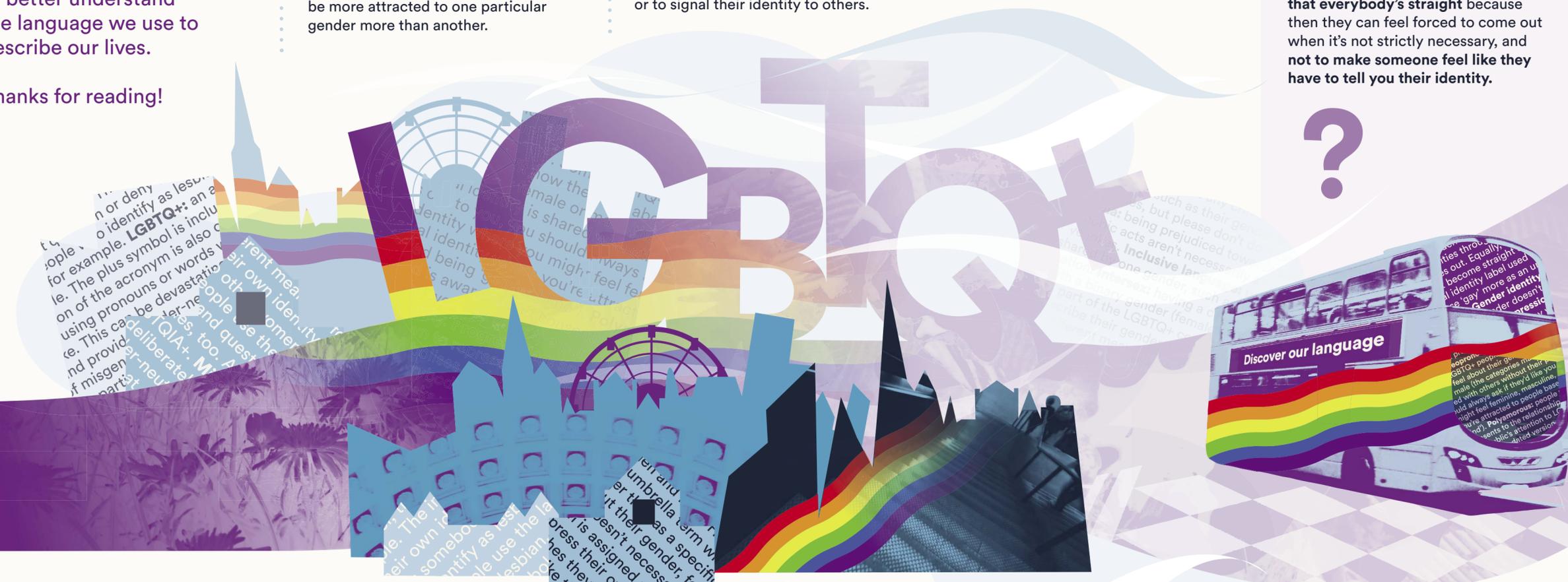
Flags: there are many different flags to represent different LGBTQ+ identities. Many LGBTQ+ people choose to display or wear them as a way of showing pride in their identity or to signal their identity to others.

Gender identity: how a person feels about their gender, for example that they are non-binary or female. Gender doesn't necessarily have anything to do with biology or the sex a person is assigned at birth.

Gender expression: how someone chooses to express their own gender identity outwardly. This can include the clothes they wear and how they style their hair, for example, as well as things like their body language.

“How should I ask somebody about their sexuality?”

First, ask yourself why you need to know. Is it so that you can give them the best support, or just because you're curious? A person's sexual identity is private: the most important thing is **not to assume that everybody's straight** because then they can feel forced to come out when it's not strictly necessary, and **not to make someone feel like they have to tell you their identity.**



Agender:

not identifying as any gender – whether female, male, or non-binary. Agender people are genderless.

Ally: being an ally means that you actively support LGBTQ+ people and challenge discrimination and inequality wherever you see it.

Asexual (ace):

an umbrella term to describe people who don't experience sexual attraction. Some asexual people experience little or no romantic attraction (known as **aromantic**) and some may occasionally experience sexual attraction to someone they have a strong bond with (known as **demisexual**).

Cisgender (cis): short for 'cisgender', this is when your gender identity lines up with the sex you were assigned at birth.

Coming out: sharing your gender or sexual identity with other people. Some young people come out as *queer* or *questioning* rather than using a specific label; it's important not to rush them to “pick a label”.

Deadname: many trans people use this term to refer to their given name at birth, which they no longer use. It's important to use the name(s) people are most comfortable with.

Drag: dressing up and performing as a different gender to the one you usually identify with.

Fluidity: it's common for people to move through different identities throughout their lives. Sexual and gender identities aren't necessarily fixed forever once someone comes out. Equally, bi and pan people can still identify as such even if they settle down with one person; they don't become straight or gay depending on the gender of their long-term partner.

Gay: traditionally, this is a sexual identity label used to mean 'homosexual', referring to women and men. However, some young people now use 'gay' more as an umbrella term which points to the whole LGBTQ+ community, rather than as a specific label.

Gender affirming treatment: some trans people take hormones or have surgery which supports their gender identity. Not all trans people want to have treatment. In the UK, only those over 16 can take hormones and only those over 18 can have surgery.

Gender dysphoria: a feeling of distress or discomfort that some trans and non-binary people feel because their gender identity doesn't line up with the sex they were assigned at birth. Not all trans and non-binary people experience gender dysphoria.

Gender fluid:

a form of non-binary gender. This is a flexible gender identity that shifts; sometimes you might feel more masculine, sometimes more feminine.

Hate crime: any crime (including verbal abuse) which targets the victim because of a particular characteristic, such as their gender or sexuality. It's important to support LGBTQ+ people who wish to report hate crimes, but please don't do it on their behalf without asking them first as it may put them at risk.

Homophobia: being prejudiced towards people and/or discriminating against them because of their sexuality. Homophobic acts aren't necessarily always violent and can also include language use such as slurs and offensive jokes.

For more information and to download this guide, visit:
nott.ac/lgbtqwords



This resource has been co-created by young people from LGBTQ+ youth groups in England and Dr Lucy Jones from the University of Nottingham. It is funded by the British Academy and designed by Gill Williamson.

“How should I ask somebody about their gender identity?”

Again, first you should ask yourself why you need to know. Second, you should try not to assume based on someone's appearance or name. If you want to refer to somebody (for example as “she” or “they”) and need to know how to do so respectfully, you can ask them what pronouns they use (see ‘pronouns’).

You should also check if that person is happy for you to use their pronouns publicly, or if this might reveal their LGBTQ+ identity (see ‘outing’). If you accidentally misgender someone, just apologise and move on – it's best not to make a big deal out of it as this can make people feel uncomfortable or even unsafe.

Inclusive language: using language which doesn't specify or assume that an experience is only shared by one gender, such as saying “people” rather than “women” in the context of pregnancy and menstruation.

Intersex:



when your biological sex characteristics don't fit neatly into the boxes of ‘female’ or ‘male’. Some intersex people identify with a binary gender, others identify as non-binary. Importantly, not all intersex people feel part of the LGBTQ+ community, but some do.

Labels: LGBTQ+ people often use labels (such as ‘lesbian’) to describe their gender and/or sexual identity. Not everybody wants to use a label, though, and they can carry different meanings for different people. The important thing is to respect the way that someone describes their own identity, and to not question or deny the labels they use.

Misgendering: using pronouns or words which refer to someone as the wrong gender, whether deliberately or by mistake. This can be devastating for trans and non-binary people, so it's best to use gender-neutral language and provide gender-neutral facilities (such as toilets, where young LGBTQ+ people can be at particular risk of misgendering) wherever possible.

Mx: a title which, unlike Ms or Mr, is gender neutral rather than specifying a particular binary gender identity. Anybody can use Mx, no matter their gender identity, but providing this as an option (such as on forms) is a good way of being inclusive of non-binary people.

Neopronouns: pronouns that have been created as alternatives to she/he/they, such as “ze” and “hir”. Some LGBTQ+ people choose to use these pronouns to refer to themselves because they better fit how they feel about their gender identity.

Pangender: a gender identity where you might feel feminine, masculine, and non-binary simultaneously.

Pansexual (pan):



a sexual identity where you're attracted to people based on them as individuals, regardless of their gender (also called being ‘gender blind’)

Polyamorous: people who have more than one partner, where everybody involved is aware of and consents to the relationships.

Pride: an event that happens in towns and cities around the world to draw the public's attention to LGBTQ+ rights, and to celebrate being part of the LGBTQ+ community.

Pronouns: parts of grammar like ‘she’, ‘his’, and ‘theirs’. Everybody uses pronouns, even if they're not LGBTQ+. It's really important to use the pronouns you've been asked to; this is a key way of respecting people's gender identity. If you're not sure what pronouns someone uses, it's best to refer to them as “they”, rather than assuming you know their gender identity based on their appearance or name. Also, don't assume someone's gender identity from their pronouns; some non-binary people might still use ‘she’ or ‘he’, for example.

Puberty blockers: medication to temporarily stop the hormones associated with puberty. These can be life-saving for young people experiencing distress as their bodies change during adolescence.

They/them: pronouns which are gender-neutral. They/them pronouns can be used in combination with gendered pronouns (for example “my pronouns are she/they”) to indicate a gender fluid identity or to show that someone doesn't identify as exclusively non-binary or gendered.

Trans: short for ‘transgender’, which means your gender identity doesn't line up with the sex assigned to you at birth. Trans people can identify with both binary (woman/man) and non-binary gender identities.

Transfeminine: a trans person whose gender identity and presentation is primarily feminine. This can include both trans women and non-binary people.

Transmasculine: a trans person whose gender identity and presentation is primarily masculine. This can include both trans men and non-binary people.

Trans flag:



a flag used to show trans pride, with the light blue and light pink symbolising traditional binary gender and the white representing non-binary and neutral gender identities.

Transitioning: the process of changing your gender presentation, whether social (for example, taking a new name and wearing certain clothes), medical (for example, through hormone therapy), or legal (such as on official documents like passports).

Transphobia: being prejudiced towards people and/or discriminating against them because they're not cisgender. Transmisogyny is a particular form of transphobia against trans women and transfeminine people in particular.

Transsexual: a term that's been used historically in medical contexts to refer to a transgender person who has had, or who wishes to have, gender affirming surgery. The term is used less nowadays because there's greater understanding that you can identify as trans without necessarily having gender dysphoria or wanting treatment.

Queer: this can be used as an umbrella term for all LGBTQ+ people and a way of indicating your membership to the LGBTQ+ community. The word was mostly used as a slur in the past, which means that not everyone's comfortable using it, but for many younger people its use is now positive.

Rainbow: the rainbow flag was developed in the 1970s and is symbolic of the LGBTQ+ community around the world. Its colours represent love, community and pride.

Straight: a sexual identity label meaning ‘heterosexual’.

Lesbian:



somebody who is attracted only to other women. Not all people who identify as lesbian necessarily also identify as women; some non-binary people use the label, too, for example.

LGBTQ+: an acronym to represent lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and questioning people. The plus symbol is inclusive of all other non-cisgender and non-heterosexual identities, too. A longer version of the acronym is also often used, and includes intersex and asexual people: LGBTQIA+.

Non-binary:



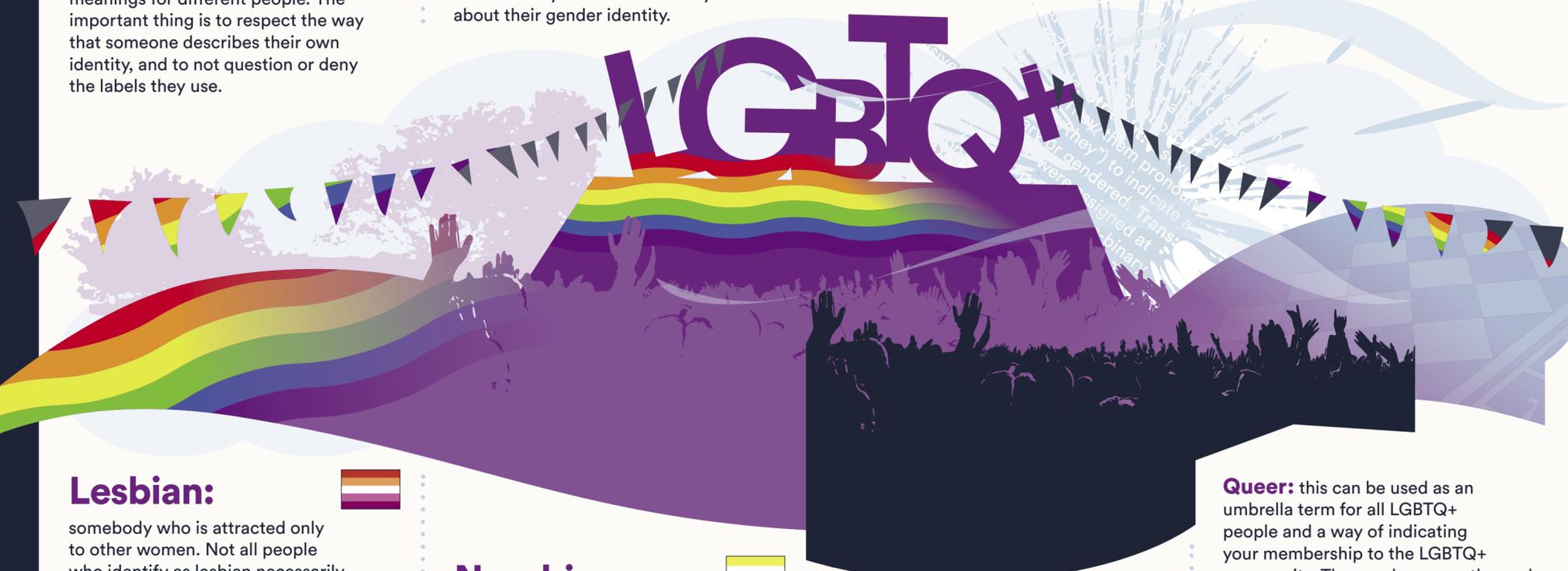
when your gender identity can't be defined as either female or male (the categories making up the gender binary).

Outing: when someone's gender or sexual identity is shared with others without their permission, whether maliciously or not. If someone comes out to you, you should always ask if they'd like you to keep this information private.

Progress flag:



an updated version of the rainbow flag which includes the intersex flag, black and brown to represent LGBTQ+ people of colour, and the colours of blue, pink, and white from the trans flag. This symbolises an inclusive and diverse LGBTQ+ community.



Useful links

➤ [LGBTQ+ British Sign Language glossary from Deaf Rainbow: deafrainbowuk.org.uk/bsl-glossary](https://deafrainbowuk.org.uk/bsl-glossary)

➤ [Find your local youth group: theproudtrust.org](https://theproudtrust.org)

➤ [The LGBT+ Youth Manifesto at the University of Nottingham: nott.ac/lgbtplusyouthmanifesto](https://nott.ac/lgbtplusyouthmanifesto)

➤ [AKT \(charity supporting homeless LGBTQ+ youth\): akt.org.uk](https://akt.org.uk)

➤ [Barnardo's Positive Identities \(a national charity offering training and advice on how to support LGBTQ+ youth\): barnardos.org.uk/get-support/support-for-young-people/lgbt](https://barnardos.org.uk/get-support/support-for-young-people/lgbt)

➤ [The LGBT Foundation \(national LGBTQ+ charity\): lgbt.foundation](https://lgbt.foundation)

➤ [Gendered Intelligence \(charity aiming to improve trans people's quality of life\): genderedintelligence.co.uk](https://genderedintelligence.co.uk)

➤ [Mermaids \(charity supporting trans and non-binary young people and their families\): mermaidsuk.org.uk](https://mermaidsuk.org.uk)

➤ [Stonewall \(LGBTQ+ charity and rights organisation\): stonewall.org.uk](https://stonewall.org.uk)