

IT'S A QUESTION OF SEX

Sexual wellbeing of
women who have
sex with women



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We are LGBT Foundation

We believe in a fair and equal society where all lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people can achieve their full potential.

Our work started in 1975 and we've been changing the lives of LGBT people ever since. Over the last five decades, we've provided information, services and support for LGBT people who've had nowhere else to turn.

We've been at the forefront of the social and legal changes that mean LGBT people in the UK have more rights than ever before. Our work is as vital and urgent as ever. LGBT people still face persecution, discrimination and stark health inequalities. Through our services we reduce isolation amongst our communities, help people feel more confident and in control of their lives, and enable people to flourish.

Every year we serve 40,000 people - amplifying people's voices, providing support and offering hope. We work in partnership with others to build strong, cohesive and influential LGBT communities and promote attitude change in society, reaching 365,000 people online each year.

Together, we can secure a safe, healthy and equal future for all LGBT people.
Until then, we're here if you need us.



The Women's Programme at LGBT Foundation

The Women's Programme is committed to three guiding principles for LB+ women:

- To improve health & wellbeing
- To reduce isolation and increase a sense of community
- Increase skills and confidence

We have achieved these goals through: monthly skills workshops, discussion spaces, an annual health campaign and an annual community festival – Sugar & Spice.

Our skills workshops have included: screen printing, learning the Jive, keep fit, stand-up comedy and car maintenance.

We have monthly discussion spaces for women of colour and non-binary and gender fluid people that offer a safer space to share common lived experiences.

We recognise that LB+ women need us to continue to be a presence and a voice within society, because many don't have the opportunity to be heard themselves.

We understand that there is still a great need for safer spaces for this community and we are committed to continuing to provide these.



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Introduction

In 2018, LGBT Foundation's Women's Programme launched the Sexual Wellbeing Survey for women who have sex with women*. Working with the academic supervision of renowned researcher Professor Catherine Meads, of Anglia Ruskin University, who has been conducting research into LGBT health needs since 1992, the survey was designed to address the fact that, despite extensive exploration, we could find no recent national data to give us an insight into key areas of sexual wellbeing for women who have sex with women.

From our day to day work we know that lesbian, bisexual and trans women often find discussing sexual health and wellbeing difficult. Health professionals frequently make heteronormative¹ and cisnormative² assumptions that can lead to misunderstanding and inappropriate curiosity. Many LB+³ women no longer look for help and/or information around sexual health, because they feel that the narrative excludes them.

We felt we needed to address this by opening up the dialogue to include factors such as pleasure, exploration, confidence and consent. We also felt that, after years of being told there were no or low sexual health risks for women who have sex with women, it was imperative to build a more realistic picture around the potential risks and negative experiences.

"Sexual Wellbeing" within this research is taken from the World Health Organisation's definition of sexual health:

'...a state of physical, emotional, mental and social wellbeing in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual [wellbeing] requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence'.

When we launched the survey we made a positive estimation that we would get around 300 to 400 responses. When the survey closed in November 2018, over 2,000 LB+ women had taken the survey. The message was very clear. We needed to talk about sex. This report outlines what we found.

Annie Cunningham Women's Programme Coordinator

1. Heteronormative – when a service or person does not consider the needs of people who are LGB – the assumption that everyone is straight.

2. Cisnormative - when a service or person does not consider the needs of people who are trans and/or non-binary – the assumption that everyone identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth.

3. LB+ means: women inclusive of trans women, non-binary and gender fluid people who identify as lesbian, bi or questioning their sexual orientation.

* This survey is centred on the experiences of lesbian, bi, queer and questioning women, including trans women, non-binary and gender fluid people, women of colour, older women and disabled women

Who Participated?

1%	65+
2%	<18
4%	55-64
9%	45-54
17%	35-44
18%	18-24
23%	Not Stated
26%	25-34



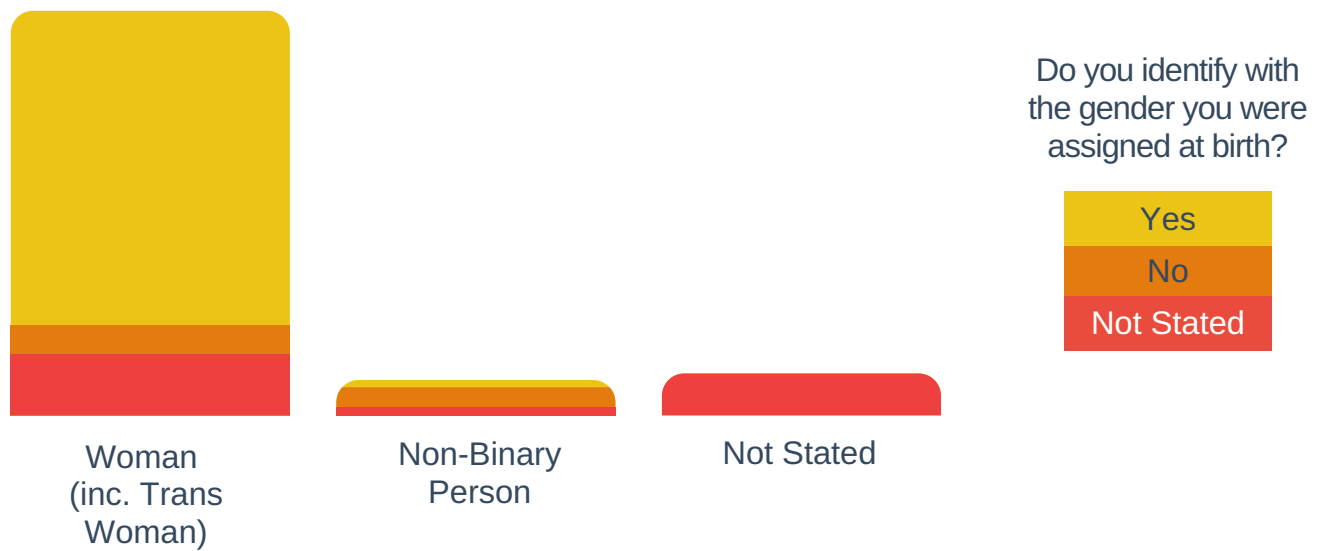
16%	Not Stated
23%	Yes
61%	No

8	NB+
48	Other
48	Heterosexual
76	Gay
104	Pansexual
164	Queer
451	Bisexual
572	Not Stated
1023	Lesbian

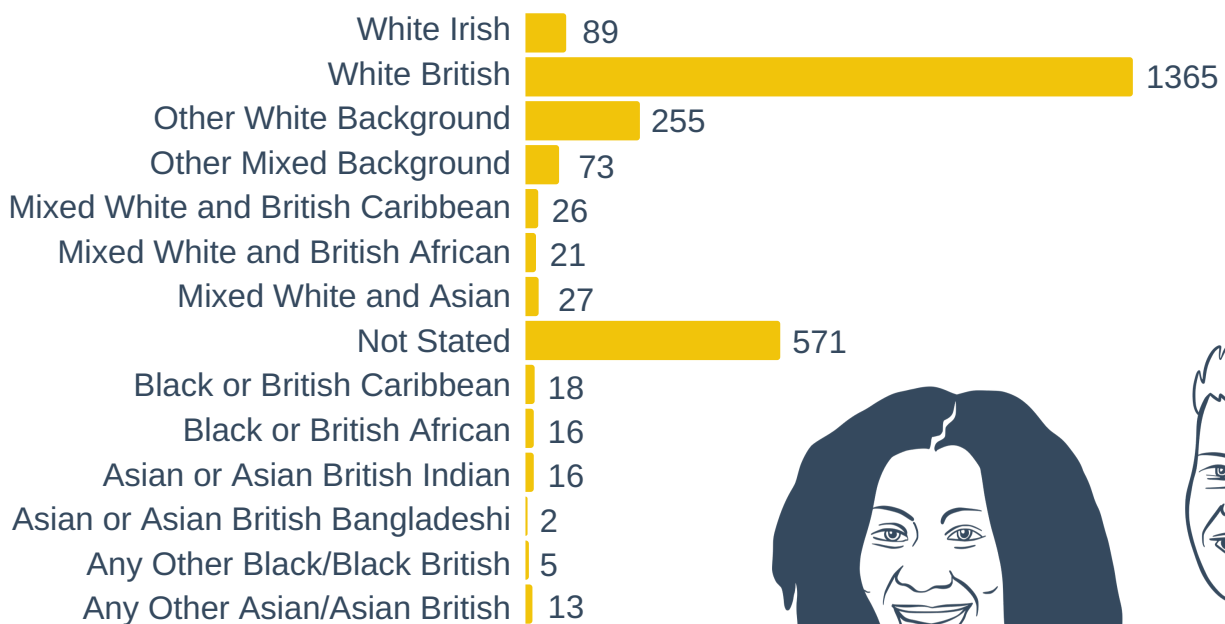


*It is important to note that the responses of women who considered themselves as heterosexual were still analysed as 40% stated that they were not having sex exclusively with men. Equally, these people determined their own suitability for the survey, which was advertised as a survey for women who have sex with women.

Gender & Trans Status



Ethnicity (Self-Identified)



General Sexual Wellbeing

Let's talk about sex: Is it important to you?

The survey results dispel many of the myths and stereotypical assumptions around sex that have existed around the LB+ community for a long time. It begins by addressing that tired phrase 'lesbian bed-death' - the concept that lesbian couples in long-term relationships have less sex than any other type of couple - by reporting that **55% of lesbians** said yes sex is important to them, **23% of bi people** also said yes and **66% of over 65s** said yes.

My sexual side is an integral part of my identity. Understanding my desires and being able to explore them freely allows me to live fully as myself. Understanding what kind of sex you enjoy is as fundamental as understanding what kind of food you like to eat or what kind of clothes you like to wear

Lesbian woman, aged 25-34, has sex with women only, gender identity same as assigned at birth



Sex is always somewhat dysphoric for me. I find it hard to create the kind of communication I want in a sexual relationship, which makes me feel safe and appreciated and sure of my partner's consent and desire. Most of my relationships with women were prior to transition and hence 'straight' relationships. I never enjoyed that dynamic. My current relationship began before transition but is with a queer/bi partner, but is sexually complicated/frustrating for other reasons...

Non-binary queer person, does not identify with gender assigned at birth

Anecdotal feedback from LGBT Foundation’s service users suggests that trans and non-binary people feel that sex is less important. The survey supported this suggestion, with **56% of trans and non-binary people reporting that sex is sometimes or not important**, and **33% reporting that sex is not enjoyable at all**.

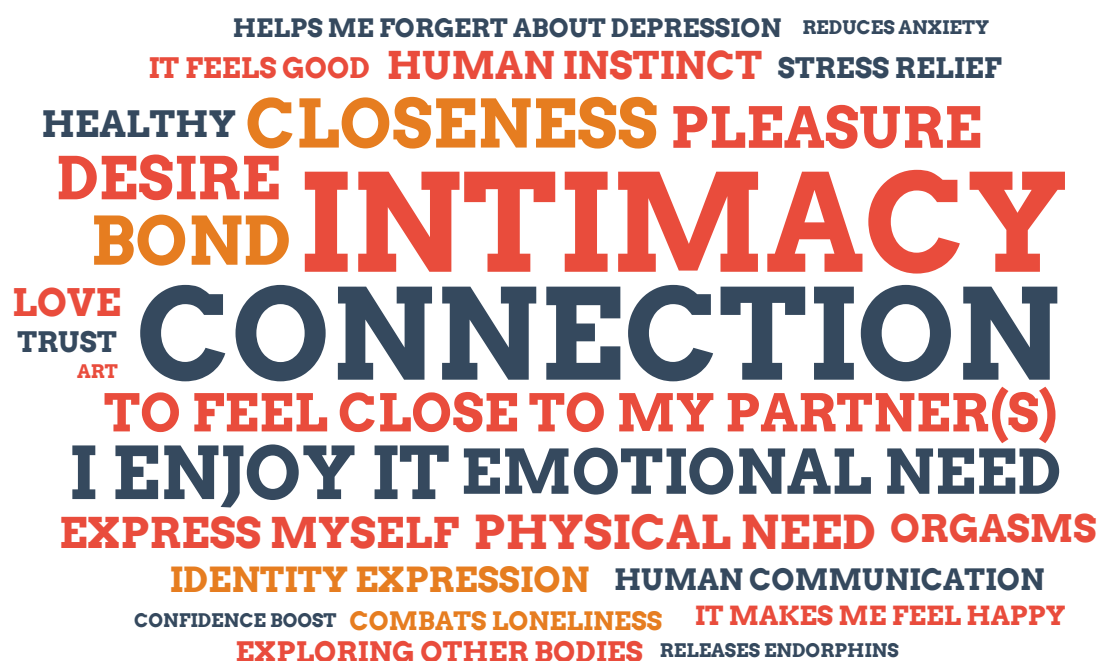
In the free text responses to the survey it was often noted, across all groups, that while sex is important, it is not always the defining part of a relationship, and that desire and its importance within relationships, fluctuates dependent on a range of factors.

For some participants, sex is an important way of **taking control** and **expressing and experiencing pleasure**.

I believe it's an important human act that connects you to your own body and connects you to another person, even if only very temporarily. It's enjoyable and satisfying and is a reliable way to make you feel good. As a disabled person, being able to take control of my body through sexual pleasure is very liberating and helps me view my body in a different way to being this vessel that has caused me so much pain and discomfort, and allows me to see it as something beautiful and capable of creating great pleasure as well as pain

Non-binary person, no sexuality stated, has sex with people of all genders, does not identify with gender assigned at birth.

This graphic represents the most common words identified when participants were asked to explain why sex is important; it’s apparent that there are physical, emotional and psychological factors around sex.



And is sex enjoyable?

77% of participants said yes, 89% of whom were cisgender - have the same gender identity as the one they were given at birth.

We analysed further those people who said no, and found **46% of disabled people stated that they do not enjoy sex.**

A number of people answered 'sometimes' to this question. The reasons stated for this were linked to: libido, pressure to have sex to please partner, anxiety around sex, feeling uncomfortable or body conscious, not being bothered or feeling lazy, and experiencing pain during sex.

When the communication and connection is there, it's great. When overwhelming desire is there, it's great. When it's just going through the motions it's not so great

Woman, no sexuality given, has sex with people of all genders, gender identity same as assigned at birth



What do you consider to be “having sex”?

The answers to this question challenge the heteronormative and cisnormative idea of what is considered to be lesbian and/or bisexual sex. The qualitative data that we now have (through the free text boxes) has given us what we consider to be the first truly open and honest recorded insights into what sex really means to LB+ women. Here are some of the responses:

Good Question. Me and my partner like having group sex and threesome sex at the moment. Our one to one sex is made up of: scissoring, orgasms by fingering and oral, some anal penetration, etc etc. We also like hugging. I would say as long as one of us has an orgasm, I'd consider it sex. My partner says, 'human touch, soft skin, connection, even emotionless connection'.

Lesbian woman, aged 25-34, gender identity same as assigned at birth, has sex with people of all genders.

Oral sex, vaginal and anal penetration with fingers or sex toys. As a lesbian, it's important for me to emphasise that a woman can still lose her virginity without being penetrated by a penis. And it's also important to note that just because lesbians enjoy using phallic shaped sex toys does not mean she is sexually attracted to penises.

Lesbian woman, aged 25-34, gender identity same as assigned at birth, has sex with people of all genders.

Any intimate sexual experience where the aim is to give and receive pleasure through sex acts.

Bi woman, aged 25-34, gender identity same as assigned at birth, has sex with women and men.



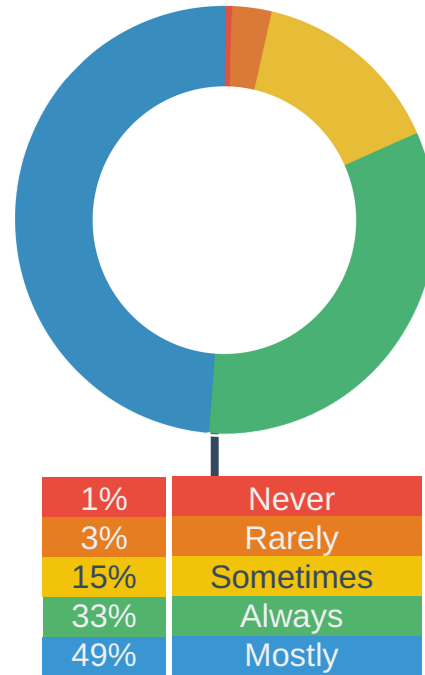
From the importance and definitions of sex we wanted to explore the idea of what type of sex LB+ women wanted.

Are you aware of the kind of sex you enjoy and desire?

The results were, generally, positive with only 0.5% of the respondents saying they never felt aware of the kind of sex they enjoy and desire.

We looked at the age ranges for this question and of the 32% of people who said always, 74% were aged between 18-44 and 20% were between 44-64.

From the under 18 participants, only 2% were always aware of the things they enjoy and desire and of the participants who felt aware of the kind of sex they enjoy only some of the time, 17% were disabled.



What is your favourite thing about sex, if anything?

Participants spoke about trust, exploration and reciprocity.

The connection it brings between you and your partner, the way it takes you into another space from every day life

Pansexual woman, gender identity same as assigned at birth

The intimacy and trust with my partner, being able to give each other pleasure and explore each other

Queer woman, gender identity same as assigned at birth

The intimacy of being with women, feeling safe and nurtured. Helping my female partner reach climax and seeing her face light up. Experiencing multiple orgasms. The teasing, the sheer variety of sex you can have and explore

Woman, no sexuality given, has sex with people of all genders, gender identity same as assigned at birth

What's your favourite way to have sex, if any way?

Whilst most people focused on specific sexual acts they enjoy, some specified different locations, such as the bedroom, or mentioned the time of day they prefer. As with the previous questions, there were a number of answers that specified comfort, safety, trust and closeness with a partner.

Without any expectations, outcomes or agenda - give ourselves time to explore and enjoy each other, be respectful and caring but also adventurous!

Woman, no sexuality given, has sex with men and women, gender identity same as assigned at birth

I like sex that involves lots of different activities, rather than just one thing over and over. I particularly enjoy penetration with fingers with oral clitoral stimulation. But my ideal sex would involve that, plus tribbing, nipple play, sex toys, maybe some BDSM elements, etc - just as varied as possible

Non-binary person, no sexuality given, has sex with people of all genders, gender identity not the same as assigned at birth



How we look and more importantly how we think we look and how we feel that others are seeing us are key features when discussing sex and so we asked about the subject of body confidence when having sex.

This question showed that **86% of respondents felt confident about how their body looks when having sex**, but it should be noted that the free text accompanying this question presented a large number of comments that linked confidence levels to sexual partners at a given time.

A significant figure reaffirmed our anecdotal evidence that people with a gender identity different to the one they were assigned at birth have a more complex relationship with sex, as **only 10% felt confident of how their body looks during sex**.

There was a definite link to higher levels of body confidence during sex, when: people felt at ease, when they felt they could trust their sexual partner, and when they were complimented or reassured about their appearance by the person they were having sex with. We also found that **20% who don't feel confident, always/mostly felt pressured by sexual partners**.

To begin with I do not feel confident with my body and am extremely conscious of it but once the sex is underway I forget about my body issues.

Woman, lesbian, aged 18-24, has sex with women only, gender the same as assigned at birth.

I mostly do now, but that's been a hard won battle whose front line I occasionally have to defend against head gremlins again.

Women, queer, aged 25-34, has sex with all genders, gender the same as assigned at birth.

It depends on the partner. If I feel loved and cared for and that being trans is no different than the colour of my eyes, it makes me feel very empowered and confident about my body. If I perceive the person as trying to check sleeping with a trans person on a box, it [my confidence] just crumbles

Woman, pansexual, aged 25-34, has sex with all genders, gender not the same as assigned at birth.

There were other common factors connecting to feelings of self-consciousness during sex and some of these included:

- body changes following child birth
- gender reassignment surgery
- dysmorphia
- dysphoria
- unspecified body issues
- having a period
- being older or ageing
- not feeling in control
- medical conditions such as skin problems or anorexia
- presence of scars
- being naked
- going through the menopause
- feelings about their vagina
- and feeling unattractive

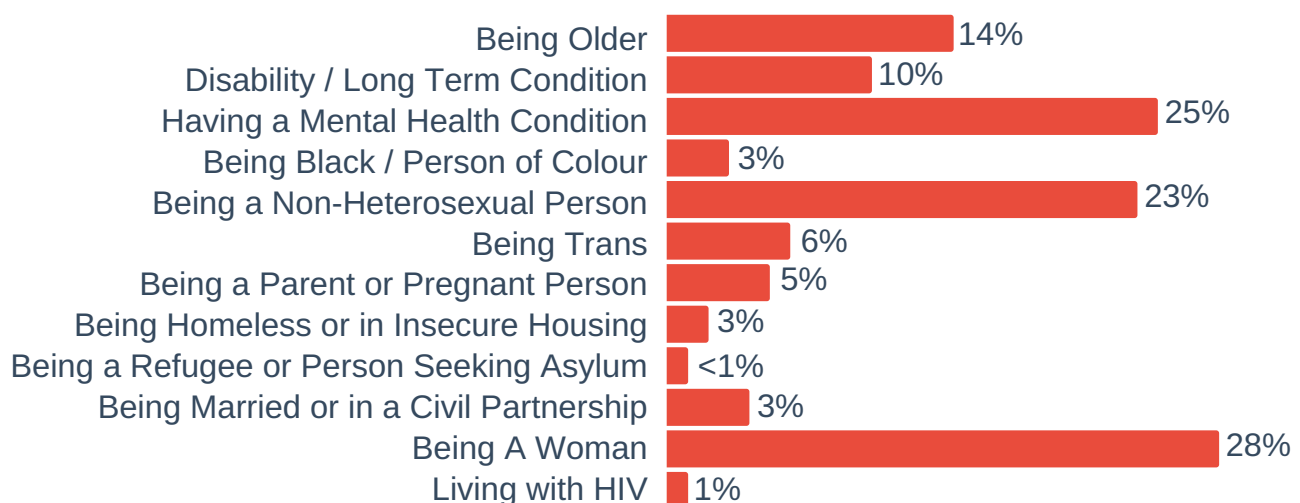
A large number of respondents mentioned feeling uncomfortable about their weight; in most cases this was due to feeling overweight or fat, although a few participants mentioned feeling uncomfortable about being skinny or underweight.

We wanted to begin to look at how our identities affect the ways in which we think, act and feel about sex. We asked **if any of the following identities impact on your sexual wellbeing?** The question allowed participants to identify with more than one identity.

The most common identities chosen were: being a non-heterosexual person, having a mental health condition and being a woman. These responses indicate that the women who took this survey (at least a quarter of them) are experiencing a noticeable impact on their sexual wellbeing due to one of these variables.

31% of those whose gender identity is different to the one that they were given at birth said they felt having a mental health issue impacted on their sexual wellbeing.

Other Identities Impacting Sexual Wellbeing



To allow us to further explore and to illuminate the complex intersectional issues that impact sexual wellbeing, we asked:

Do you feel your minority identities affects the sex you are able to have or how much you enjoy sex (e.g. as an older woman, as a disabled woman, as a black woman)

The hypersexualisation of black bodies by white lesbians makes me feel very unsafe in clubs and in relationships of the past

Non binary person, aged between 25-34, Gay, sex with women only, 25-34

Many layers of inter-related apprehensions and issues regarding sex (shame, bad body image, low libido, dissociation).

Lesbian woman, aged 18-24, has sex with women only, gender identity same as assigned at birth.

Demisexual woman, aged 18-24, has sex with people of all genders, gender identity not the same as the one assigned at birth.

It makes me question my self-worth and if I am worthy of love and sexual attention, I often feel disgusting and struggle with self-loathing due to the reactions I have had

As a black person, I get fetishised a lot or people want to 'experiment' which is basically using me. Or I go to space meant to be for lesbians/ queer but I end up being the only black person

Being disabled, in pain all the time, it's hard to get in the mood to want someone to touch you.

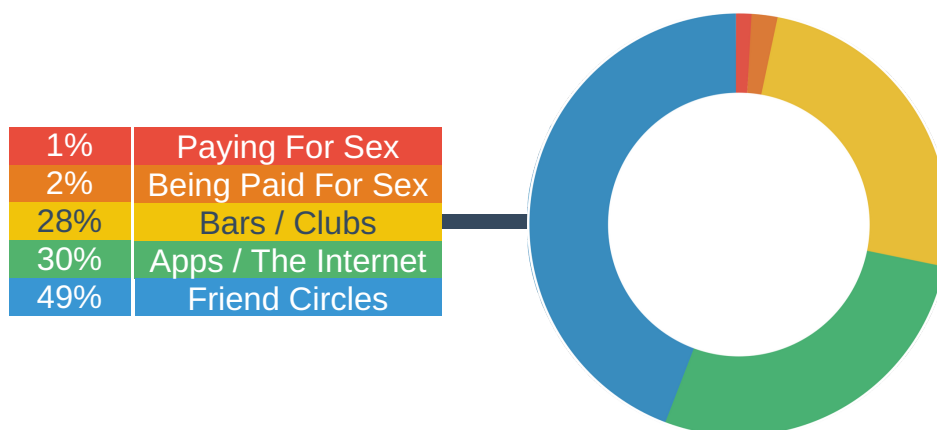
Queer woman, aged 25-34, has sex with people of all genders, gender identity the same as the one assigned at birth.

Queer non-binary person, aged 18-24, has sex with women only, gender identity not the same as assigned at birth.

Sexual Behaviour

This section explores how LB+ women seek out sexual partners and some of the behaviours and choices that they make about sex.

How do you meet your sexual partners?

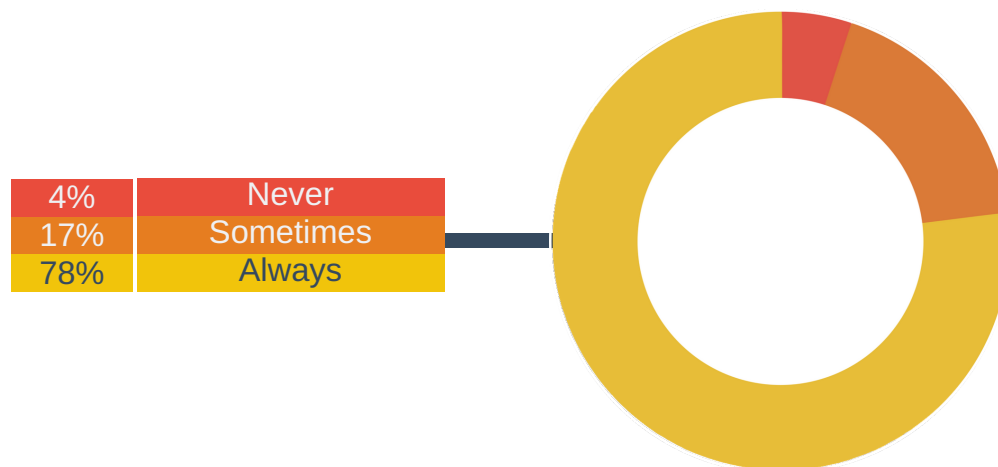


The **most common way to find sexual partners was through friends**, with bars/clubs and the internet almost equal in second place.

Finding sexual partners through friend circles was prevalent in the 18-44 age group. 25-34 years olds met in social spaces and of all the groups, the under 18s were the age group least likely to meet in social spaces.



If you use sex toys, do you wash them after use / before using them on another person / yourself?



78% of respondents said they **do wash their sex toys**, and **69% of these people are aware of the sexual health risks** for women who have sex with women.

21% of those who do not wash their sex toys currently have or have previously had an STI and **15%** of those who do not wash their sex toys haven't been tested for an STI.

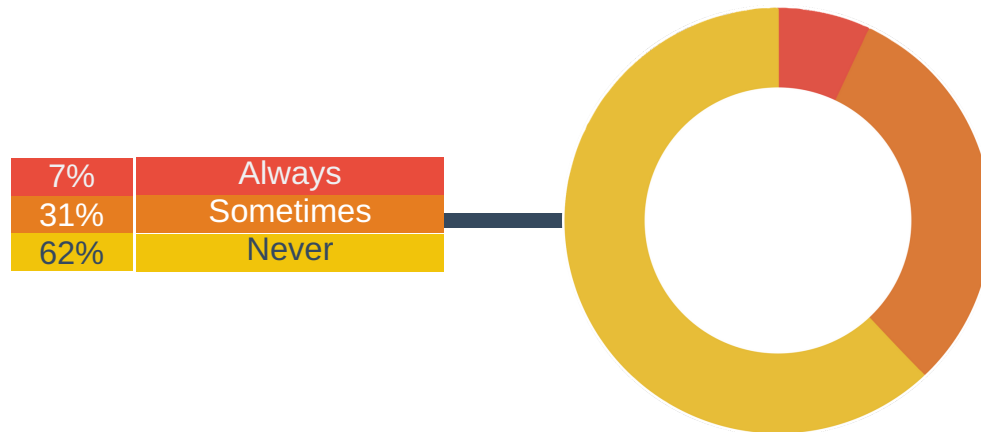
It's not surprising to find (based on historical misinformation) that 45% of those who do not wash their sex toys were unaware of the sexual health risks for women who have sex with women.

This illuminates the **acute need for a more efficient vehicle to disseminate information on the reality of sexual health risks** to a group that have been led to believe that they are not at risk.

I have HSV Type 2. Nobody in the whole world knows this. I feel deeply ashamed and embarrassed and angry that there is no cure. I've always been told that lesbians don't really get STI's from each other, only from men

Lesbian women, aged 45-54, sex with women only,
gender identity same as that assigned at birth.

When having sex, do you use barrier methods and if required, contraception (dental dams, condoms, PrEP)?



There were a lot of responses indicating the common belief that 'barrier methods were not required, because lesbians do not get STIs'. However, if we consider that there are people within this study who identify as lesbian but state that they sleep with men and women, then it is clear that information around sexual health and contraception needs to focus on sexual behaviours rather than identity. This may help to tackle some of the misinformation that is commonplace within both LB+ women communities, and in sexual health services and information.

"I feel like I'm aware of a few risks, but because women having sex with women wasn't really taught in sex education at school most of what I know is my own research therefore I don't feel like I have a full idea of the risks"

Lesbian woman, aged 18-24, has sex with women only

Only due to being a nurse... very little info, in comparison to the largely broadcasted straight sexual health

Woman, pansexual has sex with all genders, 18-24, gender identity same as that assigned at birth.

I was told at uni not that long ago that wsw don't need to worry about sexual health risks and I've never experienced lesbian/queer sex education outside of my university space

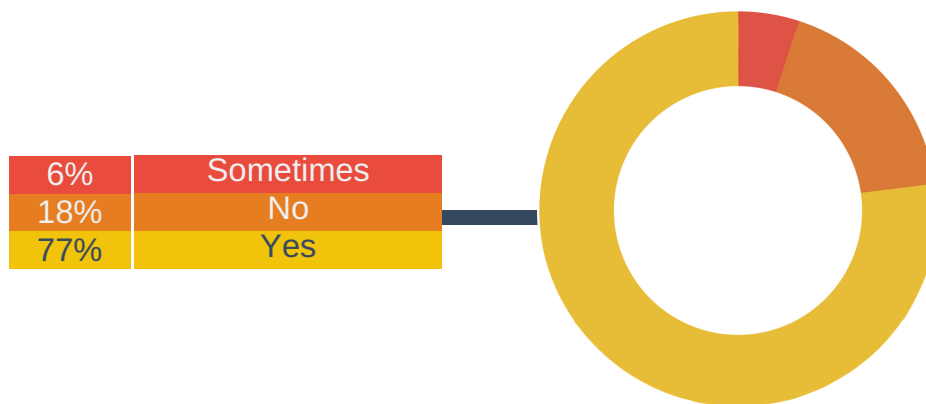
Lesbian, aged 35-34, has sex with women only, gender identity same as that assigned at birth.

Fairly aware but not as aware as I probably should be. No one has ever told me face to face about any risks specifically for women who have sex with women. Sex education in school was completely useless for non straight people. My GP doesn't have any record of me being non heterosexual so no help there either.

Gay woman, aged 18-24, has sex with women only, gender identity same as that assigned at birth.

The next questions are focused on the links between substance use and sex.

As an adult (18+) have you engaged in unprotected sex under the influence of drugs or alcohol?



Do you feel that you need to be under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol to have sex?

57% of our participant base answered this question. 2% responded that they did need to be under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol to have sex. Of those who said yes, just under half have sex exclusively with women. This was higher for under 18s, with 4% responding that they felt the need to be under the influence when having sex.

"I can't actually imagine what sex would look like without drugs or alcohol, because I do not believe I would find a partner who didn't need some 'Dutch courage' or the convenient excuse of being drunk/high in order to go through with having sex with another woman. It's like a weird, elaborate game that allows them some plausibility of not actually having to admit they're queer, which I get, but it also makes me sad that people are so unwilling to express their desire or affection for me openly

Lesbian woman, aged 18-24, has sex with women, gender identity same as that assigned at birth.

Of those disabled people who responded almost half feel the need to be under the influence to have sex – a similar number to those who don't feel confident in how their body looks during sex (46%).

Alcohol use, in particular, appeared to be prevalent in both casual and more established sexual relationships. Some participants stressed that they only had sex under the influence of drugs or alcohol with 'existing' or 'trusted' partners; others described substance use in the context of 'one-night stands' or parties.

Substances were sometimes seen as allowing respondents to relax and ease their inhibitions when having sex, with some reporting substances as an essential part to a positive sexual experience – several participants reported 'I love drunk sex', while others described substance use as allowing them to have fun or experiment more freely.

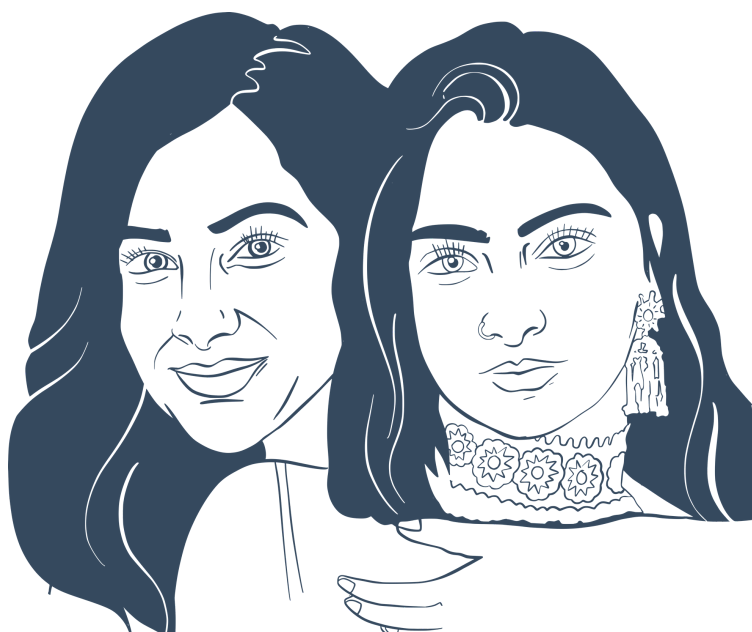
For others, alcohol or drugs were necessary for sexual encounters with new partners; substance use was described several times as a means by which participants, or their sexual partners, could gain the confidence to engage in sexual activity.

Pansexual woman, aged 45-54, has sex with people of all genders, gender identity same as assigned at birth

I still enjoy an evening in with a lover or lovers using drugs and or alcohol for a night of sex and talking as a way to get close or try new things.

Yes, sometime is just by happenstance but often for confidence. I'd have to be drunk to meet and go home with a new partner.

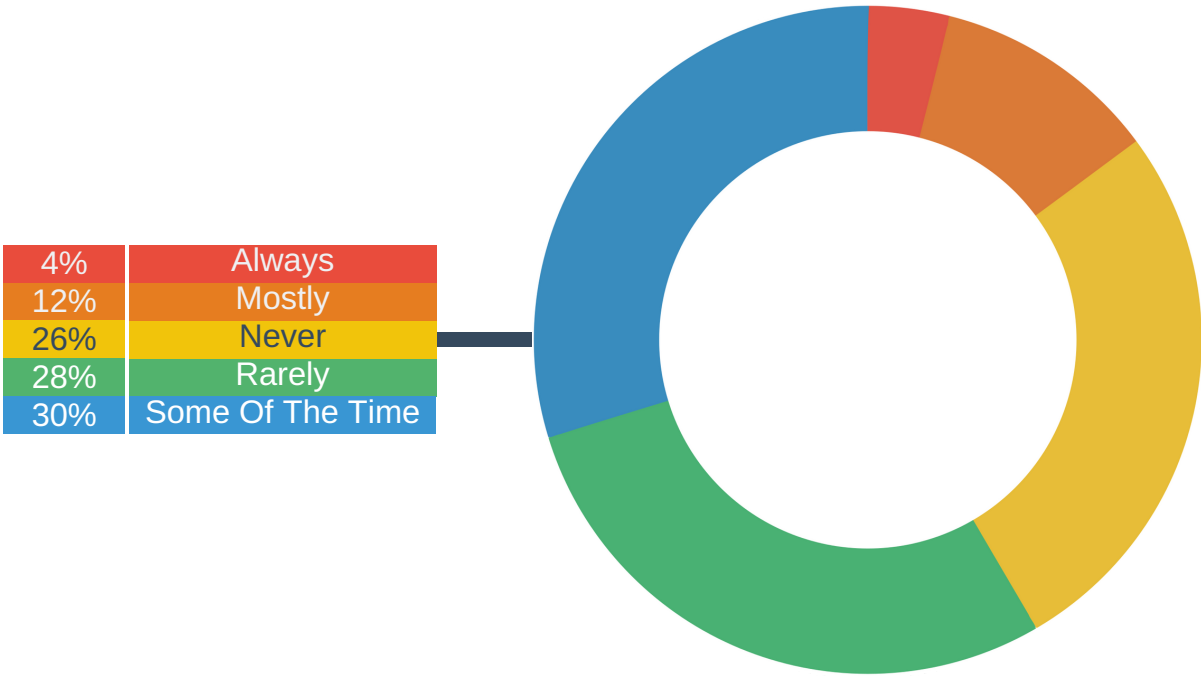
Queer woman, aged 35-44, has sex with people of all genders, does not identify with gender assigned at birth.



Consent and Sexual Violence

Having considered questions of desire and confidence and the impact of identity on the sexual wellbeing of LB+ women, we turned our attention to the poorly researched area of consent and sexual violence for LB+ women

In my sexual experiences I felt pressured by my previous partners' expectations of me to perform a certain way sexually:



30% of people stating that some of the time they felt pressured to act in a specific sexual way, and 11% saying that this occurs most of the time provides us with a previously unknown insight into the expectations that exist with the LB+ sexual scenario.

Have you ever experienced sexual violence?

The survey revealed a worryingly high level of people who have experienced sexual violence, demonstrating the need to recognise that LB+ women experience sexual abuse, and the need to ensure that this is considered in the decision making process.

Furthermore, qualitative analysis revealed a lack of awareness around the concept of consent and sexual violence in relationships between women. **42% of participants reported that they had experienced sexual violence**, and a further **8% were unsure** as to whether they had experienced sexual violence.

From this huge percentage people from certain minority groups were disproportionately more likely to have experienced sexual violence, this includes:

- **55% of people from any Asian background and 52% of people from any black background compared to 42% of people from any white background.**
- **56% of people who identify as non-binary compared to 41% of women.**
- **45% of people who are bisexual, 55% of people who are pansexual and 51% of people who are queer. 64% of disabled people.**

With these concerning statistics in mind, the next section explored what is available for support in these circumstances, and what support, information and advice is available for LB+ women who want to discuss their sexual health or wellbeing.

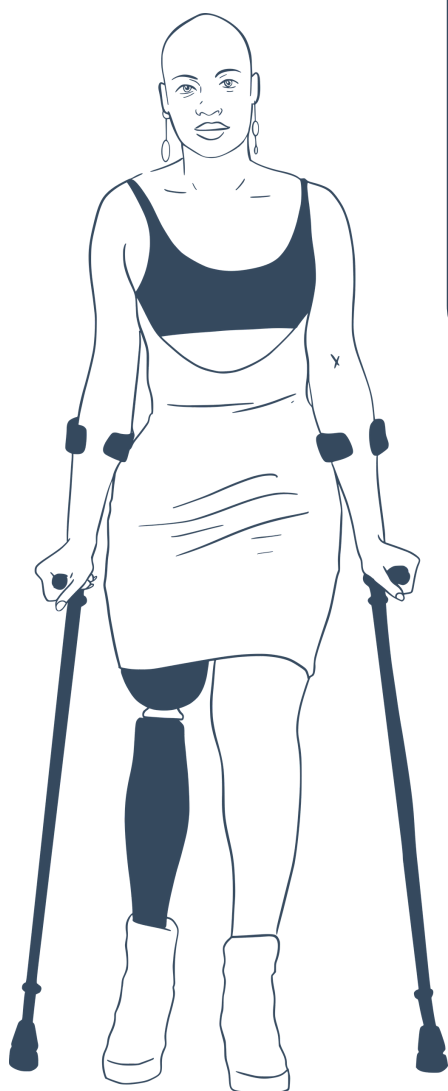


Support and Services

Of those who had experienced sexual violence **just 7% said their need for support was met** by the service they accessed.

Of those who had experienced sexual violence, **55% would be more likely to access support for sexual violence if there was LGBT specific support available**. Just 16% said they wouldn't be more likely. The remaining 29% said they didn't know.

There are a lot of free text responses outlining specific issues faced by LB+ women who have experienced sexual violence, including a lack of adequate and inclusive support.



In order to receive support for sexual violence, I (and we as a society) need to be believed that to be raped by a woman is rape... I would not feel able to access support until this is given the same level of disgust, intolerance and sympathy that penis rape gets. To be told "oh but you weren't actually raped, just assaulted" is really insulting and devalues everything

Lesbian woman, aged 45-54, has sex with women, gender identity same as that assigned at birth

Some participants described a desire for education and support services which recognised a wider scope of sexual violence, including coercion and non-violent non-consensual sex. Several responses expressed regret that they had not been able to recognise their experiences as sexual violence at the time; this was often linked to having felt – or still feeling – unable to access support services.

More support around 'ambiguous' experiences i.e my experience was with a partner, we were both drunk, and the line between consent and non consent was blurry. I haven't conceptualised what happened to me as rape, but it did and still does feel uncomfortable and non consensual. I have never really felt able to access support for that because it doesn't 'count' as sexual violence and is less clear cut.

Queer woman, aged 25-34, has sex with all genders, gender identity same as assigned at birth

Woman, no sexuality stated, aged 35-44, has sex with people of all genders, gender identity same as assigned at birth

i don't think the sexual violence i experienced was violent enough for me to access support. just everyday rape kinda thing.

I have experienced sexual harassment within the "community" and it hasn't been taken seriously due to my being a trans woman

Woman, no sexuality given, aged 25-34, gender identity not the same as that assigned at birth.

A designated helpline for LGBT that was easy to find as it's often hard to help when people are straight as they don't understand some of the hardships you experience or why you'd have sex with guys even though you were gay because of major insecurities or family not accepting.

Gay woman, aged 18-24, has sex with women, gender identity same as that assigned at birth



As a bi woman I'm not sure I would feel comfortable accessing support from an LGBT organisation if it was about violence at the hands of a man? Maybe it needs to be made clear that bi women can access LGBT sexual health or sexual violence services regardless of their sexual partner/s at the time?

Woman, aged 25-34, has sex with men and women, gender identity same as that assigned at birth.

“

I would want LGBT organisations not to be scared of the idea that lesbians who've been abused/raped are only lesbians because of this - this inhibits survivors from coming out, and also strips us of pride in our sexuality

Lesbian woman, aged 45-54, has sex with women, gender identity same as that assigned at birth.

”

It was 14 years ago and there was nothing available to me as a lesbian victim of rape. I'd like to think more support is available now but I'm not sure if it is.

Lesbian woman, aged 35-44, has sex with women, gender identity same as that assigned at birth.

Several responses specifically addressed the issue of woman-on-woman sexual violence, describing a sense that their experience of sexual violence had been invalidated by society or support services because it was not committed by a man. This had hindered their ability to access appropriate support and come to terms with their experience.

Ideally I would like pre-emptive education around sexual violence between women as for a long time after it happened I felt my experience wasn't as horrific as it wasn't a man, but the mental damage is as bad so it would have been nice before that happened to be able to recognise that. But after the incident, I think maybe a forum or self-care advice page would have been nice to visit, specifically for people who had gone through women on women sexual violence

Lesbian woman, aged 25-34, has sex with women, gender identity same as that assigned at birth.

In order to receive support for sexual violence, I (and we as a society) need to be believed that to be raped by a woman is rape... I would not feel able to access support until this is given the same level of disgust, intolerance and sympathy that penis rape gets. To be told "oh but you weren't actually raped, just assaulted" is really insulting and devalues everything.

Lesbian woman, aged 25-34, has sex with women, gender identity same as that assigned at birth.



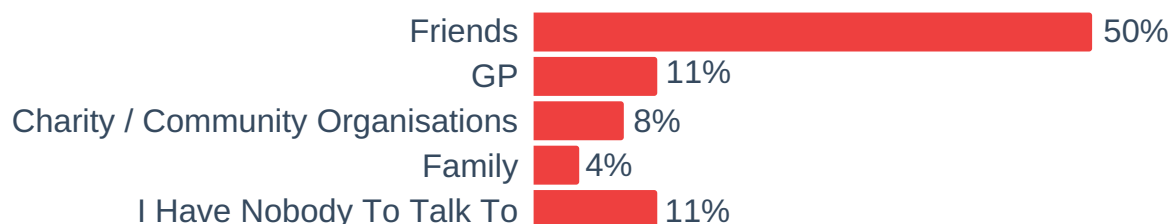
Sexual encounters with long-term partners were highlighted as an area where consent is sometimes felt to be more ambiguous. Participants described experiences which they did not count as sexual violence but which had nonetheless made them uncomfortable, and expressed a desire for greater recognition of these situations within sexual support services:

More information about low-key versions of consent matters (I did not experience sexual violence exactly, but I was unsure how able I was to consent to the kind of sex I was having with my partner, which often left me feeling violated - or that my consent was assumed with a long-term partner. I would like for that discussion to be more out in the open without it automatically becoming a question of 'violence')

Lesbian woman, aged 25-34, has sex with women, gender identity same as that assigned at birth.

It must be noted that the lack of support available, specifically for LB+ women, for people who have experienced sexual violence can only be compounded by the lack of general support and advice available for LB+ women to talk about sex.

If you wanted or need to, who would you speak to about the sex you're having or want to be having?

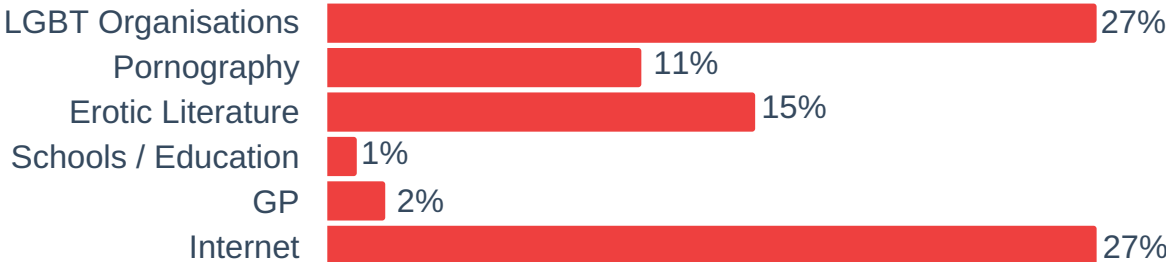


I'm a woman/femme-aligned non-binary person and my girlfriend is a trans woman. It's difficult to find advice/services for couples like us

Non- binary person, aged 25-34, Queer, has sex with women and non-binary people

Where do you go for information on having sex with other women?

The results from this part of the survey speak very clearly about the need, not only for a more a dedicated provision of support and advice, but also for a committed and overt campaign to promote its existence, making a very clear statement that the complex needs of this community are being given the consideration they require.



Scarletteen. :/ I know it's for teenagers but it's the only place I've found that covers everything I need to know.

Lesbian woman, has sex with women, gender identity same as that assigned at birth

Very few trustworthy sites without fearing ridicule or peaking other arousal and voyeurism. Highly unlikely to speak to a sexual health service or GP

Lesbian woman, aged 25-34, gender identity same as that assigned at birth, aged between 35-44



In Conclusion

We have learned that sex is important, that LB+ women enjoy sex and that they are adventurous and open-minded, intimate and loving.

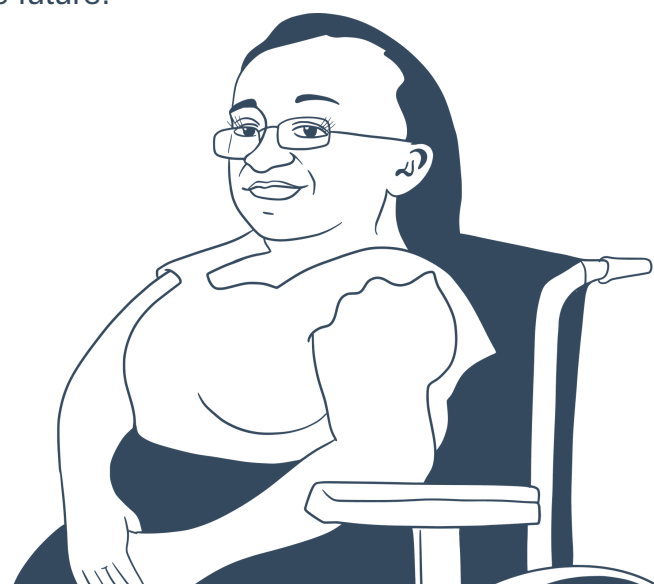
We have gained a much deeper understanding into the misrepresentation of sexual health when it comes to women who have sex with women. We have highlighted the potentially dangerous myths that still circulate around sexually transmitted diseases. We have reported untruths that are circulating within the community, compounded by the continuing lack of professional support and advice for LB+ women who want to talk about the sex they are having. We believe this situation is perpetuating falsehoods that may cost lives.

We live and work in a difficult commissioning landscape, where public services are continuously experiencing cuts. Substantiating the value of a service in order to secure funding is an ongoing battle, and if robust anecdotal evidence isn't supported by research, the likelihood of that service being commissioned is slim. We know, for example, that trans women are at higher risk of HIV, yet it's difficult to get sexual health services for trans women commissioned, because there's a data gap.

The unveiling of the appallingly high number of LB+ women who have experienced sexual violence must be a klaxon for community and health services to address how they shape the services they are providing. The sexual wellbeing of LB+ women has, for too long, existed under of a cloud of avoidance or professional discomfort.

At the very least, the community must have access to services that allow them to discuss their sexual needs and experiences.

We remain amazed by the number of LB+ women who were willing to be as open and honest with us as they were, and we hope that their responses will help to shape the support and services that are available in the future.



Useful Resources

Support helplines

www.lgbt.foundation

Helpline 0345 3 30 30 30 - helpline@lgbt.foundation

We offer advice, support and information for LGBT people through our helpline.

www.mind.org.uk

UK's largest mental health charity providing information and coordinating independent local support groups.

The African and Caribbean Mental Health Services:

admin@acmhs-blackmentalhealth.org.uk

Offers mental health services predominantly to African and African Caribbean people in Manchester.

Domestic abuse

www.lgbt.foundation/domesticabuse

We offer support to individuals who are currently at risk of, or have previously experienced, domestic.

Substance misuse

www.lgbt.foundation/substancemisuse

We offer one-to-one support sessions, a peer support group for LGBT women and access to all other groups and workshops.

Sexual health

www.lgbt.foundation/testing

We offer a range of sexual health services including: screenings and rapid HIV testing.

Sexual Violence

www.manchesterrapeccrisis.co.uk

Provides a range of confidential support services run by women for women and girls who have experienced sexual violence at any time in their lives. All services are for women over the age of 18.

Glossary

BAME	Abbreviation of the term Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
Bisexual / Bi	Someone who is attracted to people of the same gender and other genders
Cisgender / Cis	Someone who identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth; someone who is not transgender
Gender	The socially constructed and reinforced divisions between certain groups (genders) in a culture including social norms that people in these different groups are expected to adhere to, and a person's sense of self relating to these divisions
Gender Assigned at Birth	The gender that a person is assumed to be at birth, usually based on the sex assigned at birth
Gender Fluid	Someone whose gender is not fixed; their gender may change slowly or quickly over time and can switch between any number of gender identities and expressions, as each gender fluid person's experience of their fluidity is unique to them
Gender Identity	A person's internal feelings and convictions about their gender. This can be the same or different to the gender they were assigned at birth
Heterosexual	Someone who is romantically or sexually attracted to someone of a different gender, typically a man who is attracted to women or a woman who is attracted to men
Homosexual	A term used to describe someone who is almost exclusively attracted to people of the same gender. Some consider this word too medical and prefer the terms 'gay', 'lesbian' or 'queer'

Glossary

LB	The abbreviation of lesbian and bisexual
Lesbian	A woman who is largely or exclusively emotionally, sexually, and/or physically attracted to other women
LGBT	The abbreviation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans
LGBTQ+	The acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (sometimes also used to refer to questioning, usually when working with younger age groups). There are variations on this that include more (or fewer) identities, such as LGBT or LGB. LGBTQ+ can also be used to be more inclusive of other identities beyond those described by the acronym but related to them in identity or experience
Non-binary	Used to describe those whose gender does not fit into the gender binary. The term can be used by some as an identity in itself and is also used as an overarching term for genders that don't fit into the gender binary, such as genderqueer, bigender and gender-fluid
Pansexual / Pan	Someone who is emotionally, sexually, and/or physically attracted to others regardless of gender identity and external reproductive organs
Queer	An overarching or umbrella term used by some to describe members of the LGBTQ+ community. The term has been reclaimed by members of the community from previous derogatory use, and some members of the community may not wish to use it due to this history. When Q is seen at the end of LGBTQ+, it typically refers to queer and, less often, questioning

Glossary

Sex	The scientific and/or legal classification of a person as male, female or intersex. A person's sex is usually determined by a combination of primary and secondary sex characteristics including chromosomes, hormones, and internal and external reproductive organs
Sexual Orientation	How a person feels sexually about different genders. The term describes who they are most likely to pursue a sexual relationship with. Sexual activity does not indicate sexual orientation, so people who have sexual relations with someone of the same gender may not necessarily identify as LGBTQ+. This is why terms such as MSM are used in some contexts. Sexual orientation is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010
Sexual Attraction	Desiring sexual contact with a specific other person or group of people
Sexuality	Sexuality is a holistic term for someone's sexual behaviours, attractions, likes, dislikes, kinks, and preferences. Sexual orientation makes up a part of someone's sexuality, and sexuality is sometimes used interchangeably with sexual orientation, but it covers more than just who a person is attracted to. Sexuality is what you enjoy and how you enjoy it, whether that be partners or activities
Trans	An umbrella term to refer to anyone whose gender identity doesn't completely match the gender they were given at birth. This includes, but is not limited to, trans women, trans men, and non-binary people
WSW	Stands for women who have sex with women/women loving women. Women who have sex with women is used as a term within sexual health and other services to make these services more inclusive to women who have sex with other women but may not identify as LGBTQ+

We believe in a fair and equal society where all lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people can achieve their full potential.

This booklet is available in large print by calling **0345 3 30 30 30** or email **info@lgbt.foundation**

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