



Exploring gender and sexual identity

Introduction

“Discrimination and bullying [in society] still exists – that’s why this project is so important”.

The Five Rivers¹ National Youth Council meets every year to identify the issues that are most important to young people in the Five Rivers fostering family. In 2021, one of their priorities was sharing their views and ideas on their sexual and gender identity.

The Youth Council identified the societal confusion around gender and sexuality and the unhelpful stereotypes and negative attitudes which continue to affect people from the LGBTQ+ plus community, some of whom are subjected to verbal, physical and emotional abuse.

“Many of us are still not accepted or feel safe or are safe [in society].”

They also identified the importance of support from family and friends; but that those very people they rely on – carers and the wider community – can be anxious and confused about these issues.

The Youth Council decided to create a positive identity project to celebrate, explore and explain gender and sexual

identity, from their perspective. The project had lots of strands and in collaboration with Soundart Radio², we ran a two-day residential – using illustration, animation, poetry, and radio interviews to express and explore the experiences of experts by experience – young people with a whole range of gender and sexual identities.

We then ran a one-day writing course, facilitated by an author from the Royal Literary Fund³. The project gave the young people involved an opportunity to celebrate their own identities – and through their animations, poetry collection, and this illustrated booklet, they aim to inform and support other people who want to understand their experiences of gender and sexual identity.

“All together we’ve been conquering our fears and learning more things about each other; this place is just amazing, because it made me proud of who I am.”

FOOTNOTE

This project was made possible through the dedication, funding, and expertise of the following organisations:

¹ Five Rivers Child Care Ltd – www.five-rivers.org

² Soundart Radio – www.soundartradio.org.uk

³ Royal Literary Fund – www.rlf.org.uk



*Pam McConnell,
Founder of Five Rivers Child Care*

In years of bringing up children, looking after children, as well as in my professional practice as a psychotherapist and family therapist, children need to have the opportunity to find their own definitions about their identity. They need to have positive role models that help them choose who they want to identify as and for us to be careful not to use any of the ‘new’ identifications to become boxes that result in labelling in an unhelpful way.

We are all fluid, through different times in our lives, through our different relationships and cultures, shaped by many invisible factors. In our humanity, caring for each other, relating and wanting to share our lives with others, some with few and others with many, let’s keep openness in our hearts to make the most of that human characteristic of being pro-social and one of the human race.

I welcome the sensitive work that the youth council have done working together to help open this dialogue and to create understanding where many feel rather lost. I commend the book to you.

What is this book and who is it for?

This book aims to help young people and their carers to explore ideas relating to gender and sexual identity.

We want this book to be a useful guide for foster carers and staff who support young people with care experience, helping them to understand how to nurture the younger LGBTQ+ generation so that they can reach their fullest potential. But anyone - including other care experienced young people who may be questioning their gender or sexual identity - might find something useful in this book.

It was written collaboratively by a group of young people with care experience during a one-day writing course and a three-day residential. It includes transcripts from conversations about the areas covered in this book.

Much of the text and content of this book comes directly from the young people's conversations, their own views and personal experiences.

Throughout the book, young people's voices and experiences are mixed with stories from Five Rivers staff, Five Rivers foster carers, and other friends and allies of the care experienced community.

In the first half of this book, we explore sex and gender ([see page 4](#)). In the second half of the booklet, we consider sexuality and sexual identity ([see page 10](#)).

At the back of the book, you will find a list of some of the terms you might come across when you are trying to understand gender and sexuality ([see page 20](#)).

If you look after a child or young person who is questioning or exploring their gender identity and/or sexuality this book maybe a helpful reference point to start discussions with them.

Young Writer A (they/them)

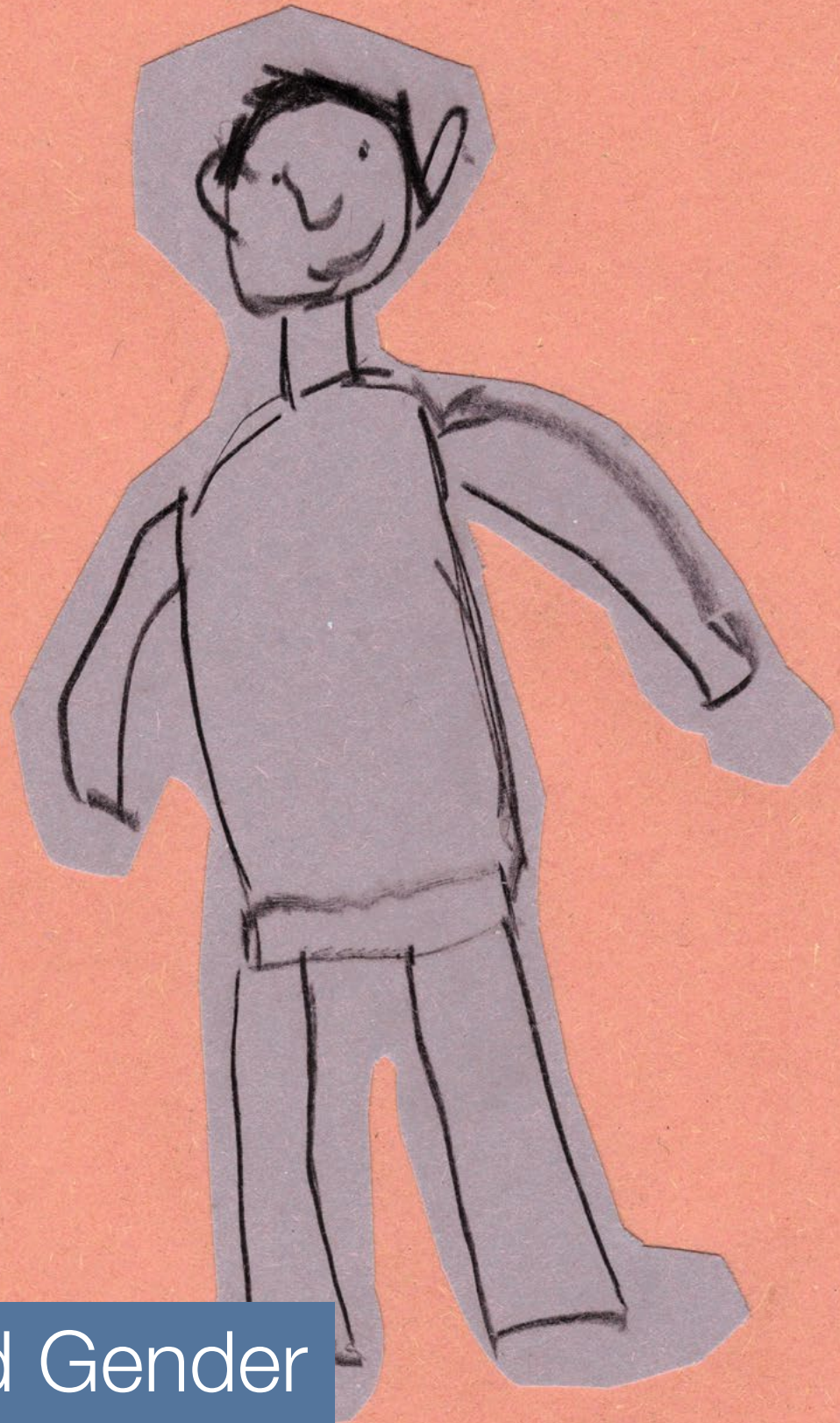
The words we use to describe sexual orientation and gender identity are forever changing. There are up to and over 70 different words that we use to describe different sexual or gender orientations! You can find a list of some of these at the back of the book. But for the purposes of this book, we are going to keep things simple.

Introduction from Young Writer A (they/them)

The language used around trans and non-binary people is constantly evolving, and often people with the best intentions are worried about saying the wrong thing. That's why we hope this book will help you with your confidence in talking to a young person about their gender and sexual identities.

Just understanding what is going on and respecting others, can make a difference. You don't have to be a protester or a civil rights activist. If you just respect us, there are no limits to what a difference you can make. ■





Part 1

Sex and Gender

In this section, we try to provide a simple explanation of gender, sex, and some of the main forms of gender identity. You'll hear from young people with lived experience and expertise, explaining what it's like to be cisgender, transgender, genderfluid and non-binary. You'll read examples of some of the challenges they have faced, alongside their suggestions for how you can helpfully support young LGBTQ+ people.

What is biological sex?

Biological sex is the state of being of being a man or a woman, based on physical differences or is it?

Usually, when we are born, a midwife or doctor identifies whether we are male or female. This is what is known as our “biological sex”.

From the obvious visual cues - to more complicated judgements about our bodies, including our hormones, our internal organs and chromosomes – our biological sex is based on physical differences between boys and girls.

Biologically if a person has an XY chromosome, they are male, and if they have two X chromosomes, they are female; if a person has a penis, then they are male, and if they have a vagina, they are female; if a person has a high levels of testosterone, then they are male, and if they have high levels of oestrogen, they are female.

However, for some people biological sex is not that simple. For example, a person could have an XY chromosome, but they could be missing specific genes that encode for specific male characteristics. Even though they have the XY chromosomes - they may look like a person who we would stereotypically describe as female. Factors like genes and receptors can dramatically change how people appear and how they feel within themselves.

Based on this, some people argue that sex isn't a simple matter of being male or female – instead, it might be more helpful to view it as a spectrum.

Gender

Whilst sex refers to the biological sex we are identified as at birth, gender refers to the roles and expectations we associate with being a man or a woman.

For example, we might traditionally expect that girls wear pink, play with dolls and are gentle and caring; and that boys wear blue, play with toy cars and are assertive and tough.

When we identify a baby's biological sex at birth, we can unknowingly hand them a set of roles which we expect them to conform to for their rest of their lives.

Gender identity and gender expression

Gender identity - is a person's own sense of gender. It refers to a deep personal sense of the gender they feel they are.

Gender expression - is how you express your gender to the world.

Some people feel happy conforming to traditional gender roles. But many people may feel that they don't always want to conform. For example, men might sometimes want to be soft and caring; girls may sometimes want to climb trees.

Some people have a deep sense that their gender identity does not fit with the sex they were assigned at birth.

As our understanding of gender identity and gender expression develops, we have developed more labels and definitions to help us describe the different ways that people live with and experience their gender.

In the rest of this section, you'll find explanations of some of the main forms of gender identity. But first, let's address the issue of pronouns. ►

► Pronouns

Words we use to refer to people's gender in conversation – for example, 'he' or 'she'. Some people may prefer others to refer to them in gender neutral language and use pronouns such as they/their and ze/zir.*

Pronouns are also a way of expressing gender identity. Someone who does not identify with the sex and gender they were assigned at birth might chose to change their pronouns. They may change from he, to she, or vice versa - or they may want to be known as they/ them.

If a young person wishes to be known by a different pronoun, respecting this wish indicates that we respect that young person's gender identity. Some young people are happy to use all the pronouns for example 'he, she, they', they identify with them all.

Young Writer A

Many people use basic he/him or she/her pronouns. There are other pronouns such as they/them, which are most often used by people who identify as non-binary.

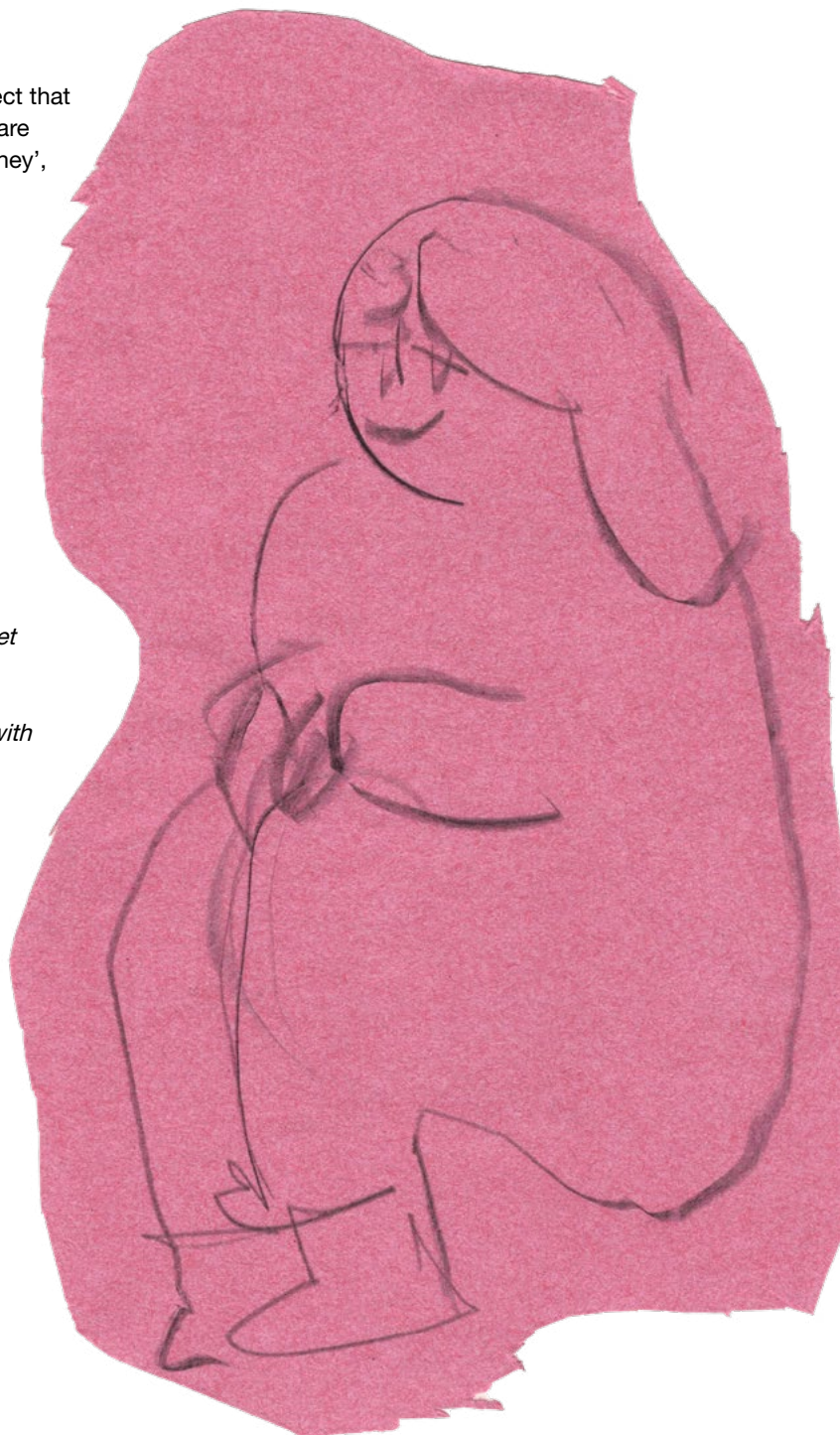
Using she/her when someone identifies as he/him can affect their mental health and really upset them. Many people struggle with bullying and misgendering on a daily basis. There is no law against this, but I feel like people should try and use the right pronouns. It may be difficult to always remember them but if you get it wrong it's not that bad as long as it's just a mistake!

Many people will understand if you make a mistake with their pronouns and it is just better to keep trying and not make a fuss about it.

* www.ymcadlg.org/glossary-gender-identity/

we
they he

I
she you



Cisgender or Cis

A term used by some for those whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were identified as at birth.

Young Writer H (she/her)

So, I am a cisgender female who is heterosexual – I use the pronouns she/her.

I first realized I was cis gendered when I started getting involved with this project and I didn't really think much about pronouns to be fair. But I have a lecturer who is called Max. However, we couldn't tell if Max was a girl or a boy - so I think it's helpful for pronouns to be stated on emails or any form of communication or wherever possible, so no one gets offended or upset by accidentally being misgendered.

I've always been sure of my gender, and I've always been sure of my sexuality. However, I've only just learned about cisgender. I believe it's helpful to use the term, as it helps recognize trans people, it brings awareness, and it shows that you care about transgender people and the LGBTQ+ community. I would describe myself as an ally to the LGBTQ+ community.

I am 18 years old. I always was quite a tomboy and I still am. I tend to enjoy wearing clothes I feel more comfortable in - gender nonconforming girls' clothes. I'm not the type of girl to go out wearing heels and a lot of makeup.

I used to like to hang out with boys all the time, but I never thought at any point that I'd like to be a boy. I was very much involved in football. I very much enjoyed doing stereotypical boys' things, but I've always been sure that I was a girl.

I don't think I'm a perfect example of an obvious stereotypical female, but I still identify as female. I believe the androgynous way of dressing has become more acceptable and I'm glad it's been accepted more.

Staff member F (she/her)

I am a cis woman. This means that I resonate with the gender I was assigned at birth. I am aware that a lot of what "makes me a girl" will have been shaped by my growing up in a society that has strict gender norms. So, whilst I quite like having a gender to identify with, sometimes it can seem quite a reductive concept, especially when I see the inequality between men and women.

I often question what gender means to me. I like being feminine, but that doesn't mean I necessarily want to act or dress feminine. Being feminine to me means feeling strong and confident, it is a part of me that feels integral to my identity. I have never had to defend who I am to others and for that I feel lucky and privileged.

Trans

An umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth.*

Young Writer S (he/him)

I have always felt different to the other kids. When I was around 5, I saw a guy with his shirt off and I thought I wanted to be like him, so I did it too and thought nothing of it. Then when I was eight, I would pretend to be a boy and I liked things like Lego, football and bikes. Then when I was twelve, I started growing hair in different places and I was so happy because I thought I was turning into a boy.

When I came out to my mum, initially she supported me, but when we got into arguments, she would tell me that I was a disappointment to her and tell me that I was never going to be a real boy. Then people around me started to misgender me.

Recently someone found an old social media account of mine, but I'm not out yet at school so people think that I am born male. I know a certain person has started to message me about it and it is possibly going to out me to the whole school. It's really worrying me.

Foster carer V (she/her)

I am a trans woman. I knew I was different before I could speak (my parents confirmed this to me based on my actions) and I grew up in a time where there was no internet, no social media, the only person you could talk to was your doctor (who was usually a stern older person who would not have their time wasted). You couldn't talk to your friends as they would condemn you, tease and bully you, and there was no - politically correct "don't offend people" or "don't hurt their feelings" - set of rules!

It was hard because I was alone in a world full of people who didn't know or understand and even worse, I thought I was the only one!

I found a way amongst a few trinkets and tiny flashes of light and wisdom. We didn't have names for things like we do today to better understand each other. I have been through the process and know it's so hard but so worth it! I had friends before I came out but always had to avoid certain subjects and pretend to be a man's man and yes, I did that to excess. I have lived a good life before but now I live a different, happier and more accepting life, not only by me but those who love me! Life was in black and white, now it's in full technicolour, and I wouldn't change it for the world. ►

* www.ymcadlg.org/glossary-gender-identity/

► Gender Fluid

When you identify with all or most of the genders or pronouns. Your gender identity can fluctuate.

Young Writer R (he/she/they/them)

I figured out a couple of months ago that I was gender fluid, because I didn't fit into the gender binary, and I didn't want to. I was relieved because I found myself. Labels can restrict you to a certain thing. I don't want to be restricted so I don't really have a label. Gender fluid is a free term, it doesn't restrict you to just one thing. So that felt most comfortable to me.

If you're gender fluid, you can use all the pronouns. You don't fit into one specific binary - male, female or non-binary. I fit into all of them and none of them at the same time. You can dress how you want.

Non-binary

An umbrella term for people whose gender identity doesn't sit comfortably with 'man' or 'woman'. Non-binary identities are varied and can include people who identify with some aspects of binary identities, while others reject them entirely.*

Young Writer A (they/them)

When I was between the ages of 3 to 7, I was very jealous of all my brothers. I wanted to be like them, I wanted to look like them and I was just this dorky little girl with long blonde hair. When I was younger I wasn't very happy with who I was. I kept on begging that I would change into boy any day. I was sick of being told of that I couldn't do things because I was a girl.

I was never taught anything about transgender. One day I was just chilling out in my room and I Googled "what's the scientific name for a girl that wants to be a boy" and that's how I found out. A month later I told my mates. I was about 11 and a half at the time but I didn't want to come out because I thought I'd be too young, and people wouldn't believe me. So, I waited until I was 12. That year was the toughest I've had, I stayed in my room all the time.

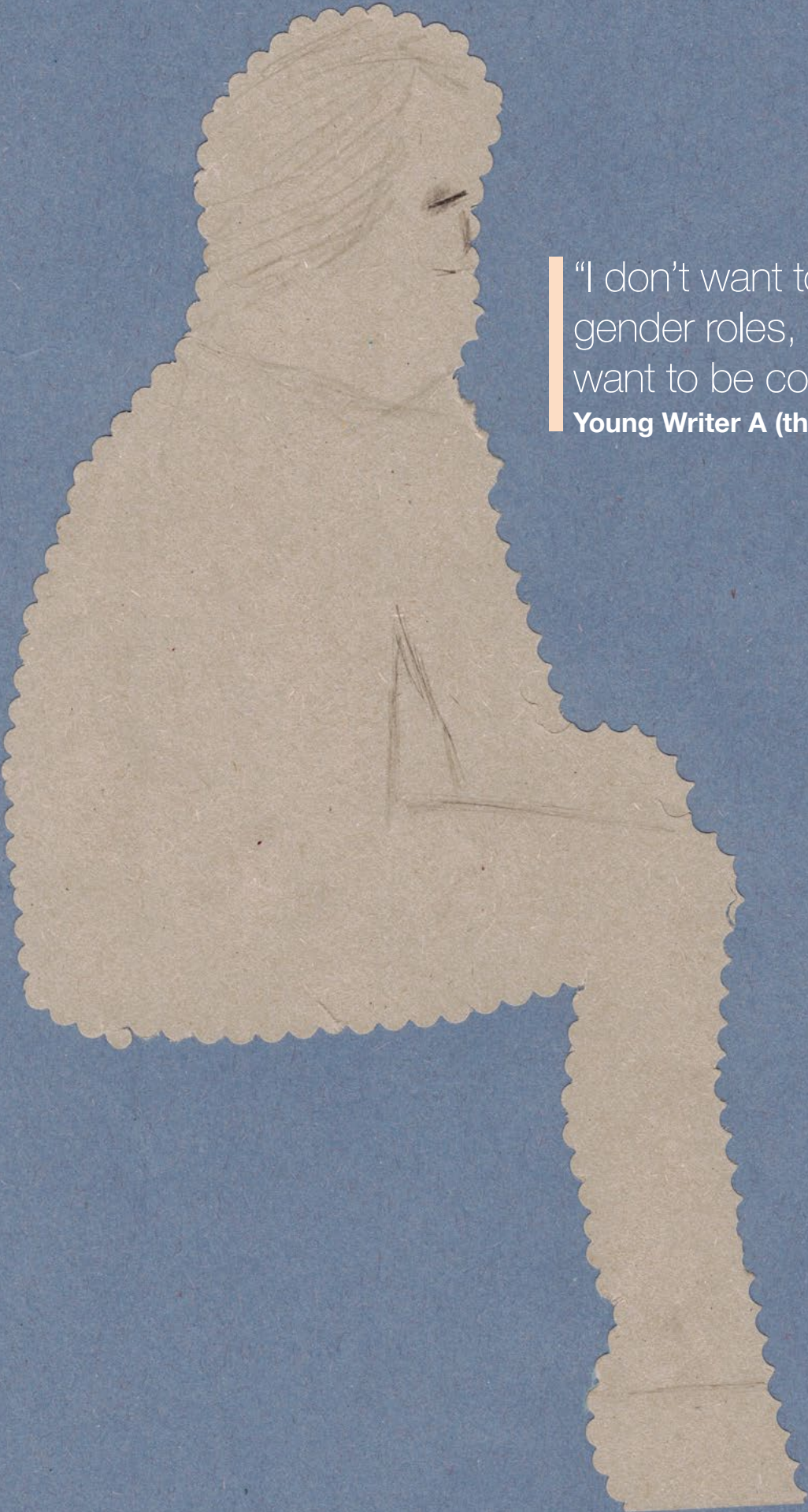
I came out to my family and they were amazing. Then I came out at school and I had a bit of hate but that went away quickly - the adults fought back against the hate.

When I was a trans boy I was really happy, but I felt once again that I was limited by that gender role, and I had to act masculine and like a jock. I started realising - well, I'm not truly female and I'm not truly male. I don't want to stick to the gender roles, and I don't want to be confined. I'm just going to use whatever pronouns I feel I want to use.

Young Writer K (he/him)

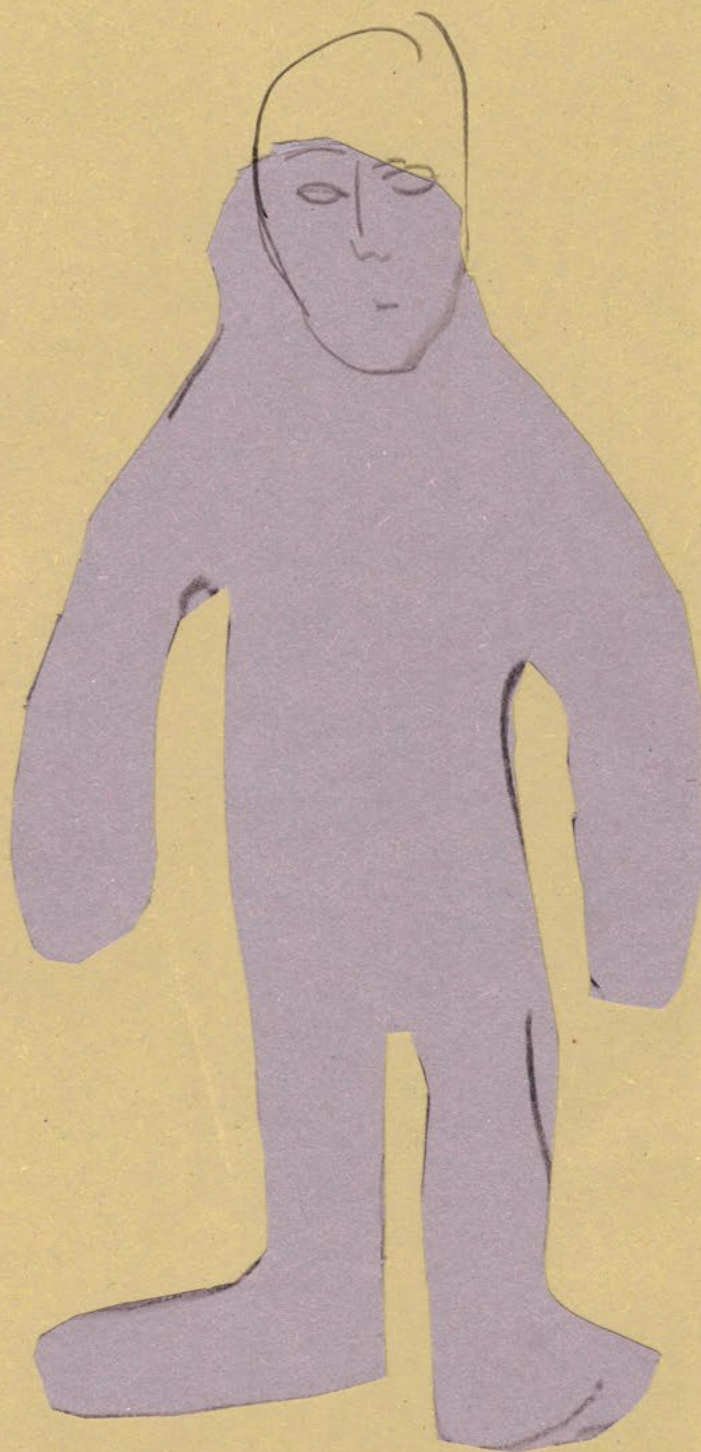
One of my carers, is a boy and a girl - a mix - and the other is a girl. It doesn't matter if you have two mums because that means it's all about just having fun with them and you'll just have more mums to talk to. We don't really talk about pronouns and stuff. We just play games they taught me when I first came to stay with them. ■

* www.ymcadlg.org/glossary-gender-identity/



"I don't want to stick to the gender roles, and I don't want to be confined."

Young Writer A (they/them)



Part 2

Understanding Sexual Identity

Sexual identity is based on who you are sexually or romantically attracted to. There are lots of ways of describing sexual identity. In this section, we will look at some of the most common. You'll hear from young people with lived experience and expertise, explaining what it's like to be heterosexual, bisexual, lesbian, gay, pansexual, asexual and questioning. You'll read examples of some of the challenges they have faced, alongside their suggestions for how you can helpfully support young LGBTQ+ people.

Heterosexual/straight

Refers to a man who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards women or to a woman who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards men.*

Young Writer H (she/her)

When I was 13 I had a girlfriend, so I did identify as bisexual then. However, now I'm 18 years old and identify as heterosexual. Looking back, I think it was a crush. I think it was useful and I think it helped me understand my sexual orientation. I still think there is some pressure to be heterosexual, and I still think there is a lot of worry and fear about coming out as gay. It all depends on the person and their personal circumstances, but generally I think there are still a lot of people that won't accept someone who comes out as anything other than heterosexual.

A lot of heterosexual people still make gay jokes a lot and the word "gay" gets thrown around a lot as an insult and it's not acceptable. We need to try to teach others, educate them that it's not acceptable. I'm 100% LGBTQ+ ally.

We weren't taught about sexual or gender identity in school, or not that I can remember. The only way that I learned about sexual orientation and gender was through my friends.

* www.ymcadlg.org/glossary-gender-identity/

Homosexual, Gay, Lesbian

Homosexual: This might be considered a more medical term used to describe someone who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards someone of the same gender. The term 'gay' is now more generally used.*

Gay: Refers to a man who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards men. Also a generic term for lesbian and gay sexuality – some women define themselves as gay rather than lesbian. Some non-binary people may also identify with this term.*

Lesbian: Refers to a woman who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards women. Some non-binary people may also identify with this term.*

Staff member O (she/her)

I am a cis lesbian (I feel a bit embarrassed to say that I never really thought much about my gender until I took part in this project.

I came out when I was about 19 – I always knew I liked girls but as a child I had no form of reference for lesbians, there was no representation on TV. Being a lesbian back then was very wrong in my Irish Catholic family.

When I saw one of the first lesbian characters on television on Brookside back in the 80's it blew my mind. I didn't even know it was possible to be anything other than straight, not seriously.

I did a really good job of blocking the option out of my mind. Then I fell in love with a lesbian when I was 19. The joy of this was completely overshadowed by anxiety that I held about my family finding out.

I told some of my siblings and they asked me to choose between my first love or the family – they told me I was going to ruin the family. It's been tough not being able to share my life or joy with my family. I think my parents probably imagine that I am very unhappy and single. I am not. I have a family and I'm proud to be gay.

In England I've not experienced a great deal of discrimination. I think because I look female/feminine - I don't get much hassle, but I see that boyish/butch women can often get abuse for how they look. My partner is 6 ft tall and looks very androgenous - they have been verbally and physically abused by random strangers on the street because of how they look. ►

► Bi or Bisexual

Bi is an umbrella term used to describe a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards more than one gender.

Bi people may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms, including, but not limited to, bisexual, pan, queer, and some other non-monosexual and non-monoromantic identities.*

Young Writer B (she/her)

I identify as bi and I'm proud. In the beginning I wondered am I bi, or am I lesbian? I prefer girls more than boys, but I still like boys as well, it was just like on and off and then I realised I was bi. It's been weird because people ask - why do you like boys and girls? You can only pick one.

At school people are wondering why I say I'm bi - people think I'm a lesbian because I had a girlfriend and then I had to explain to them that I'm bi - so I like boys and girls. If I'm not accepted by them it doesn't matter, I've got the LGBTQ+ community and they're like my second family

All together we've been conquering our fears and learning more things about each other, and this project is just amazing because it made me proud of what I am.

Staff member F (she/her)

I am a bisexual woman. This means that I am attracted to both males and females. Personally, I view sexuality as a spectrum rather than strict categories. You can be attracted to the same sex or gender, the opposite sex or gender, or be anywhere in between the two.

One common assumption is that if for example, a bisexual man was a relationship with a man, that he suddenly becomes gay rather than bisexual. This is untrue, that person would still identity as bisexual as they are not attracted only to men.

Young Writer S (he/him)

The main issues I've experienced being bisexual is that other people often tell me that I am being greedy. People telling me to pick a sexuality when I refuse to label.

Pan or Pansexual

Pan refers to a person whose romantic and/or sexual attraction towards others is not limited by sex or gender.*

Young Writer A (they/them)

Some pansexual people can have preferences towards a certain gender as can bisexual people. For example - I am pansexual but I lean more towards dating genderfluid people and men.

I don't want to be limited in my choices of who I love. I think that being pansexual or bisexual is just more freeing, I'm being me and that's better - I don't want to be limited to just being straight or gay. But it can be quite confusing at times because it is hard to explain what you're feeling.

“I don't want to be limited in my choices of who I love.”

The numbers of bisexual and pansexual people are rising each year. For example, last year in my school year there were only 30 of us - now there are 90. I think that people are slowly becoming more confident in coming out safely. I think that bisexual and pansexual people don't get a lot of hate because it can seem as if they are straight and it's not always obvious just by looking at them. ►

* www.ymcadlg.org/glossary-gender-identity/



Illustration created by a young person on our two-day residential

► Asexual

Being asexual can mean a few things- for example you can experience some sexual feelings, but not directed at a person; not have any sexual feelings at all but still experience romantic attraction; or have neither sexual nor romantic attraction.

Many people see asexual people as not interested in relationships, but some asexual people may still want relationships depending on what level of attraction they experience.

Questioning

The process of exploring your own sexual orientation and/or gender identity.*

Young Writer N

I identify as questioning. For me, this means that I don't know what my gender is yet. I also identify as asexual. My gender identity goes between being feminine, masculine, and non-binary. I've tried out some pronouns like he, she and they - and I've settled on the ones that feel most comfortable. But I'm still willing to experiment with my gender and labels to find out what gender identity means to me.

If I think or talk about it too much, it feels stressful – so I try not. My friends accept it. Other than trying out different pronouns, most of us don't have a label yet for our gender identity.

My advice to anyone who is questioning their sexuality or gender identity is - don't stress about it too much. You might feel clear what your identity is – but if you're not, don't feel pressure to choose a label. It might change. Give it time.

My advice to staff and carers is – please try to be supportive. Go with the flow. Accept someone's identity at any given time. Give them chance to talk; let them know you're there for them and that you'll support them no matter what. ■

* www.ymcadlg.org/glossary-gender-identity/

“My advice to staff and carers is – please try to be supportive. Go with the flow. Accept someone's identity at any given time. Give them chance to talk; let them know you're there for them and that you'll support them no matter what.”

Young Writer N





Illustration created by a young person on our two-day residential

Conclusions: learning from each other

Staff member O reflecting on what she learnt

I knew what being non-binary was, but I didn't realise what binary was until I spoke with the young people involved in this project. I now look at life, the world, people, gender, sexuality and identity in a completely different way. I don't believe any of us are 'binary' – black or white, light or shadow etc – I believe we are all individual and we can move and shift within a spectrum.

“Life and our knowledge of people is constantly changing – it's ephemeral and this project has opened my eyes to a whole new landscape.”

Young people appear to be better adapted and more open minded to these sorts of ideas than many adults are. If we listen to them, give them space and support, we ourselves and society can gain a lot from this non-biased and open-minded approach to the world and the people in it. Our young people can breathe life into the ideas and concepts we hold. Life and our knowledge of people is constantly changing – it's ephemeral and this project has opened my eyes to a whole new landscape.

Young writer A reflecting on what we learned

It's perfectly fine that you're changing your thoughts and experimenting because our minds are still evolving and so is society. You'll see many different views as you grow up and it's perfectly fine to change your thoughts and opinions based on those views – so it's a learning process of what you see in your daily life.

Foster Carer V

For those of you feeling lost or unworthy, stick to your guns, you will get there. For those of you who are unsure, you will find your path. For those of you who change your mind, it's ok, it's your mind and it's not for others to tell you what to do. Always do it with respect for yourself as well as them and remember, there are only a few diamonds in the rough so shine bright!

Trust yourself, you are the expert of you, no one else knows your mind as well as you do. Just remember, the people trying to help you are probably as confused as you are, so practice the same tolerance as you would expect, spend your time to help them understand and remember, acceptance breeds acceptance. ►

► Where to next?

What we want for our kids

We want young people in the Five Rivers Family to feel supported, loved, safe and cared for. We also want them to feel that they are respected and taken seriously.

At Five Rivers, it is our responsibility as adults to support young people to explore and exercise their rights as children under the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child. Part of this responsibility is to ensure that we are preparing young people to live their best individual lives.

This means that LGBTQ+ young people should have extra support in order for them to feel that they have enough equity to take part. We should be accepting, inclusive, and make sure that LGBTQ+ young people in Five Rivers have a creative safe space for open dialogue where they can come together to influence service delivery.

In this project, experts by experience described how important it is to feel understood and supported, and how staff and foster carers can play a crucial role.

Support from friends and family is crucial because it can help a person feel more comfortable being themselves. It can also help them in the long run so that they feel a sense of comfort in the knowledge people in their daily lives support them for who they are.

They also described what happened when they were not offered the support and understanding they needed.

- **Bullying:** *I'm bullied at school and I'm just angry at the adults and at society for allowing that. There's a massive bullying issue at my school and the teachers aren't doing anything. There should definitely be more safety for LGBTQ+ people at school.*
- **Fear and anxiety:** *If your family and friends don't support you, you feel scared to show yourself.*
- **Being invisible and voiceless:** *Teachers mainly want to take the easy route because if they stand up for the minority the majority will not be very happy. Most of the time the LGBTQ+ voice is being drowned out by other people. We are here and we want to be part of it.*
- **Not being able to be yourself:** *Some adults think children and young people are too young to understand or make decisions about their gender, but they still think that it's OK to accept the gender that you're assigned at birth! The pressure to be the gender you were assigned at birth can make it difficult to come out and people can put it off, leave it until they are older which can make things even more difficult.*

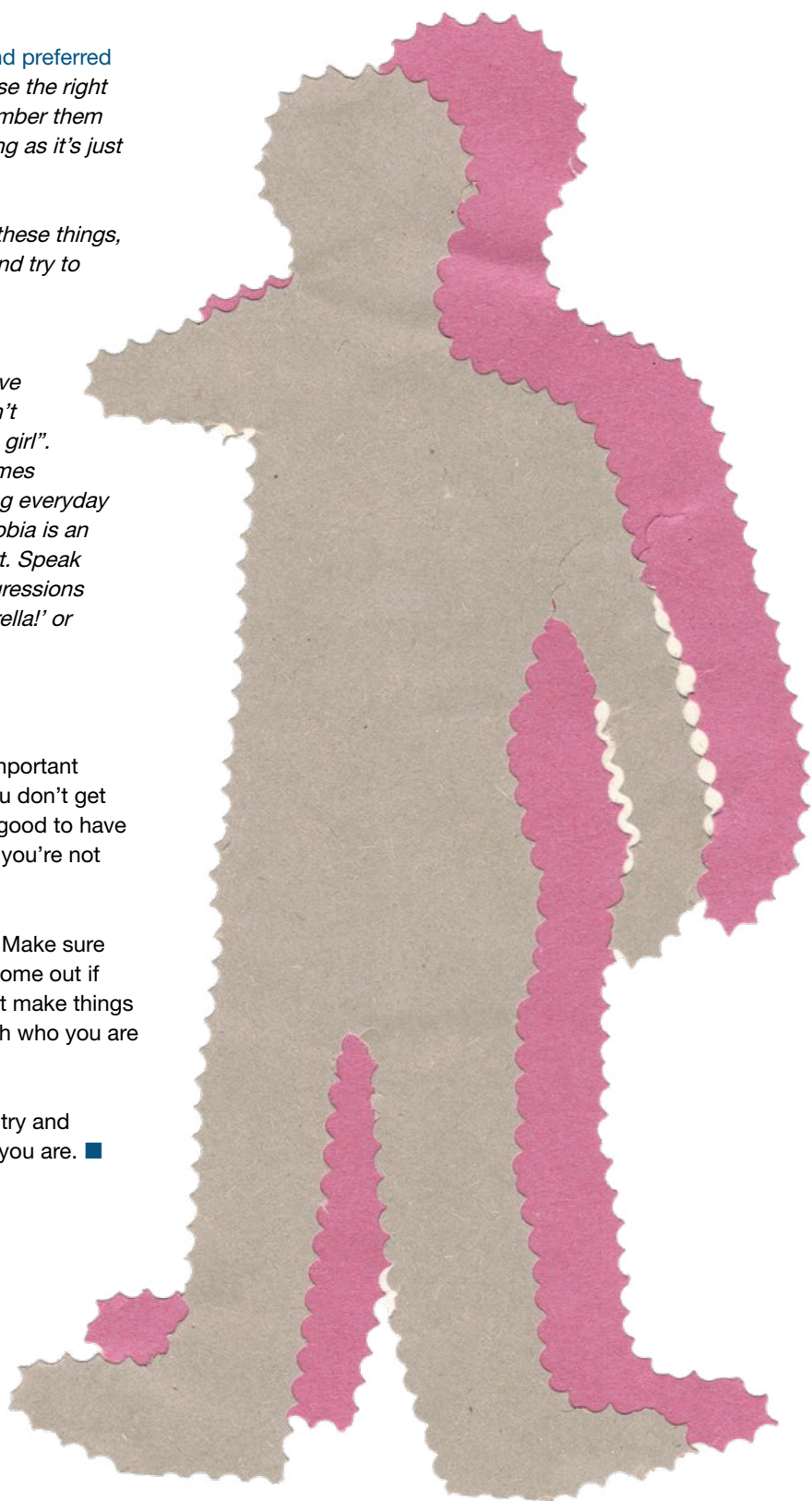
What you can do to support young people

- **Be supportive and non-judgemental:** *Make sure that the young person is supported. Be there to help them with anything that they need regarding sexual orientation. Take a non-judgmental stance towards it.*
- **Be open to new information and knowledge.** *Listen to young people: Although my family didn't know anything about LGBTQ+ before I came out, they did start asking questions and they became more supportive when they were more knowledgeable. I think it's a case of just asking and experiencing and seeing what's going on.*
- **Listen with respect:** *If you want advice on how to talk to me - get to know me first, start talking to me before you ask me questions like, how did I know that I was gender fluid? and what it means and stuff like that. Be respectful of me and who I am.*
- **See the whole person, not just the label:** *People should not judge you based on just your sexuality, that is just one page out of a person's whole book. It's like opening one of the best books in the world - reading line 3, on chapter 2, of page 93. It's a random line in someone else's world and you can't base them on just that one part.*
- **Be positive about LGBTQ+ identities:** *I think it can be tough to come out as gay if it's something your friends or family don't talk openly and positively about it.*
- **Allow them to explore their feelings and ideas:** *It's great if they can explore how they feel - and if they can change how they feel too. Our sexual identity is something we grow into as we get older.*
- **Don't say that people are too young to know. You should let them explore and find out who they are:** *If young people don't have the space to explore, they won't be able to find out who they are for themselves and they should be able to do that. My foster carers and everyone around me have given me the space to do that. My school has been supportive and it's made it a lot easier.*
- **Don't make assumptions:** *My advice to carers or whoever is reading this book would be to always ask the individual their pronouns and what they prefer to be known as. Don't assume they are straight or cis gendered.*

- **Respect young people's gender identities and preferred pronouns:** *I feel like people should try and use the right pronouns. It may be difficult to always remember them but if you get it wrong it's not that bad as long as it's just a mistake!*
- **Spread awareness:** *Make yourself aware of these things, talk to your friends and other foster carers and try to educate them. Spread awareness.*
- **Challenging stereotypes and discrimination:** *Speak to girls and boys equally and don't give out household chores based on gender. Don't say things like "man up" or "don't be such a girl". Support children to explore hobbies and games that don't enforce gender norms. Challenging everyday sexism, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia is an evolving challenge and we can all play a part. Speak about the micro sexism, homophobia or aggressions however small, for example, 'Man up Cinderella!' or 'That's so gay'.*

From kids, to kids

- **Seek out support:** Social support is a very important thing. Everybody has a social need and if you don't get that you can get quite upset or anxious. It's good to have reassurance that who you are is ok and that you're not alone in this.
- **Seek out someone who feels safe to talk to:** Make sure you come out in a safe environment. Don't come out if you feel endangered because that would just make things worse. Make sure you're safe and happy with who you are before you come out.
- **Believe in yourself:** Don't let other people to try and dictate what your life is, and especially who you are. ■



Glossary of terms (A-Z)*



Useful language for you to know

Ace

An umbrella term used specifically to describe experiences of a lack of, varying, or occasional experiences of sexual attraction. This encompasses asexual people as well as those who identify as demisexual and grey-sexual.

Agender

A non-binary identity which might be used by people who feel they have no gender at all. This term can also fall under the trans umbrella.

Ally

A (typically) straight and/or cis person who supports members of the LGBTQU+ community.

Bi

Bi is an umbrella term used to describe a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards more than one gender. Bi people may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms, including, but not limited to, bisexual, pan, queer, and some other non-monosexual and non-monoromantic identities.

Biphobia

The fear or dislike of someone who identifies as bi based on prejudice or negative attitudes, beliefs or views about bi people. Biphobic bullying may be targeted at people who are, or who are perceived to be, bi.

Cisgender or Cis

A term used by some for those whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were identified at birth. Non-trans is also used by some people.

Coming out

When a person first tells someone/others about their orientation and/or gender identity.

Deadnaming

Calling someone by their birth name after they have changed their name. This term is often associated with trans people who have changed their name as part of their transition.

Gay

Refers to a man who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards men. Also a generic term for lesbian and gay sexuality – some women define themselves as gay rather than lesbian. Some non-binary people may also identify with this term.

Gender

Often expressed in terms of masculinity and femininity, gender is largely culturally determined and is assumed from the sex assigned at birth.

Gender dysphoria

Used to describe when a person experiences discomfort or distress because there is a mismatch between their sex assigned at birth and their gender identity. This is also the clinical diagnosis for someone who doesn't feel comfortable with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gender expression

How a person chooses to outwardly express their gender, within the context of societal expectations of gender. A person who does not conform to societal expectations of gender may not, however, identify as trans.

Gender identity

A person's innate sense of their own gender, whether male, female or something else (see non-binary below), which may or may not correspond to the sex assigned at birth.

Gender reassignment

Another way of describing a person's transition. To undergo gender reassignment usually means to undergo some sort of medical intervention, but it can also mean changing names, pronouns, dressing differently and living in their self-identified gender.

Gender reassignment is a characteristic that is protected by the Equality Act 2010, and it is further interpreted in the Equality Act 2010 approved code of practice. It is a term of much contention.

Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC)

This enables trans people to be legally recognised in their affirmed gender and to be issued with a new birth certificate. Not all trans people will apply for a GRC and you currently have to be over 18 to apply.

You do not need a GRC to change your gender markers at work or to legally change your gender on other documents such as your passport.

Gillick competence

A term used in medical law to decide whether a child (under 16 years of age) is able to consent to their own medical treatment, without the need for parental permission or knowledge.

Heterosexual/straight

Refers to a man who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards women or to a woman who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards men.

Homosexual

This might be considered a more medical term used to describe someone who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards someone of the same gender. The term 'gay' is now more generally used.

Homophobia

The fear or dislike of someone, based on prejudice or negative attitudes, beliefs or views about lesbian, gay or bi people. Homophobic bullying may be targeted at people who are, or who are perceived to be, lesbian, gay or bi.

Intersex

Intersex is not a gender identity and should not be lumped under the trans umbrella. It describes someone born with anatomical, hormonal and/or chromosomal variations in their sex characteristics. Some intersex people self-define as trans and/or non-binary, others with the gender they were assigned at birth.

It's always up to an individual as to how they describe their gender identity. Some people use multiple terms or shift between different terms to better represent their gender identity. This should always be respected and supported.

Lesbian

Refers to a woman who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards women. Some non-binary people may also identify with this term.

Lesbophobia

The fear or dislike of someone because they are or are perceived to be a lesbian.

LGBTQU+

The acronym for lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer, unsure.

Non-binary

An umbrella term for people whose gender identity doesn't sit comfortably with 'man' or 'woman'. Non-binary identities are varied and can include people who identify with some aspects of binary identities, while others reject them entirely.

Orientation

Orientation is an umbrella term describing a person's attraction to other people. This attraction may be sexual (sexual orientation) and/or romantic (romantic orientation). These terms refer to a person's sense of identity based on their attractions, or lack thereof. ►

Orientations include, but are not limited to, lesbian, gay, bi, ace and straight.

* www.ymcadlg.org/glossary-gender-identity/

► Outed

When a lesbian, gay, bi or trans person's sexual orientation or gender identity is disclosed to someone else without their consent.

Person with a trans history

Someone who identifies as male or female or a man or woman, but was assigned the opposite sex at birth. This is increasingly used by people to acknowledge a trans past.

Pan

Refers to a person whose romantic and/or sexual attraction towards others is not limited by sex or gender.

Passing

If someone is regarded, at a glance, to be a cisgender man or cisgender woman.

Cisgender refers to someone whose gender identity matches the sex they were 'assigned' at birth. This might include physical gender cues (hair or clothing) and/or behaviour which is historically or culturally associated with a particular gender.

Pronoun

Words we use to refer to people's gender in conversation – for example, 'he' or 'she'. Some people may prefer others to refer to them in gender neutral language and use pronouns such as they/their and ze/zir.

Queer

Queer is a term used by those wanting to reject specific labels of romantic orientation, sexual orientation and/or gender identity. It can also be a way of rejecting the perceived norms of the LGBT community (racism, sizeism, ableism etc). Although some LGBT people view the word as a slur, it was reclaimed in the late 80s by the queer community who have embraced it.

Questioning

The process of exploring your own sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Romantic orientation

A person's romantic attraction to other people, or lack thereof. Along with sexual orientation, this forms a person's orientation identity.

Sex

Assigned to a person on the basis of primary sex characteristics (genitalia) and reproductive functions. Sometimes the terms 'sex' and 'gender' are interchanged to mean 'male' or 'female'.

Sexual orientation

A person's sexual attraction to other people, or lack thereof. Along with romantic orientation, this forms a person's orientation identity.

Trans

An umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth.

Trans people may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms, including (but not limited to) transgender, transsexual, gender-queer (GQ), gender-fluid, non-binary, gender-variant, crossdresser, genderless, agender, nongender, third gender, bi-gender, trans man, trans woman, trans masculine, trans feminine and neutrois.

Transgender man

A term used to describe someone who is assigned female at birth but identifies and lives as a man. This may be shortened to trans man, or FTM, an abbreviation for female-to-male.

Transgender woman

A term used to describe someone who is assigned male at birth but identifies and lives as a woman. This may be shortened to trans woman, or MTF, an abbreviation for male-to-female.

Transitioning

The steps a trans person may take to live in the gender with which they identify. Each person's transition will involve different things. For some this involves medical intervention, such as hormone therapy and surgeries, but not all trans people want or are able to have this.

Transitioning also might involve things such as telling friends and family, dressing differently and changing official documents.

Transphobia

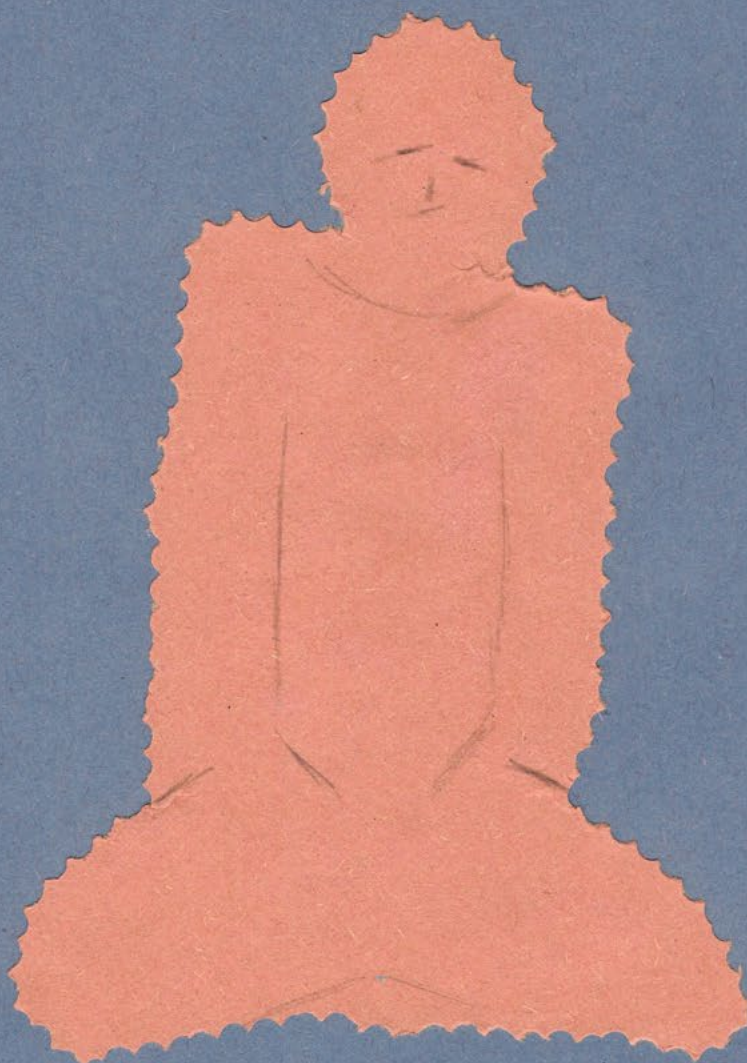
The fear or dislike of someone based on the fact they are trans, including denying their gender identity or refusing to accept it. Transphobia may be targeted at people who are, or who are perceived to be, trans.

Transsexual

This was used in the past as a more medical term (similarly to homosexual) to refer to someone whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth. This term is still used by some although many people prefer the term trans or transgender. ■

* www.ymcadlg.org/glossary-gender-identity/

For more information, or if you have any questions about our Participation work, please email participation@five-rivers.org



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