



**Bee Proud**


**INVESTIGATING THE EXPERIENCES  
OF LGBTQIA+ YOUNG PEOPLE IN  
GREATER MANCHESTER**

**REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**MANCHESTER**  
1824

The University of Manchester



A background of soft, wavy, overlapping bands of rainbow colors (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple) creating a fluid, abstract pattern.

***"It's important to hear the input of young LGBT people because they're often the ones who strive for change more and are more determined to change things in society."***

**– W, (him), trans, bisexual**

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**We are incredibly grateful to all the young people who took part in the research and shared their thoughts with us. We wish you brighter, freer futures where you can thrive as your authentic selves.**





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# ABOUT THE RESEARCH

This research gathered the views of 49 LGBTQIA+ young people (16-19 years old) across Greater Manchester in 2024 through a detailed questionnaire on their lives as LGBTQIA+ young people living, working, and going to school in Greater Manchester.

The young people lived across eight of the ten Manchester boroughs, reflected a range of ethnicities and religious identities, and included those with and without disabilities. Gender and sexuality were self described and a wide and varied range of different labels were used. Almost half of the young people identified as trans, including non-binary. They chose their own (fake) names to be used here.

It was conducted by a team of young researchers from the Proud Trust and academic researchers from the University of Manchester. The team was LGBTQIA+ led and included a range of queer and trans identities.

The aim of the research was to better understand the specific issues faced by LGBTQIA+ young people in Greater Manchester, to establish what organisations working with young people can do to improve their lives and wellbeing.

This report gives a summary of the research findings, alongside direct quotes from young people in the research. It also makes suggestions for organisations working with young people about how best to support LGBTQIA+ young people based on these findings.

For key terms and acronyms used, please see the glossary

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# KEY FINDINGS

## LGBTQIA+ YOUNG PEOPLE TOLD US THAT...

- They have to balance wanting to express themselves and feel visible with wanting privacy and safety
- LGBTQIA+ identities are influenced by political dynamics, with barriers to trans healthcare and varying acceptance based on political views
- Educational institutions play a key role in LGBTQIA+ young people's experiences and can reduce stigma and foster acceptance
- Safe spaces are where being LGBTQIA+ is seen as "the norm" and where they can belong without explanation
- Casual LGBTphobia is prevalent and often dismissed as a joke or ignored.

## LGBTQIA+ YOUNG PEOPLE NEED...

- Safe LGBTQIA+ specific places where they can freely express their identities without fear of judgement
- People to advocate for political change, particularly around trans rights
- Inclusive and comprehensive LGBTQIA+ training curriculums
- Peer support networks and positive, active role models
- Active intervention into background and low-level LGBTphobia



# VISIBILITY

## BALANCING THE NEED FOR PRIVACY AND SELF-EXPRESSION

Many young people wrote about managing and negotiating their visibility as LGBTQIA+ people. There was a tension for many between being visible to find community, and to celebrate their identities, and hiding aspects of their identity for safety and social acceptance.

Physical expression through hairstyles and clothing choices was described as playing a critical role in expressing, exploring, affirming, and better understanding their identities.

And yet, they knew that being visible about their identities could leave them vulnerable to discrimination and prejudice.

Some young people talked about the privilege of being “straight passing” or cisgender and the level of safety and ease of navigating the world this could bring. But “passing” and not being visibly “out” could lead to internal conflicts around authenticity and belonging to their own community.

Young people described navigating these complexities by selectively revealing their identities in safe spaces or among trusted friends while remaining cautious in less accepting environments.

For many, there was still a real fear of “coming out” or “being outed” and that people might not accept them.



# VISIBILITY

## QUOTES FROM THE RESEARCH

**"Some LGBT people want to stand out and some just want to blend in. Being loud about our community isn't just who we are, that's just some people's personality. People should stop assuming all LGBT people are obvious about it. Some people just want to be like everyone else and that's okie"**

- Pebble (he/they), trans female to male, queer/unsure

**"I've been aware for quite a while about my sexuality, as it seemed to be something that I always acknowledged, but I'm only recently starting to explore more about my gender and how I express myself visually, which I feel has been because I am now at college, and no longer have the pressure of having to conform to a dress code like I did at high school."**

- I (they/them), non-binary, lesbian

**"The experience of coming out to friends, family, or peers can be both liberating and challenging as we navigate our identity and how to share it with others."**

- E (him), trans boy, bisexual

**"Wellbeing is feeling comfortable in my own skin and having a sense of inner peace even when things outside might be a bit chaotic. It's about being able to express myself freely and authentically, especially in terms of my identity and emotions."**

- Astrid (she/her), cis girl, sapphic demiromantic

**"Usually I do not share my preferences or what I align with when it comes to gender, I like to be quiet about it unless asked specifically as that is information I would feel doesn't need to be told when it comes to my own experiences"**

- Clove (they/them), agender, queer





# POLITICAL VIEWS

## THE IMPACT OF POLITICS ON LGBTQIA+ LIVES

Young LGBTQIA+ people felt their identities were tied to political dynamics and messaging. They wrote about their rights and existence as being subject to political debate and changes in policy, and this affecting both the health care and support they could access as well as acceptance (or not) within their local communities.

The lack of supportive systems and healthcare, particularly for trans people, was identified as something which needed to change, and young people recognised that this was linked to political priorities and policies.

Young people were often on guard for people who would not be understanding and accepting of them and were suspicious of older generations, assuming they were more likely to hold conservative and anti-LGBTQIA+ views, particularly in regard to transphobia. This was also true of people they perceived to be more affluent ("rich" or "posh").

Geographical differences were also highlighted with mentions of "nice" and "rough" areas and it was believed that LGBTQIA+ people might experience different levels of acceptance across the different areas in Greater Manchester. While "rough" areas were described by all who mentioned them as seeming less accepting, views were inconsistent around "nice" areas. There was little information given on what made an area either "rough" or "nice".





# POLITICAL VIEWS

## QUOTES FROM THE RESEARCH

**"I live in X and while it is a 'nice area,' homophobia is rife with much of the population, though it is worth noting this is because of how old everyone is. Our MP, voted against gay marriage on religious grounds... With younger people however there is absolutely a difference."**

- DG (he/him/they/them), cis man, bisexual

**"In my area, X, it can go either way. People are accepting or fully against it... However, there is little representation and it isn't really mentioned much."**

- Alexandra (she/her), cis girl, bisexual

**"I have identified as transgender for 5 years now and I have barely made any process of transitioning as the NHS pathway is extremely difficult to navigate as a young person as there are many rules and regulations which the NHS follow."**

- A (any pronouns), doesn't believe in gender labels, unsure of sexuality

**"[There should be] political representation and participation of LGBTQIA+ individuals in decision-making processes at all levels of government ensuring our voices are heard and our rights are protected."**

- A (him), trans boy, bisexual

**"I live in a very middle class area and to be blunt it's full of Tory pricks who obviously don't have as progressive views and values as other places in Manchester. I have never felt that I couldn't express my identity here because what are the Tories going to do throw avocado at me?"**

- A (any pronouns), doesn't believe in gender labels, unsure of sexuality



# EDUCATION

## THE POTENTIAL FOR EDUCATION TO ADVOCATE AND INFLUENCE VIEWS

Educational institutions were described as uniquely important in shaping the experiences and acceptance of LGBTQIA+ young people. Schools, colleges and universities were understood to be not just places of learning, but key environments in which young people form their identities and are exposed to identities different to their own. The way in which LGBTQIA+ identities are framed and addressed by educational institutions was seen as incredibly important.

Many young people shared that LGBTQIA+ phobia and bullying was still common in schools, despite there often being individual instances of LGBTQIA+ support (things like LGBT+ history month, or particular assemblies on LGBTQIA+ rights). They felt the intensity of bullying and discrimination decreased as they moved through school, explaining that older students and more mature environments were more accepting.

There were positive changes highlighted too, with young people describing students and teachers as being more educated and aware than they might have been in the past. They also wrote about how much they valued the presence of queer teachers who were open about their lives.

All felt that inclusive teaching, and supportive resources were vital in reducing stigma and fostering a culture of respect and understanding but almost all felt that schools could do better.



# EDUCATION

## QUOTES FROM THE RESEARCH

**"I go to school in X. School had to out me to my parents for safeguarding reasons, and this really made me distrustful until I grew out of it and became confident in my transition. My peers were cruel about my identity when I was younger, but I feel like they grew out of it as they matured."**

– Jack (he/him), transgender man, bisexual

**"My school should deal with safety concerns including fear of physical or verbal violence, especially for LGBTQIA+ individuals who are targeted or marginalized. Bullying and harassment are common among LGBTQIA+ individuals."**

– P (him), trans boy, homosexual

**"I attended school in Greater Manchester. I experienced lack of gender inclusion and lacked privacy since everyone knew about my status but I had some supportive teachers and friends."**

– ME, trans girl, bisexual

**"I usually deal with bullies at school and in settings because of my identity. I feel we lack proper representation in textbooks, curriculum, or school events."**

– LV (him), cis boy, homosexual

**"I've found allies among some teachers and students. There's a need for more inclusive education around especially non-binary identities and pronouns. Teachers are still ignorant of what we need when actually it's not particularly hard. Just use they/them like you would when you didn't know someone's gender."**

– Jordan (they/zir), trans nonbinary, queer





# BELONGING

## THE IMPORTANCE OF FITTING IN AND FEELING 'NORMAL'

Feeling like they belonged in communities and spaces was important for young LGBTQIA+ people. This was not just about being safe and accepted as who they were but rather feeling that their identities were normalised and commonplace.

They often found these places within specific friend groups or community settings tailored to LGBTQIA+ identities. These were spaces or groups where they could believe that LGBTQIA+ identities were the majority, where they did not have to explain or face assumptions about their gender or sexuality, and where they could momentarily forget about the pressures of heteronormativity.

LGBTQIA+ family members played a particularly significant role in creating a sense of belonging. These family members provided not only acceptance but also understanding and shared experiences that helped young people feel less isolated. Knowing that they had family members who navigated similar challenges and celebrated their identities contributed greatly to their sense of security and normalcy. Role models, both in media and real life, were also important. Seeing LGBTQIA+ individuals represented positively in television shows, movies, and social media offered young people hope and validation and allowed them to feel less minoritised.



# BELONGING

## QUOTES FROM THE RESEARCH

**"It's important to have friends that share the same community as you because when you are with them you forget that LGBT people are the minority. Without these types of friends you can feel very alone surrounded by people that don't share the same experiences as you and never will."**

– M (she/her), cis girl, bisexual

**"I find community mostly with my group of friends who are also part of the LGBTQIA+ spectrum. We kind of understand what each other is going through, and it's comforting to have that kind of support."**

– Poet (they/them/it), genderfluid, bisexual

**"[In] my friend group; we all have different orientations and preferences and we usually don't speak about it unless specifically asked. I feel like that should be the norm that we should normalise LGBTQIA+ in a way that it's like noticing someone's eye color—subtle and normal for someone to identify differently and not be treated any differently because of it."**

– Dash (she/they), gender-fluid, bisexual

**"It's a very welcoming and obviously inclusive environment... I haven't really had any negative experiences to do with how I express myself visually in these places, so I feel very comfortable."**

– J (they/them), nonbinary, lesbian

**"I go to groups, where i find it easier to socialise, and my identity is recognised so I feel relaxed"**

– Sheep (they/them), agender, lesbian



# EVERYDAY PREJUDICE

## LIVING WITH COMMONPLACE LGBTPHOBIA

Encountering homophobia and transphobia was a commonplace reality for many young LGBTQIA+ people. Many described encountering discriminatory behaviour, slurs, stereotypes, and prejudiced comments as part of their daily lives. Crucially, many of these instances were overlooked by others, minimised, and often dismissed as jokes. This was often the case within their families, friendship groups, and school settings.

Young people began to view this as inevitable and learned to dismiss comments as harmless and just part of their everyday experience. They felt resigned to casual discrimination and developed a resistance to it, beginning to minimise and normalise it themselves. At times, the descriptions compared discriminatory comments or slurs to physical violence, and they rationalised that at least they weren't as severe as that.

In some instances, the individuals perpetuating discrimination were perceived as well-meaning, with young people often excusing the behaviour by noting the absence of malicious intent. They might describe these people as ignorant rather than hateful, believing that this lack of awareness mitigated the impact of their words. As a result, many LGBTQIA+ young people felt compelled to overlook such behaviour and this was something they developed or learned to do over time.





# EVERYDAY PREJUDICE

## QUOTES FROM THE RESEARCH

**"People have always joked about my sexuality. At first, I identified as Pansexual, and when asked about it, they always made jokes about me liking pans, which was a little rude, and I pretended it didn't matter."**

- Dash (she/they), gender-fluid, bisexual

**"You do learn to block it out and just move on."**

- Samuel (he/him), cis boy, gay

**"It's weird how casual people use gay as an insult or say slurs because they're 'funny' but it happens all the time. Teachers also don't pick up on it when those things are being said. I've had slurs yelled at me before which can be quite damaging."**

- Alexandra (she/her), cis girl, bisexual

**"I also think the most hard part is that when I kind of "found out" I was gay, it was hard as I was always used to seeing straight couples, you'd never see gay ones. And if you ever did, it was always about how it's wrong and when you grow up and only see hateful content towards LGBTQ people or even them just being entirely ignored and almost excluded from society. It can create a lot of self hate and make you feel isolated, which can be especially hard when you're learning about yourself."**

- Samuel (he/him), cis boy, gay

**"As a young person, I feel as though lgbt issues are seen as kind of taboo. Not in the sense that it's looked down upon but that people make intensive jokes and mock people for it. I am openly bisexual in my school and I have been looked down upon and called slurs within my school environment."**

- Hazel (she/they), girl, bisexual



# RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings, and in collaboration with young researchers, we have developed the following set of recommendations for organisation who want to work inclusively with LGBTQIA+ young people.

## FOR SCHOOLS

- **Integrate LGBTQIA+ Education:** Include comprehensive LGBTQIA+ topics throughout all areas of the curriculum to promote understanding and acceptance from an early age
- **Staff training:** Provide training for teachers and staff on LGBTQIA+ issues to handle bullying and discrimination effectively and sensitively
- **Create Supportive Environments:** Establish safe spaces and clubs/support groups within schools where LGBTQIA+ students can express themselves freely
- **Visible Role Models:** Encourage and support openly LGBTQIA+ staff and educators, providing students with positive role models

## FOR YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

- **Support Networks:** Develop and strengthen peer support networks to provide a sense of belonging and community for LGBTQIA+ young people.
- **Education and Awareness:** Conduct workshops and training sessions to educate both staff and participants about LGBTQIA+ issues and the importance of inclusivity
- **Provide Resources:** Offer resources such as therapeutic services, mentorship programs, and access to information on LGBTQIA+ rights and health services.



## FOR POLICY MAKERS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- **Supportive Legislation:** Advocate for and implement policies that protect and support LGBTQIA+ individuals, especially in healthcare and education. This is particularly important for trans young people
- **Funding and Resources:** Allocate funding and resources to LGBTQIA+ initiatives, including support services, community programs, and educational campaigns
- **Community Engagement:** Engage with LGBTQIA+ communities to understand their needs and develop policies that address those needs effectively
- **Inclusive Public Services:** Ensure that public services are inclusive and respectful of LGBTQIA+ identities, providing training for staff and implementing inclusive practices

## FOR PUBLIC SPACES

- **Create Inclusive Environments:** Design public spaces that are welcoming to LGBTQIA+ individuals, with visible signs of support such as pride flags and inclusive messaging
- **Accessibility:** Ensure that public spaces are accessible to all, including LGBTQIA+ individuals, by providing gender-neutral bathrooms and safe zones
- **Community Events:** Host events and activities that celebrate LGBTQIA+ identities and promote inclusivity and understanding within the broader community
- **Representation:** Feature LGBTQIA+ role models and speakers in public events and initiatives to provide visibility and promote acceptance
- **Safety Measures:** Implement safety measures such as security protocols and staff training to protect LGBTQIA+ individuals from harassment and discrimination





# LGBTQIA+ SAFE SPACES

## THROUGHOUT CENTRAL MANCHESTER

In the findings, young people talked about the places they felt most safe, celebrated and included in across Manchester. Many of the spaces displayed pride flags, had openly queer staff, or demonstrated inclusive practices such as using correct pronouns and acknowledging pronoun badges.

The following page shows the six most mentioned central Manchester locations. Notably, the majority of these spaces are queer-owned. Young people expressed that knowing a space was queer-owned made them feel especially safe and supported, as these places were seen as intentionally inclusive and welcoming.

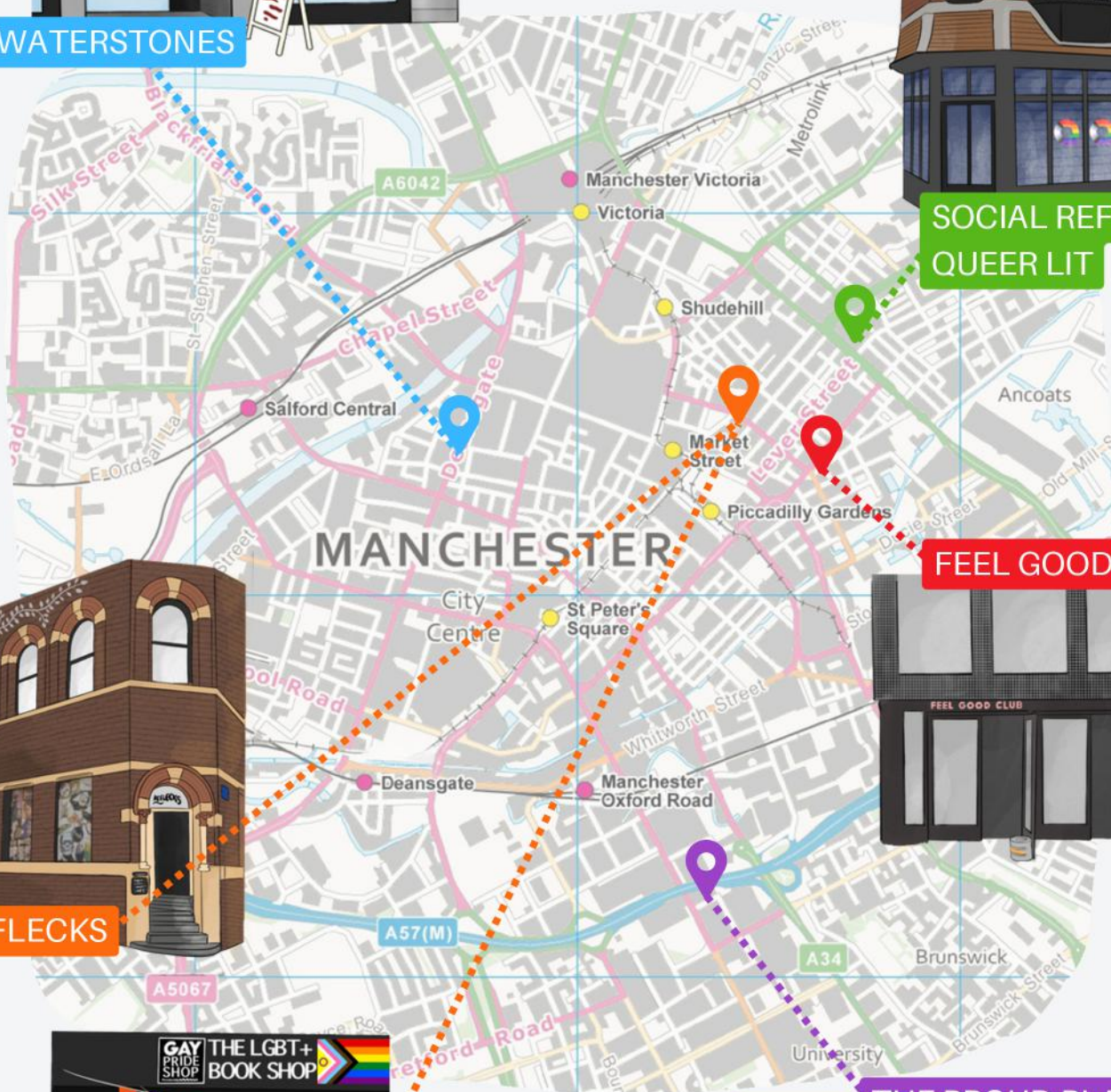
- **Afflecks** was one of the most mentioned places. It was discussed for it's inclusive atmosphere, positive LGBTQIA+ messaging throughout, and openly queer staff.
- **Social Refuge/Queer Lit**, was praised for being an LGBT+ specific space, where young people could do to browse books and be around other LGBTQIA+ people.
- **Waterstones**, although not an LGBTQIA+ specific space, was mentioned frequently for it's LGBT+ book displays and friendly, openly queer staff.
- **Feel Good Club**, a gay-owned coffee shop, was highlighted for its warm and welcoming atmosphere, as well as its regular LGBTQIA+ focused events.
- **The Proud Place**, purpose-built as the home of the Proud Trust, was celebrated as a safe and supportive environment where young people could attend groups specifically designed for LGBTQIA+ young people.
- **The Gay Pride Shop**, was valued for its wide range of LGBTQIA+ merchandise and books, and for being an LGBTQIA+ specific space.



WATERSTONES



SOCIAL REFUGE & QUEER LIT



FEEL GOOD CLUB



AFFLECKS



GAY PRIDE SHOP



THE PROUD PLACE





# LGBTQIA+ ORGANISATIONS

These organisations are available to provide help and support for LGBTQIA+ young people, both locally and nationally.

## LOCAL LGBTQIA+ ORGANISATIONS

- **The Proud Trust:** The Proud Trust is an LGBT+ youth charity delivering youth work and one-to-one support across Greater Manchester, as well as a national training and inclusion programme for schools. See [theproudtrust.org](http://theproudtrust.org)
- **LGBT Foundation:** LGBT Foundation is a national LGBT+ charity based in Manchester. They offer services including mental health support, befriending, and advocacy work, as well as a range of training programmes. See [lgbt.foundation](http://lgbt.foundation)
- **RainbowNoirMCR:** A volunteer led social group who celebrate, elevate and advocate for LGBTQIA+ people of colour living in Manchester. See [rainbownoirmcr.com](http://rainbownoirmcr.com)

## NATIONAL LGBTQIA+ ORGANISATIONS

- **Mermaids:** Mermaids is a national charity supporting transgender, non-binary and gender diverse children and young people. Their services include a helpline, professional training, and local groups and events, including in Manchester. See [mermaids.org.uk](http://mermaids.org.uk)
- **Schools OUT UK:** Schools OUT UK is an education charity working to make schools safe for all LGBT+ people. They are the founders of **UK LGBT+ History Month**, and The Classroom, which provides free school resources. See [lgbtplushistorymonth.co.uk](http://lgbtplushistorymonth.co.uk)
- **Stonewall:** Stonewall is a national charity providing information, support and guidance on LGBTQ+ inclusion. They provide free education resources, and a School Champions training programme. See [stonewall.org.uk](http://stonewall.org.uk)





# GLOSSARY

This list is provided to help readers understand the terms used in the report. However, it must be noted that terms and labels can change meaning over time, and may be defined differently by different LGBTQIA+ people. It is also important to know that not all terms can be covered here and that there are many other ways people may refer to themselves and others.

- **Agender:** A term for individuals who do not identify with any gender or feel an absence of gender altogether.
- **Asexual:** A term for people who do not experience sexual attraction to other people
- **Cisgender:** A term for people whose gender is aligned with the sex they were assigned at birth
- **Coming Out:** The process of disclosing one's LGBTQIA+ identity to others
- **Deadnaming:** Referring to a transgender person by their birth name instead of their chosen name
- **Gay:** A term for individuals attracted to others of the same gender, often used by men but also an umbrella term for same-gender attraction.
- **Genderfluid:** A term for people whose gender is not fixed and changes or fluctuates in some way over time
- **Heteronormativity:** The assumption that heterosexuality and the binary gender system are the norms, which can marginalise those who do not fit these expectations
- **Homophobia:** Dislike or prejudice against homosexual people because they are homosexual
- **Intersectionality:** A concept describing how different forms of discrimination (e.g., race, gender, sexuality) intersect and affect individuals' experiences
- **Lesbian:** A term for women or feminine-aligned individuals who are only romantically or sexually attracted to other women or feminine-aligned individuals.



# GLOSSARY

- **LGBTphobia:** A broad term encompassing homophobia, transphobia, and other prejudices against LGBTQIA+ individuals
- **LGBTQIA+:** An acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and other identities. This includes those who are unsure about their identities, or who do not feel there is a label which 'best fits' their identity
- **Misgender:** To refer to someone using a word, especially a pronoun or form of address, that does not correctly reflect their gender
- **Non-Binary:** A term for people whose gender does not fit within cis-gender binaries
- **Pansexual:** A term for people whose sexual attraction to others does not take into account their gender
- **Pronouns:** Words used to refer to people without using their name, e.g., she/her, they/them, ze/zir
- **Queer:** Often used as an umbrella term to describe a sexual or gender identity that is not heterosexual or cisgender. This is a reclaimed slur
- **Representation:** The inclusion of diverse LGBTQIA+ identities in various contexts, such as media and education
- **Safe Space:** A place where LGBTQIA+ individuals can feel safe, accepted, and free to express themselves
- **Sapphic:** A term for women or feminine-aligned individuals attracted to other women or feminine-aligned individuals. Inclusive of bisexuals, pansexuals etc.
- **Straight-Passing:** A term describing LGBTQIA+ individuals who may be perceived as heterosexual or cisgender, often leading to different social experiences
- **Transgender:** A term for people whose gender is not (or not always) aligned with the sex they were assigned at birth
- **Transphobia:** Dislike or prejudice against transgender people because they are transgender



# GLOSSARY - FLAGS

This report contains various flags used by LGBTQIA+ people to represent their identities. These flags are created by members of the community and can change and evolve with time and usage. People may use one or many flags to express their identity. Listed here are some of the most common, but there are many more.



**Inclusive Pride Flag**



**Bisexual**



**Lesbian**



**Gay**



**Pansexual**



**Asexual**



**Demi sexual**



**Genderqueer**



**Genderfluid**



**Transgender**



**Non binary**



**Intersex**



**Aromantic**



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