

I'm a straight cis woman. I'm attracted to the opposite sex, and the sex I was assigned at birth matches my gender identity, so there are a lot of things that I don't have to think about when it comes to sexuality, dating, socialising, my body, friends and family. Because of this privilege, and my lack of personal experience on all things LGBTQ+, I've invited some of my friends to write about it and tell their stories themselves. But first, let's start by looking at what LGBTQ+ actually means.

L *Lesbian*

G *Gay*

B *Bisexual*

T *Transgender*

Q *Queer / questioning*

+ *so many other things!*

There are many differing opinions within the LGBT community about whether the Q and the + should be included, and also about the addition of other letters (A for Asexual, I for Intersex and even another A for Ally). Some people have started using 'GSM' – Gender Sexuality Minority – instead, but it seems that in the mainstream, at least for now, 'LGBT' is most commonly understood.

At school, I remember being taught that gay people existed and that it was fine, but I don't remember there being any kids in my year who 'came out'. That was 10 years ago though, so I hope more young people now feel comfortable and safe enough in their school environment to be themselves. But there is a definite lack of sex education in general at school, and more specifically a lack of any kind of sex education that isn't about heterosexual relationships.

Acknowledging the existence of gay people isn't enough, there's so much more to cover. Information like the fact that there's a difference between your sex, gender, sexual orientation, romantic orientation and sexual behaviour, is rarely taught in schools.

Biological Sex

(Bio-sex)

This refers to your biological sex, which can usually be determined by three things – your genitals (penis/vagina), hormones (testosterone/oestrogen) and chromosomes (XY/XX). At birth a baby is assigned a sex that is either ‘male’ or ‘female’. But there are not just two sexes. Some people (about 1 in 2,000 births) are intersex which is a general term used to describe someone whose genitals, reproductive system, hormones and chromosomes aren’t necessarily wholly ‘male’ or ‘female’. For example, someone could have a penis but XX (female) chromosomes, a vagina and XY (male) chromosomes, or ambiguous genitals. There are many different variations but not all are visible. Some intersex people don’t know that they are intersex until puberty, and some people may never know.

Even though it’s not very common, it is still important to understand that even within biology, sex is not as simple as just ‘male’ and ‘female’.



Gender

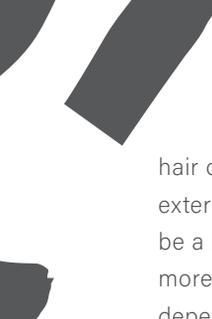
Gender is different to sex. Your gender is about how you identify, and how you feel. There are different ways in which you can identify with your gender.

Cis gender = your gender identity matches the sex you were assigned at birth.

Transgender = your gender identity does not match the sex you were assigned at birth. For example, if you were born a boy but identify as female. Often transgender people will transition but everyone's transition is different. It could be changing your name, using different pronouns, dressing differently, taking hormones, or surgery.

Non-binary = this means not identifying as male or female. 'Male' and 'female' are at opposite ends of the gender binary spectrum but there's a whole host of sexes, genders and identities in between, for example gender queer, gender fluid, etc.

Gender expression is also different to gender identity. There are many symbols and signifiers in society that communicate your gender to other people. This could be the clothes you wear or how you do your



hair or makeup. Gender identity is internal, gender expression is external and the two don't necessarily have to match up. You can be a boy who wears makeup, a girl with short hair, you can have a more androgynous style or move between masculine and feminine depending on the day.

The outward expression of gender is the easiest way to determine a person's gender when you first meet them. If you are unsure, then ask how a person identifies and which pronouns they use. If you get it wrong, don't make a big deal out of it. Simply apologise and correct yourself.

Gender is a spectrum and it's not as simple as vagina = woman or penis = man. How someone identifies may be different to the body that they have, and how they choose to transition, if at all, is completely up to them.