

Sexual identity & orientation

My coming out experience wasn't unusual. After years of painful deliberation, self doubt and confusion, I sat my parents down and told them that I was bisexual. A few weeks later my mum nonchalantly asked if it was a phase, and I assured her it wasn't. The experiences I have had coming out as bisexual have been very positive. However, all LGBT people have to come out in stages. Because sexuality is seldom visible, we have to ask ourselves whether or not it is safe for our colleagues to know our sexuality, or how supportive our friends will be. We have to come out individually, and only when it feels safe for us to do so. What strikes me is how often I tell people about my sexuality, or my previous partners, and they are surprised. It is often assumed that disabled people do not have a sexual identity because of our impairments, let alone a sexuality that lets us experience attraction to more than one gender. As well as this, bisexuality is often erased by both straight and gay people, bisexuality doesn't exist, apparently! I feel as if LGBT people spend a lot more time trying to accept themselves and their identities before coming out. The experiences I've had as a bi, disabled man range from bizarre to offensive, with people often making assumptions about who I am because of my sexuality, or my impairment.

Charlie Willis, @nerdwillis



Becoming aware of your sexuality, and who you fancy, can be exciting and terrifying all at once. We all have preferences, be that men, women, everyone or no-one, and we are not able to 'choose' who it is we find attractive.

Sexuality is as diverse as we are... and that's pretty diverse!

Sexual terms

Here are some terms you may have heard of, and what they mean (thanks www.brook.org.uk):

Heterosexual: Women who only fancy men, or a man who only fancies women is called heterosexual.

Homosexual (gay/lesbian): People who are homosexual are attracted to the same sex (men fancy men and women fancy women). Homosexual men are often called gay and homosexual women are often called lesbians but can also be called gay.

Bisexual or bi: People who are bisexual are attracted to both men and women.

Pansexual: Pansexual people are people attracted to people regardless of their gender.

Asexual (or ace): People who are asexual or ace don't feel sexually attracted to anyone and feel no desire to have sex.

Queer: The word queer is a term covering all non-straight sexualities. It was originally used as an insult, but now some people choose to call themselves queer because they don't feel like other labels for sexuality fit them properly.



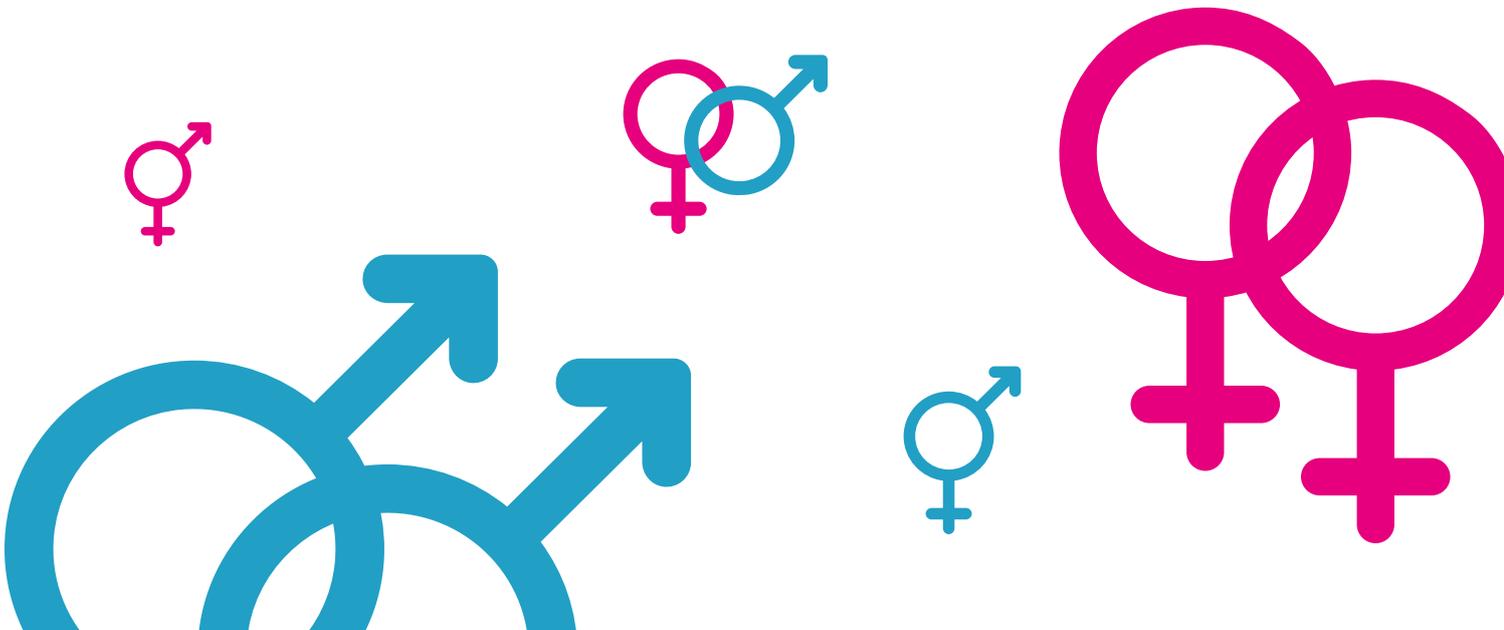
LGB: LGB stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual.

LGBT+: LGBT stands for 'lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, plus'. At Brook, they use the term LGBT+ to cover people who are not heterosexual and/or who are not cisgender. The '+' ensures all gender identities and sexual orientations are included.

Cisgender: cisgender refers to someone for whom their gender and biological sex are the same.

Your sexuality

Sexuality can be complex and sometimes tough to come to terms with. The two most important things to remember (however hard it may seem is that firstly, no sexual orientation is the 'wrong one', and secondly, there's loads of time, so use it to discover what and who you like, and don't feel a pressure to rush. In a society that always just assumes that everyone is straight, it can be tough to break the mould and show a different preference. But, be true to yourself; that's all that matters in the end.



Not getting the support, love and care you need around your sexuality? Make sure you have someone you can contact who does understand, be that a friend, parent, teacher or professional. Having someone to confide in and ask for advice from can be really helpful in the sexuality journey.

If you have a disability: Having a sexuality considered 'different' can be particularly difficult, as Charlie explains (above.) As well as assuming everyone is straight, society also often assumes that they are all non-disabled, too! Be proud of who you are and what you identify as; hiding how you really feel will only cause problems in the long run. As *always*, we are here to help answer any questions, or just lend an ear to listen, if that's what you are looking for.

Extra support

Feel free to contact Mik or Emily at The Love Lounge:

www.enhancetheuk.org/enhance/the-love-lounge

These guides are part of Enhance the UK's **#UndressingDisability** campaign: Sex Ed for Teenagers. Show your support by following us on Twitter and Instagram! **@EnhancetheUK**

