



LGBTQ (term)

LGBTQ is an initialism for **lesbian**, **gay**, **bisexual**, **transgender**, and **queer**. **LGBTQ** and related initialisms are umbrella terms, originating in the United States, broadly referring to all sexual and gender minorities. Many variants^[a] of the initialism are used to encompass intersex, asexual, aromantic, agender and other identities.^[1]

In the 1990s, gay, lesbian, and bisexual activists adopted the initialism *LGB*. Terminology eventually shifted to *LGBT*, as transgender people gained recognition. Around that time, some activists began to reclaim the term *queer*, seeing it as a more radical and inclusive umbrella term, though others reject it, due to its history as a pejorative. In recognition of this, the 2010s saw the adoption of *LGBTQ*, and other more inclusive variants.

LGBTQ people collectively form the LGBTQ community, though not all LGBTQ people participate in or consider themselves part of a broader community. These labels are not universally agreed upon by everyone that they are intended to include. For example, some intersex people prefer to be included in this grouping, while others do not. Various alternative umbrella terms exist across various cultures, including *queer*; same-gender loving (SGL); and gender, sexual and romantic minorities (GSRM).

Some versions of the term add a plus sign (+) to represent additional identities not captured by the letters within the initialism. Many further variants exist which add additional identities, such as *2SLGBTQ* (for two-spirit), *LGBTQQ* (for queer and questioning), or, rarely, the letters ordered differently, as in *GLBT* and *GLTQ*.

History

The first widely used term, homosexual, now a term used primarily in scientific contexts, has at times carried negative connotations in the United States.^[2] Gay became a popular term in the 1970s.^[3]

As lesbians forged more public identities, the phrase *gay and lesbian* became more common.^[4] A dispute as to whether the primary focus of their political aims should be feminism or gay rights led to the dissolution of some lesbian organizations, including Daughters of Bilitis, which was founded by Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon,^[5] but disbanded in 1970 following disputes over which goal should take precedence.^[6] As equality was a priority for lesbian



A six-band rainbow flag representing the LGBTQ community

Continuation en afsluiting. Ich dagegen vertrate diese unbekannte Sittenlich infamie nicht, da es sich um ein allgemein höher verschlagen und auch persönliche Freiheit geht, welche man zu erlangen und auch nicht für jedes den gewünschten Bereich für das Leben zu wählen - mit dem Zweck der Legalisierung, wie ja in anderen Jurisdicitionen, sowie aller bestehenden Gesetzbücher, bisgeschieden sind. Diese wichtige und gewichtige Sache der Staats- und Rechtshaltung, und habe ich mich die Naturwissenschaften, anthropologische wie historische bestudiert. Diese gesetzlich erforderte, mit in einem eigenen kleinen Kasten abzufestigen, Monosexual; Homosexual; Heterosexual; Differenziertheit. Nun wird der wesentliche Vortheil, wenn hier unter den wissenschaftlichen Gelehrten, das Oscar Brodney'sche Entdeckung, als sehr wichtig geschätzt, und hier ebenfalls Oscar'seine Verdienste, durch die er geboren, und hier ebenfalls Interesse an sozialer Fortschritte, gehabt am haben, der Lebendigkeit, der Kultur. Der mir schon bekannt, mit dem ich alles beweisen kann. Der mir schon bekannt, und das ist eben seine Tugend, welche er hat, dass er keine Theorie, welche er hat,

The first use of the words Monosexual, Homosexual, and Heterosexual in a letter written on 6 May 1866

feminists, disparity of roles between men and women or butch and femme were viewed as patriarchal. Lesbian feminists eschewed gender role play that had been pervasive in bars as well as the perceived chauvinism of gay men; many lesbian feminists refused to work with gay men or take up their causes.^[7]

Lesbians who held the essentialist view that they had been born homosexual and used the descriptor lesbian to define sexual attraction often considered the separatist opinions of lesbian-feminists to be detrimental to the cause of gay rights.^[8] Bisexual and transgender people also sought recognition as legitimate categories within the larger minority community.^[4]

In the late 1970s and the early 1980s, after the elation of change following group action in the 1969 Stonewall riots in New York City, some gays and lesbians became less accepting of bisexual or transgender people.^{[9][10]} The Gay Liberation Front, which was less assimilationist, remained more accepting.^[11] Critics said that transgender people were acting out stereotypes, and bisexuals were simply gay men or lesbian women who were afraid to come out and be honest about their identity.^[9] Each community has struggled to develop its own identity including whether, and how, to align with other gender and sexuality-based communities, at times excluding other subgroups; these conflicts continue to this day.^[10] LGBTQ activists and artists have created posters to raise consciousness about the issue since the movement began.^[12]

From about 1988, activists began to use the initialism LGBT in the United States.^[14] Not until the 1990s within the movement did gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people gain equal respect.^[10] This spurred some organizations to adopt new names, as the GLBT Historical Society did in 1999.^[15] Although the LGBT community has seen much controversy regarding universal acceptance of different member groups (bisexual and transgender individuals, in particular, have sometimes been marginalized by the larger LGBT community), the term LGBT has been a positive symbol of inclusion.^{[16][10]}

Beginning in the 1990s, the term queer began to be reclaimed from its earlier pejorative use, particularly by radical activists who sought to reject causes they viewed as assimilationist, such as marriage, military inclusion and adoption.^[17] Academic fields of study such as queer studies and queer theory build on this reclamation. The term queer is now in use as an umbrella term and as a distinct self-identity term analogous to gay, lesbian, and bisexual.^[18] The initialism LGBT eventually evolved to LGBTQ in recognition of the unique meaning of queer within the community.^{[19][20][21]}

In 2016, GLAAD's Media Reference Guide states that LGBTQ is the preferred initialism, being more inclusive of younger members of the communities who embrace queer as a self-descriptor.^[22] Some people consider queer to be a derogatory term originating in hate speech and reject it, especially among older members of the community.^[23]



LGBTQ publications, pride parades, and related events, such as this stage at Bologna Pride 2008 in Italy, increasingly drop the LGBT initialism instead of regularly adding new letters and dealing with issues of placement of those letters within the new title^[13]

Variants

Many variants of the term *LGBTQ* exist, such as the more inclusive *LGBT+*,^[25] and variations that change the order of the letters or include additional letters. At least some of the components of sexuality (regarding hetero, bi, straight), and also gender are stated to be on different spectrums of sexuality.^{[26][27]} Other common variants also exist, such as *LGBTQIA*, with the *I* standing for *intersex* and the *A* standing for *asexual, aromantic, or agender*,^{[28][29][30]} and *LGBTQIA+*, where "the '+' represents those who are part of the community, but for whom *LGBTQ* does not accurately capture or reflect their identity".^[31]



A 2010 [pride parade](#) in [Plaza de Mayo](#), [Buenos Aires](#), which used the [LGBTIQ](#) initialism^[24]

Longer initialisms have been criticized as confusing or unwieldy,^{[32][33][34]} sometimes being referred to as "alphabet soup",^[35] and mocked with labels such as *LGBTQWERTY*, *LGBTQXYZ*, and *alphabet mafia*.^{[36][37][38]} The implication that the initialism refers to a single community is also controversial.^[39]

Although identical in meaning, *LGBT* may have a more [feminist](#) connotation than *GLBT* as it places the "L" (for "lesbian") first.^[10] *LGBT* may also include additional Qs for "queer" or "questioning" (sometimes abbreviated with a question mark and sometimes used to mean anybody not literally L, G, B or T) producing the variants *LGBTQ* and *LGBTQQ*.^{[40][41][42]}

The order of the letters has not been standardized. In addition to the variations between the positions of the initial "L" or "G", the mentioned, less common letters, if used, may appear in almost any order.^[10] In [Hebrew](#) and [Peninsular Spanish](#), *LGTB* (ב"טהל) is used, that is, reversing the letters "B" and "T".^{[43][44]} Variant terms do not typically represent political differences within the community, but arise simply from the preferences of individuals and groups.^[45]

The terms *pansexual*, *omnisexual*, *fluid* and *queer-identified* are regarded as falling under the umbrella term *bisexual* (and therefore are considered a part of the [bisexual community](#)). Some use *LGBT+* to mean "LGBT and related communities".^[27] Other variants may have a "U" for "unsure"; a "C" for "curious"; another "T" for "[transvestite](#)"; a "TS", "2S", or "2" for "[two-spirit](#)" persons; or an "SA" for "[straight allies](#)".^{[46][47][48][49][50]}

The inclusion of straight allies in the *LGBTQ* initialism has proven controversial, as many straight allies have been accused of using *LGBTQ* advocacy to gain popularity and status in recent years,^[51] and various *LGBTQ* activists have criticised the heteronormative worldview of certain straight allies.^[52] Some may also add a "P" for "[polyamorous](#)" or "[pangender](#)", an "H" for "[HIV-affected](#)", or an "O" for "other".^{[10][53]} The initialism *LGBTIH* has seen use in [India](#) to encompass the [hijra third gender](#) identity and the related subculture.^{[54][55]}

Adding the term *allies* to the initialism has sparked controversy,^{[56][57]} with some seeing the inclusion of ally in place of asexual/aromantic/agender as a form of [LGBT erasure](#).^{[29][58][59]} There is also the acronym *QUILTBAG* (queer and questioning, unsure, intersex, lesbian, transgender and two-spirit,

bisexual, asexual and aromantic, and gay and genderqueer).^[60] Similarly *LGBTIQA+* stands for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual and many other terms (such as non-binary and pansexual)".^{[61][62]}

As of 2025, the Government of Canada's official term is *2SLGBTQI+*, with the first two characters standing for two-spirit.^[63] Trudeau's new initialism was criticized by some social media users.^[64] For some indigenous people, *two-spirit* invokes a combination of identities, including sexual, gender, cultural, and spiritual.^[65] The government previously used *LGBTQ2*.^[63] Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was also criticized for using the *2SLGBTQIA+* initialism.^{[66][67]}

Transgender inclusion

The term *trans** has been adopted by some groups as a more inclusive alternative to "transgender", where *trans* (without the asterisk) has been used to describe trans men and trans women, while *trans** covers all non-cisgender (genderqueer) identities, including transgender, transsexual, genderqueer, genderfluid, non-binary, genderfuck, genderless, agender, non-gendered, third gender, two-spirit, bigender, and trans man and trans woman.^{[68][69]} Likewise, the term transsexual commonly falls under the umbrella term transgender, but some transsexual people object to this.^[10]

Intersex inclusion

Those who add intersex people to LGBTQ groups or organizations may use the extended initialism *LGBTQI*.^{[70][71][72]}

The relationship of intersex to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer communities is complex,^[73] but intersex people are often added to the LGBTQ category to create an LGBTQI community. Some intersex people prefer the initialism *LGBTQI*, while others would rather that they not be included as part of the term.^{[71][74]} Emi Koyama describes how inclusion of intersex in *LGBTQI* can fail to address intersex-specific human rights issues, including creating false impressions "that intersex people's rights are protected" by laws protecting LGBTQ people, and failing to acknowledge that many intersex people are not LGBTQ.^[75]

Asexual, aromantic and agender inclusion

In the early 2010s, asexuality and aromanticism started gaining wider recognition. Around 2015, they were included in the expanded initialism *LGBTQIA*, with the A standing for asexual, aromantic, commonly grouped together as a-spec along with agender.^{[29][30]}

Some people have mistakenly claimed the A stands for "ally", but allies are not a marginalized group and mentions of A for ally have regularly sparked controversy as a form of LGBTQ erasure.^{[56][57]}

Criticism

The initialisms *LGBT* or *GLBT* are not agreed to by everyone that they encompass.^[39] For example, some argue that transgender and transsexual causes are not the same as that of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people.^[76] This argument centers on the idea that being transgender or transsexual has to do more with

gender identity, or a person's understanding of being or not being a man or a woman irrespective of their sexual orientation.^[10] LGB issues can be seen as a matter of sexual orientation or attraction.^[10] These distinctions have been made in the context of political action in which LGB goals, such as same-sex marriage legislation and human rights work (which may not include transgender and intersex people), may be perceived to differ from transgender and transsexual goals.^[10]

A belief in "lesbian and gay separatism", not to be confused with the related "lesbian separatism", holds that lesbians and gay men form, or should form, a community distinct and separate from other groups normally included in the LGBTQ sphere.^[77] While not always appearing in sufficient numbers or organization to be called a movement, separatists are a significant, vocal, and active element within many parts of the LGBTQ community.^{[78][77][79]} In some cases separatists will deny the existence or right to equality of bisexual orientations and of transsexuality,^[78] sometimes leading to public biphobia and transphobia.^{[78][77]} In contrasts to separatists, Peter Tatchell of the LGBTQ human rights group OutRage! argues that to separate the transgender movement from the LGB would be "political madness", stating that:^[80]

Queers are, like transgender people, gender deviant. We don't conform to traditional heterosexist assumptions of male and female behaviour, in that we have sexual and emotional relationships with the same sex. We should celebrate our discordance with mainstream straight norms.

The portrayal of an all-encompassing "LGBT community" or "LGB community" is also disliked by some lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people.^{[81][82]} Some do not subscribe to or approve of the political and social solidarity, and visibility and human rights campaigning that normally goes with it, including LGBT pride marches and events.^{[81][82]} Some of them believe that grouping together people with non-heterosexual orientations perpetuates the myth that being gay/lesbian/bi/asexual/pansexual/etc. makes a person deficiently different from other people.^[81] These people are often less visible compared to more mainstream gay or LGBTQ activists.^{[81][82]}

Since this faction is difficult to distinguish from the heterosexual majority, it is common for people to assume all LGBTQ people support LGBTQ liberation and the visibility of LGBTQ people in society, including the right to live one's life differently from the majority.^{[81][82][83]} In the 1996 book *Anti-Gay*, a collection of essays edited by Mark Simpson, the concept of a 'one-size-fits-all' identity based on LGBT stereotypes is criticized for suppressing the individuality of LGBTQ people.^[84]

Writing in the BBC News Magazine in 2014, Julie Bindel questions whether the various gender groupings now, "bracketed together[,] ... share the same issues, values and goals?" Bindel refers to a number of possible new initialisms for differing combinations and concludes that it may be time for the alliances to either be reformed or go their "separate ways".^[85] In 2015, the slogan "**Drop the T**" was coined to encourage LGBT organizations to stop support of transgender people as they say that sexual orientation, LGB, does not share similarity with gender identity, the T. The campaign has been condemned by many LGBT groups as transphobic.^{[86][87][88][89]}

Alternatives

Queer

Many have expressed desire for an umbrella term to replace existing initialisms.^{[20][78][90]} Queer gained popularity as an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities in the 21st century.^[91] The term remains controversial, particularly among older LGBTQ people who perceive it as offensive due to its historical usage as a slur,^{[91][92]} as well as those who wish to dissociate themselves from queer radicalism,^[93] and those who see it as amorphous or trendy.^[94] Some people feel *queer* is a more politically charged, more powerful term than *LGBT*.^{[95][96]} Recent studies have found that 5–20% of non-heterosexuals and 21–36% of trans, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming people identify as queer.^[91]

Sexual and gender minorities

In academic and professional contexts, *sexual and gender minorities* (*SGM*) is sometimes used as an alternative to *LGBTQ* to include individuals who may not self-identify as LGBTQ (such as men who have sex with men, women who have sex with women, and some intersex people).^[97] A UK government paper favors *SGM* because initials like *LGBTQ* stand for terms that, especially outside the Global North, are "not necessarily inclusive of local understandings and terms used to describe sexual and gender minorities".^[98]

Gender, sexual and romantic minorities (*GSRM*) includes individuals of a minority romantic orientation such as aromanticism.^{[99][100]}

Further umbrella terms

Other rare umbrella terms are Gender and Sexual Diversities (*GSD*),^[101] MOGII (Marginalized Orientations, Gender Identities, and Intersex) and MOGAI (Marginalized Orientations, Gender Alignments and Intersex).^{[102][103]}

SGL (same-gender loving) is sometimes favored among gay male African Americans as a way of distinguishing themselves from what they regard as white-dominated LGBTQ communities.^[104]

Clinical

In public health settings, *MSM* ("men who have sex with men") is clinically used to describe men who have sex with other men without referring to their sexual orientation, with *WSW* ("women who have sex with women") also used as an analogous term.^{[105][106]}

MVPFAFF

MVPFAFF is an abbreviation for Māhū, Vakasalewa, Palopa, Fa'afafine, Akava'ine, Fakaleitī (Leiti), and Fakafafine. This term was developed by Phylesha Brown-Acton in 2010 at the Asia Pacific Games Human Rights Conference.^[107] This refers to those in the rainbow Pacific Islander community, who may or may not identify with the LGBTQ initialism.^[108]

See also



- [LGBTQ music](#)
- [Androphilia and gynephilia](#)
- [Gender and sexual diversity](#)
- [LGBTQ symbols](#)
- [Takatāpui – the Māori language equivalent of LGBTQ](#)

Notes

a. Other common variants include LGBT, LGBT+, LGBTQ+, LGBTQIA, LGBTQIA+, 2SLGBTQ, 2SLGBTQ+, GLBT, GLBTQ, LGBTQQ, LGBTI, LGBTI+

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External links

- Archives (<http://www.glb tqarchive.com/>) of glbtq.com, the GLBTQ encyclopedia
 - Directory of U.S. and international LGBT Community Centers (<https://web.archive.org/web/20081010152330/http://directory.lgbtcenters.org/>) (archived 10 October 2008)
 - American Psychological Association's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns Office (<http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/index.aspx>)
 - LGBTQIA+ Wiki (<https://lgbtqia.wiki/>) (alternative website (<https://new.lgbtqia.wiki/>))
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Retrieved from "[https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=LGBTQ_\(term\)&oldid=1327854135](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=LGBTQ_(term)&oldid=1327854135)"



Gay

Gay is a term that primarily refers to a homosexual person or the trait of being homosexual. The term originally meant "carefree", "cheerful", or "bright and showy".^[1]

While scant usage referring to male homosexuality dates to the late 19th century, that meaning became increasingly common by the mid-20th century.^[2] In modern English, *gay* has come to be used as an adjective, and as a noun, referring to the community, practices and cultures associated with homosexuality. In the 1960s, *gay* became the word favored by homosexual men to describe their sexual orientation.^[3] By the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st century, the word *gay* was recommended by major LGBTQ groups and style guides to describe people attracted to members of the same sex,^{[4][5]} although it is more commonly used to refer specifically to men.^[6]



The rainbow flag, a common symbol representing gay people, or more recently, the overall LGBTQ community.

Since the 1980s, a new, pejorative use became prevalent in some parts of the world. Among younger speakers, the word has a meaning ranging from derision (e.g., equivalent to "rubbish" or "stupid") to a light-hearted mockery or ridicule (e.g., equivalent to "weak", "unmanly", or "boring"). The extent to which these usages still retain connotations of homosexuality has been debated and harshly criticized.^{[7][8]} Because of the strongly offensive and homophobic insult, the use of *gay* as an insult is generally considered socially inappropriate, sometimes even legally restricted, especially in Canada.

History

Overview

The word *gay* arrived in English during the 12th century from Old French *gai*, most likely deriving ultimately from a Germanic source.^[2]

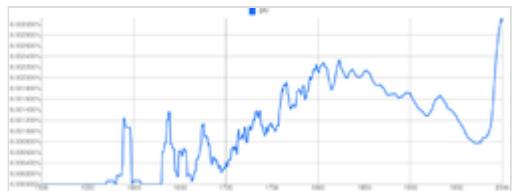
In English, the word's primary meaning was "joyful", "carefree", "bright and showy", and the word was very commonly used with this meaning in speech and literature. For example, the optimistic 1890s are still often referred to as the Gay Nineties. The title of the 1938 French ballet *Gaîté Parisienne* ("Parisian Gaiety"), which became the 1941 Warner Brothers movie, *The Gay Parisian*,^[10] also illustrates this connotation. It was apparently not until the 20th century that the word began to be used to mean specifically "homosexual", although it had earlier acquired sexual connotations.^[2]

The derived abstract noun *gaiety* remains largely free of sexual connotations and has, in the past, been used in the names of places of entertainment, such as the Gaiety Theatre in Dublin.

Sexualization



Cartoon from *Punch* magazine in 1857 illustrating the use of "gay" as a colloquial euphemism for being a prostitute;^[9] one woman says to the other (who looks glum), "How long have you been gay?" The poster on the wall is for *La Traviata*, an opera about a courtesan



Usage statistics from English books, according to [Google Ngram Viewer](#)

The word may have started to acquire associations of sexual immorality as early as the 14th century, but had certainly acquired them by the 17th.^[2] By the late 17th century, it had acquired the specific meaning of "addicted to pleasures and dissipations",^[11] an extension of its primary meaning of "carefree" implying "uninhibited by moral constraints". A *gay woman* was a prostitute, a *gay man* a womanizer, and a *gay house* a brothel.^{[12][2]} An example is a letter read to a London court in 1885 during the prosecution of brothel madam and procuress Mary Jeffries that had been written by a girl while enslaved inside of a French brothel:

I write to tell you it is a gay house ... Some captains came in the other night, and the mistress wanted us to sleep with them.^[13]

The use of *gay* to mean "homosexual" was often an extension of its application to prostitution: a *gay boy* was a young man or boy serving male clients.^[14]

Similarly, a *gay cat* was a young male apprenticed to an older hobo and commonly exchanging sex and other services for protection and tutelage.^[2] The application to homosexuality was also an extension of the word's sexualized connotation of "carefree and uninhibited", which implied a willingness to disregard conventional or respectable sexual mores. Such usage, documented as early as the 1920s, was likely present before the 20th century,^[2] although it was initially more commonly used to imply heterosexually unconstrained lifestyles, as in the once-common phrase "*gay Lothario*",^[15] or in the title of the book and film *The Gay Falcon* (1941), which concerns a womanizing detective whose first name is "Gay". Similarly, Fred Gilbert and G. H. MacDermott's music hall song of the 1880s, "Charlie Dilke Upset the Milk" – "Master Dilke upset the milk, when taking it home to Chelsea; the papers say that Charlie's gay, rather a wilful wag!" – referred to Sir Charles Dilke's alleged heterosexual impropriety.^[16] Giving testimony in court in 1889, the prostitute John Saul stated: "I occasionally do odd-jobs for different gay people."^[17]

Well into the mid-20th century a middle-aged bachelor could be described as "gay", indicating that he was unattached and therefore free, without any implication of homosexuality. This usage could apply to women too. The British comic strip *Jane*, first published in the 1930s, described the adventures of *Jane Gay*. Far from implying homosexuality, it referred to her free-wheeling lifestyle with plenty of boyfriends (while also punning on Lady Jane Grey).

A passage from Gertrude Stein's *Miss Furr & Miss Skeene* (1922) is possibly the first traceable published use of the word to refer to a homosexual relationship. According to Linda Wagner-Martin (*Favored Strangers: Gertrude Stein and her Family*, 1995) the portrait "featured the sly repetition of the word gay, used with sexual intent for one of the first times in linguistic history", and Edmund Wilson (1951, quoted by James Mellow in *Charmed Circle*, 1974) agreed.^[18] For example:

They were ... gay, they learned little things that are things in being gay, ... they were quite regularly gay.

—Gertrude Stein, 1922

The word continued to be used with the dominant meaning of "carefree", as evidenced by the title of The Gay Divorcee (1934), a musical film about a heterosexual couple.

Bringing Up Baby (1938) was the first film to use the word *gay* in an apparent reference to homosexuality. In a scene in which Cary Grant's character's clothes have been sent to the cleaners, he is forced to wear a woman's feather-trimmed robe. When another character asks about his robe, he responds, "Because I just went *gay* all of a sudden!" Since this was a mainstream film at a time, when the use of the word to refer to cross-dressing (and, by extension, homosexuality) would still be unfamiliar to most film-goers, the line can also be interpreted to mean, "I just decided to do something frivolous."^[19]

In 1950, the earliest reference found to date for the word *gay* as a self-described name for homosexuals came from Alfred A. Gross, executive secretary for the George W. Henry Foundation, who said in the June 1950 issue of SIR magazine: "I have yet to meet a happy homosexual. They have a way of describing themselves as gay but the term is a misnomer. Those who are habitues of the bars frequented by others of the kind, are about the saddest people I've ever seen."^[20]

Shift to specifically *homosexual*

By the mid-20th century, *gay* was well established in reference to hedonistic and uninhibited lifestyles^[11] and its antonym *straight*, which had long had connotations of seriousness, respectability, and conventionality, had now acquired specific connotations of heterosexuality.^[21] In the case of *gay*, other connotations of frivolousness and showiness in dress ("gay apparel") led to association with camp and effeminacy. This association no doubt helped the gradual narrowing in scope of the term towards its current dominant meaning, which was at first confined to subcultures. *Gay* was the preferred term since other terms, such as queer, were felt to be derogatory.^[22] Homosexual is perceived as excessively clinical,^{[23][24][25]} since the sexual orientation now commonly referred to as "homosexuality" was at that time a mental illness diagnosis in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).

In mid-20th century Britain, where male homosexuality was illegal until the Sexual Offences Act 1967, to openly identify someone as homosexual was considered very offensive and an accusation of serious criminal activity. Additionally, none of the words describing any aspect of homosexuality were considered suitable for polite society. Consequently, a number of euphemisms were used to hint at suspected homosexuality. Examples include "sporty" girls and "artistic" boys,^[26] all with the stress deliberately on the otherwise completely innocent adjective.

The 1960s marked the transition in the predominant meaning of the word *gay* from that of "carefree" to the current "homosexual". In the British comedy-drama film *Light Up the Sky!* (1960), directed by Lewis Gilbert, about the antics of a British Army searchlight squad during World War II, there is a scene in the mess hut where the character played by Benny Hill proposes an after-dinner toast. He begins, "I'd like to propose..." at which point a fellow diner interjects "Who to?", implying a proposal of marriage. The Benny Hill character responds, "Not to you for start, you ain't my type". He then adds in mock doubt, "Oh, I don't know, you're rather gay on the quiet."

By 1963, a new sense of the word *gay* was known well enough to be used by Albert Ellis in his book *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Man-Hunting*. Similarly, Hubert Selby Jr. in his 1964 novel *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, could write that a character "took pride in being a homosexual by feeling intellectually and esthetically superior to those (especially women) who weren't gay...."^[27] Later examples of the original meaning of the word being used in popular culture include the theme song to the 1960–1966 animated TV series *The Flintstones*, wherein viewers are assured that they will "have a gay old time." Similarly, the 1966 Herman's Hermits song "No Milk Today", which became a Top 10 hit in the UK and a Top 40 hit in the U.S., included the lyric "No milk today, it was not always so; *The company was gay*, we'd turn night into day."^[28]

In June 1967, the headline of the review of the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album in the British daily newspaper *The Times* stated, "The Beatles revive hopes of progress in pop music with their gay new LP".^[29] The same year, the Kinks recorded "David Watts", which is about a schoolmate of Ray Davies, but is named after a homosexual concert promoter they knew, with the ambiguous line "he is so gay and fancy-free" attesting to the word's double meaning at that time.^[30] As late as 1970, the first episode of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* has the demonstrably straight Mary Richards' neighbor Phyllis breezily declaiming that Mary is still "young and gay", but in an episode about two years later, Phyllis is told that her brother is "gay", which is immediately understood to mean that he is homosexual.

Homosexuality

Sexual orientation, identity, behavior

The American Psychological Association defines sexual orientation as "an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women, or both sexes," ranging "along a continuum, from exclusive attraction to the other sex to exclusive attraction to the same sex."^[31] Sexual orientation can also be "discussed in terms of three categories: heterosexual (having emotional, romantic, or sexual attractions to members of the other sex), gay/lesbian (having emotional, romantic, or sexual attractions to members of one's own sex), and bisexual (having emotional, romantic, or sexual attractions to both men and women)."^[31]



The rainbow flag is a symbol of gay pride

According to Rosario, Schrimshaw, Hunter, Braun (2006), "the development of a lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) sexual identity is a complex and often difficult process. Unlike members of other minority groups (e.g., ethnic and racial minorities), most LGB individuals are not raised in a community of similar others

from whom they learn about their identity and who reinforce and support that identity. Rather, LGB individuals are often raised in communities that are either ignorant of or openly hostile toward homosexuality."^[32]

The British gay rights activist Peter Tatchell has argued that the term *gay* is merely a cultural expression which reflects the current status of homosexuality within a given society, and claiming that "Queer, gay, homosexual ... in the long view, they are all just temporary identities. One day, we will not need them at all."^[33]

If a person engages in sexual activity with a partner of the same sex but does not self-identify as gay, terms such as 'closeted', 'discreet', or 'bi-curious' may apply. Conversely, a person may identify as gay without having had sex with a same-sex partner. Possible choices include identifying as gay socially, while choosing to be celibate, or while anticipating a first homosexual experience. Further, a bisexual person might also identify as "gay" but others may consider *gay* and *bisexual* to be mutually exclusive. There are some who are drawn to the same sex but neither engage in sexual activity nor identify as gay; these could have the term asexual applied, even though *asexual* generally can mean no attraction, or involve heterosexual attraction but no sexual activity.

Terminology

Some reject the term *homosexual* as an identity-label because they find it too clinical-sounding,^{[24][25][34]} they believe it is too focused on physical acts rather than romance or attraction, or too reminiscent of the era when homosexuality was considered a mental illness. Conversely, some reject the term *gay* as an identity-label because they perceive the cultural connotations to be undesirable or because of the negative connotations of the slang usage of the word.

Style guides, like the following from the Associated Press, call for *gay* over *homosexual*:

Gay: Used to describe men and women attracted to the same sex, though *lesbian* is the more common term for women. Preferred over *homosexual* except in clinical contexts or references to sexual activity.^[6]

There are those who reject the gay label for reasons other than shame or negative connotations. Writer Alan Bennett^[35] and fashion icon André Leon Talley^[36] are out and open queer men who reject being labeled gay, believing the gay label confines them.

Gay community vs. LGBTQ community

Starting in the mid-1980s in the United States, a conscious effort was underway within what was then commonly called the *gay community*, to add the term *lesbian* to the name of organizations that involved both male and female homosexuals, and to use the terminology of *gay and lesbian*, *lesbian/gay*, or a similar phrase when referring to that community. Accordingly, organizations such as the National Gay Task Force became the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. For many feminist lesbians, it was also important that *lesbian* be named first, to avoid the implication that women were secondary to men, or an afterthought.^[37] In the 1990s, this was followed by a similar effort to include terminology specifically including bisexual, transgender, intersex, and other people, reflecting the intra-community debate about the inclusion of these other sexual minorities as part of the same movement. Consequently, the

portmanteau *les/bi/gay* has sometimes been used, and initialisms such as *LGBT*, *LGBTQ*, *LGBTQI*, and others have come into common use by such organizations, and most news organizations have formally adopted some such variation.

Descriptor

The term *gay* can also be used as an adjective to describe things related to homosexual men, or things which are part of the said culture. For example, the term "gay bar" describes the bar which either caters primarily to a homosexual male clientele or is otherwise part of homosexual male culture.

Using it to describe an object, such as an item of clothing, suggests that it is particularly flamboyant, often on the verge of being gaudy and garish. This usage predates the association of the term with homosexuality but has acquired different connotations since the modern usage developed.



"Bar Revenge", a gay bar in Brighton, England

Use as a noun

The label *gay* was originally used purely as an adjective ("he is a gay man" or "he is gay"). The term has also been in use as a noun with the meaning "homosexual man" since the 1970s, most commonly in the plural for an unspecified group, as in "gays are opposed to that policy." This usage is somewhat common in the names of organizations such as Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) and Children of Lesbians And Gays Everywhere (COLAGE). It is sometimes used to refer to individuals, as in "he is a gay" or "two gays were there too," although this may be perceived as derogatory.^[38] It was also used for comedic effect by the Little Britain character Dafydd Thomas. To avoid pejorative connotations, the adjective form can be used instead, e.g. "gay person" or "gay people".

Generalized pejorative use

When used with a derisive attitude (e.g., "that was so gay"), the word *gay* is pejorative. Though retaining other meanings, its use among young people as a term of disparagement is common; 97 percent of American LGBTQ middle and high school students reported hearing its negative use as of 2021.^{[7][39][40]}

This pejorative usage has its origins in the late 1970s, with the word gaining a pejorative sense by association with the previous meaning: homosexuality was seen as inferior or undesirable.^[41] Beginning in the 1980s, and especially in the late 1990s, the usage as a generic insult became common among young people.^[7] Use of "gay" in some circumstances continues to be considered a pejorative in present day. As recently as 2023, the American Psychological Association described language like "that's so gay" as heterosexist and heteronormative.^[42]

The pejorative usage of the word "gay" has been criticized as homophobic. A 2006 BBC ruling by the Board of Governors over the negative use of the word by Chris Moyles advises that "caution on its use"; however, it acknowledges its common use among young people to mean "rubbish" or "lame".^[39]

The BBC's ruling was heavily criticized by the Minister for Children, Kevin Brennan, who stated in response that "the casual use of homophobic language by mainstream radio DJs" is:

"too often seen as harmless banter instead of the offensive insult that it really represents. ... To ignore this problem is to collude in it. The blind eye to casual name-calling, looking the other way because it is the easy option, is simply intolerable."^[43]

Shortly after the Moyles incident, a campaign against homophobia was launched in Britain under the slogan "homophobia is gay", playing on the double meaning of the word "gay" in youth culture, as well as the popular perception that vocal homophobia is common among closeted homosexuals.^[44]

The United States had its own popular campaign against the pejorative use of "gay" called *Think B4 You Speak*. It was created in 2008 in partnership with the Advertising Council, GLSEN, and Arnold NYC. This initiative created television, radio, print and web PSAs with goals "to motivate teens to become allies in the efforts to raise awareness, stop using anti-LGBT language and safely intervene when they are present and anti-LGBT harassment and behavior occurs."^[45]

Research has looked into the use and effect of the pejorative. In a 2013 article published in the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, University of Michigan researchers Michael Woodford, Alex Kulick and Perry Silverschanz, alongside Appalachian State University professor Michael L. Howell, argued that the pejorative use of the word "gay" was a microaggression.^[46] They found that college-age men were more likely to repeat the word pejoratively if their friends said it, while they were less likely to say it if they had lesbian, gay or bisexual peers.^[46] A 2019 study used data collected in a 2013 survey of cisgender LGBQ+ college students to evaluate the effects of microaggressions like "that's so gay" and "no homo."^[47] It found that increased exposure to the phrase "that's so gay" was significantly associated with greater developmental challenge (a measure of academic stressors).^[47] Research published in the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* in 2021 finds that use of anti-gay banter among Midwestern middle and high school students such as "that's so gay" is perceived less negatively and more humorously if the person saying it is a friend.^[48]

Parallels in other languages and cultures

- The concept of a "gay identity" and the use of the term gay may not be used or understood the same way in non-Westernised cultures, since modes of sexuality may differ from those prevalent in the West.^[49]
- For example, two-spirit is a term used by some Indigenous people in the United States and Canada to describe Indigenous people in their communities who do not conform to Western expressions of gender and sexuality. It functions as a modern, pan-Indian umbrella term, much like the use of queer or LGBTQ by non-Natives. Some Indigenous people identify as both two-spirit and gay.^{[50][51]} For some traditional Native Americans, who usually use terms in their own languages for these individuals rather than the English neologism, two-spirit is not interchangeable with the "LGBT Native American" or "gay Indian"^[52] sexual and gender identity labels because it is a sacred, spiritual, and ceremonial role that is recognized and confirmed only by tribal elders of the two-spirit person's ceremonial community.^[50]
- The German equivalent for "gay", "schwul", which is etymologically derived from "schwül" (hot, humid), also acquired the pejorative meaning within youth culture.^[53]

See also



- [Deviance \(sociology\)](#) – Action or behavior that violates social norms
- [Gay bashing](#) – Violence against and bullying of LGBTQ people
- [Gay gene \(Xq28\)](#)
- [Hate speech](#)
- [Human sexuality](#)
 - [Human female sexuality](#)
 - [Human male sexuality](#)
- [Human Rights Campaign](#) – LGBTQ civil rights advocacy group
- [Labeling theory](#) – Sociological theory
- [LGBTQ themes in mythology](#)
- [List of gay, lesbian or bisexual people](#)
- [List of LGBTQ events](#)
- [Men who have sex with men](#)
- [Opposition to LGBTQ rights](#)
- [Religion and sexuality](#)
- [Sexual practices between men](#)
- [Sexual practices between women](#)
- [Social stigma](#)
- [Tu'er Shen](#) – Chinese deity of homosexual love and sex

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External links

-  The dictionary definition of [Gay](#) at Wiktionary
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Gay men

Gay men are male homosexuals.^[1] Historic terminology for gay men has included inverts and uranians.

Gay men continue to face significant discrimination in large parts of the world, particularly in parts of Asia and Africa. In the Western world, many gay men still experience discrimination in their daily lives,^[2] though some openly gay men have reached national success and prominence, including Apple CEO Tim Cook and heads of state or government such as Edgars Rinkēvičs (president of Latvia since 2023).

The word *gay* is recommended by LGBTQ groups and style guides to describe all people exclusively attracted to members of the same sex,^[3] while lesbian refers specifically to female homosexuals, and gay men to male homosexuals.^[4]



A gay couple at a pride event



Two interlocked Mars symbols representing male homosexuality.

Male homosexuality in world history

Some scholars argue that the terms "homosexual" and "gay" are problematic when applied to men in ancient cultures since, for example, neither Greeks or Romans possessed any one word covering the same semantic range as the modern concept of "homosexuality".^{[5][6]} Furthermore, there were diverse sexual practices that varied in acceptance depending on time and place.^[5] Other scholars argue that there are significant similarities between ancient and modern male homosexuals.^{[7][8]}

In cultures influenced by Abrahamic religions, the law and the church established sodomy as a transgression against divine law or a crime against nature. The condemnation of anal sex between males, however, predates Christian belief.^[9] Throughout the majority of Christian history, most Christian theologians and denominations have considered homosexual behavior as immoral or sinful.^{[10][11]} Condemnation existed in ancient Greece; for instance Plato, in his Laws, described male homosexuality as 'unnatural' and argued for its prohibition.^[12]

Many historical figures, including Socrates, Lord Byron, Edward II, and Hadrian,^[13] have had terms such as gay or bisexual applied to them. Some scholars, such as Michel Foucault, have regarded this as risking the anachronistic introduction of a contemporary construction of sexuality foreign to their times,^[14] though other scholars challenge this.^{[15][8][7]}

Africa



Khnumhotep and Niankhkhnum nose-kissing

The first recorded possible homosexual male couple in history is commonly deemed to be Khnumhotep and Niankhkhnum, an ancient Egyptian couple, who lived around 2400 BCE. The pair are portrayed in a nose-kissing position, the most intimate pose in Egyptian art, surrounded by what appear to be their heirs.^[16] The 6th- or 7th-century Ashmolean Parchment AN 1981.940 provides the only example in the Coptic language of a love spell between men.^[17] More recently, the European colonization of Africa resulted in the introduction of anti-sodomy laws, and is generally regarded as the central reason why African nations have such stringent laws against gay men today.^[18]

Three countries or jurisdictions have imposed the death penalty for gay men in Africa. These include Mauritania and several regions in Nigeria and Jubaland.^{[19][20][21]}

Americas

As is true of many other non-Western cultures, it is difficult to determine the extent to which Western notions of sexual orientation apply to Pre-Columbian cultures. Evidence of homoerotic sexual acts between men has been found in many pre-conquest civilizations in Latin America, such as the Aztecs, Mayas, Quechuas, Moches, Zapotecs, the Incas, and the Tupinambá of Brazil.^{[22][23][24]} In fact, in Aztec mythology, the deity Xochipilli was a symbol of gay men and male prostitutes.^[25]



Pre-Columbian ceramic of oral sex

The Spanish conquistadors expressed horror at discovering sodomy openly practiced among native men and used it as evidence of their supposed inferiority.^[26] The conquistadors talked extensively of sodomy among the natives to depict them as savages and hence justify their conquest and forced conversion to Christianity. As a result of the growing influence and power of the conquistadors, many Native leaders started condemning homosexual acts themselves. During the period following European colonization, homosexuality was prosecuted by the Inquisition, sometimes leading to death sentences on the charges of sodomy, and the practices became clandestine. Many homosexual men went into heterosexual marriages to keep appearances, and some turned to the clergy to escape public scrutiny.^[27]

During the Mexican Inquisition, after a series of denunciations, authorities arrested 123 men in 1658 on suspicion of homosexuality. Although many escaped, the Royal Criminal Court sentenced fourteen men from different social and ethnic backgrounds to death by public burning, in accordance to the law passed by Isabella the Catholic in 1497. The sentences were carried out together on one day, 6 November 1658. The records of these trials and those that occurred in 1660, 1673 and 1687, suggest that Mexico City, like many other large cities at the time had an active underworld.^{[27][28]}

East Asia



Two young men about to have anal sex. Qing China, date unknown.

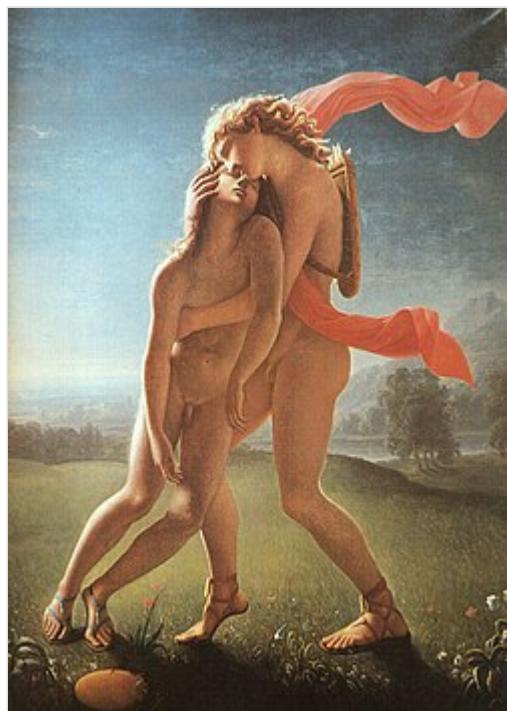
In East Asia, same-sex relations between men has been noted since the earliest recorded history. Homosexuality in China, known as the *passions of the cut peach* and various other euphemisms, has been recorded since approximately 600 BCE. Male homosexuality was mentioned in many famous works of Chinese literature. The instances of same-sex affection and sexual interactions described in the classical novel Dream of the Red Chamber seem as familiar to observers in the present as do equivalent stories of romances between heterosexual people during the same period. Confucianism, being primarily a social and political philosophy, focused little on sexuality, whether homosexual or heterosexual. Ming dynasty literature, such as *Bian Er Chai* (弁而釵 / 弁而钗), portray homosexual relationships between men as more enjoyable and more "harmonious" than heterosexual relationships.^[29] Writings from the Liu Song dynasty by Wang Shunu claimed that homosexuality was as common as heterosexuality in the late 3rd century China.^[30] Opposition to male homosexuality in China originates in the medieval Tang dynasty (618–907), attributed to the rising influence of Christian and Islamic values,^[31] but did not become fully established until the Westernization efforts of the late Qing dynasty and the Republic of China.^[32]

Europe

Classical period

The earliest Western documents (in the form of literary works, art objects, and mythographic materials) concerning same-sex male relationships are derived from ancient Greece. Certain city-states prohibited it while others were ambiguous or allowed it.^[33] In Athens, laws were eventually enacted to curb pederasty and homosexuality in general, but not prohibit every instance of it.^[34]

In Ancient Rome, male homosexuality is documented through pederasty, but male sexual passivity was criticized; pederastic attentions were considered legitimate only if it is directed towards current or former slaves.^[35] The Hellenophile emperor Hadrian is renowned for his relationship with Antinous, but the Christian emperor Theodosius I decreed a law on 6 August 390, condemning passive males to be burned at the stake.^{[36][37]} In 558 C.E., The Emperor Justinian expanded the proscription to the active partner as well, warning that such conduct can lead to the destruction of cities through the "wrath of God"^[38]



The Death of Hyacinthos by Jean Broc (1801)

Some scholars argue that there are examples of male homosexual love in ancient literature, such as Achilles and Patroclus in the *Iliad*.^[39]

Renaissance



Apollon et Cyparisso by Claude Marie Dubufe, 1821

During the Renaissance, wealthy cities in northern Italy—Florence and Venice in particular—were renowned for their widespread practice of same-sex love, engaged in by a considerable part of the male population and constructed along the classical pattern of Greece and Rome.^{[40][41]} But even as many of the male population were engaging in same-sex relationships, the authorities, under the aegis of the Officers of the Night court, were prosecuting, fining, and imprisoning a good portion of that population. From the second half of the 13th century, death was the punishment for male homosexuality in most of Europe.^[42] The relationships of socially prominent figures, such as King James I and the Duke of Buckingham, served to highlight the issue,^[43]

including in anonymously authored street pamphlets: "The world is chang'd I know not how, For men Kiss Men, not Women now; ... Of J. the First and Buckingham: He, true it is, his Wives Embraces fled, To slabber his lov'd Ganimede" (*Mundus Foppensis, or The Fop Display'd*, 1691).

Middle East

In ancient Sumer, a set of priests known as gala worked in the temples of the goddess Inanna, where they performed elegies and lamentations.^{[44]:285} Gala took female names, spoke in the eme-sal dialect, which was traditionally reserved for women, and appear to have engaged in homosexual intercourse.^[45] The Sumerian sign for gala was a ligature of the signs for "penis" and "anus".^[45] One Sumerian proverb reads: "When the gala wiped off his ass [he said], 'I must not arouse that which belongs to my mistress [i.e., Inanna].'"^[45] In later Mesopotamian cultures, kurgarrū and assinnu were male servants of the goddess Ishtar (Inanna's East Semitic equivalent), who dressed in female clothing and performed war dances in Ishtar's temples.^[45] Several Akkadian proverbs seem to suggest that they may have also engaged in homosexual intercourse.^[45] In ancient Assyria, male homosexuality is documented. It is thought that ancient Assyria (2nd millennium BC to 1st millennium AD) viewed homosexuality as negative and at least criminal,^[46] with the religious codes of Zoroastrianism forbidding homosexuality.^[47] Some religious texts contain prayers for divine blessings on homosexual relationships.^[48] The *Almanac of Incantations* contained prayers favoring on an equal basis the love of a man for a woman, of a woman for a man, and of a man for man.^[49]



An illustration from the 19th-century book *Sawaqub al-Manaqib* depicting homosexual sex between young men (see: Gender and sexual minorities in the Ottoman Empire)

Gay men in modern Western history

The use of *gay* to mean a "homosexual" man was first used as an extension of its application to prostitution: a *gay boy* was a young man or adolescent serving male clients.^[50] Similarly, a *gay cat* was a young man apprenticed to an older *hobo* and commonly exchanging sex and other services for protection and tutelage. The application to homosexuality was also an extension of the word's sexualized connotation of "uninhibited", which implied a willingness to disregard conventional *sexual mores*. In court in 1889, the prostitute John Saul stated: "I occasionally do odd-jobs for different gay people."^[51]

Bringing Up Baby (1938) was the first film to use the word *gay* in an apparent reference to homosexuality. In a scene in which Cary Grant's character's clothes have been sent to the cleaners, he is forced to wear a woman's feather-trimmed robe. When another character asks about his robe, he responds, "Because I just went *gay* all of a sudden!" Since this was a mainstream film at a time, when the use of the word to refer to cross-dressing (and, by extension, homosexuality) would still be unfamiliar to most film-goers, the line can also be interpreted to mean, "I just decided to do something frivolous."^[52]

In 1950, the earliest reference found to date for the word *gay* as a self-described name for male homosexuals came from Alfred A. Gross, executive secretary for the George W. Henry Foundation, who said in the June 1950 issue of *Sir* magazine: "I have yet to meet a happy homosexual. They have a way of describing themselves as gay, but the term is a misnomer. Those who are habitues of the bars frequented by others of the kind, are about the saddest people I've ever seen."^[53]

Gay men in the Holocaust



A pink triangle was worn by gay men during the Holocaust.

Gay men were one of the primary victims of the Nazi Holocaust. Historically, the earliest legal step towards the Nazi persecution of male homosexuality was 1871's Paragraph 175, a law passed after the unification of the German Empire. Paragraph 175 read: "An unnatural sex act committed between persons of male sex ... is punishable by imprisonment; the loss of civil rights might also be imposed." The law was interpreted in varying ways in Germany until 23 April 1880, when the Reichsgericht ruled that criminal homosexual acts involved either anal, oral, or intercrural sex between two men. Anything less (such as kissing and cuddling) was deemed harmless play.^{[54]:240}

Franz Gürtner, the *Reich* Justice Minister amended Paragraph 175 to address "loopholes" in the law after the Night of the Long Knives. The 1935 version of Paragraph 175 declared "expressions" of homosexuality as prosecutable crimes. The most important change to the law was the definitional shift of male homosexuality from "An unnatural sex act committed between persons of male sex" to instead "A male who commits a sex offense with another male." This expanded the reach of the law to persecute gay men as a people group, rather than male homosexuality as a sexual act. Kissing, mutual masturbation and love-letters between men were now seen as legitimate reasons for the police to make arrests. The law never defined a "sex offence", leaving it to interpretation.^{[54]:240–242}

Between 1933 and 1945, an estimated 100,000 men were arrested as homosexuals under the Nazi regime, of whom some 50,000 were officially sentenced. Most of these men served time in prison, while an estimated 5,000 to 15,000 were incarcerated in Nazi concentration camps.^[55] Rüdiger Lautmann found that the death rate of homosexuals in concentration camps may have been as high as 60%.^[56] Gay men in the camps suffered an unusual degree of cruelty by their captors and were regularly used as the subjects for Nazi medical experiments as scientists tried to find a "cure" for homosexuality.^[57]

AIDS crisis in the United States

The HIV/AIDS epidemic is considered the deadliest period in modern history for gay men, and the generation of young gay men who died in the crisis is known as the "lost generation".^[58] At its start, the epidemic was particularly severe in the United States. In 1980, San Francisco resident Ken Horne was reported to the CDC with Kaposi's sarcoma (KS). He was retroactively identified as the first patient of the AIDS epidemic in the US.^[59] In 1981, Lawrence Mass became the first journalist in the world to write about the epidemic in the New York Native.^[60] Later that year, the CDC reported a cluster of Pneumocystis pneumonia in five gay men in Los Angeles.^[61] The next month, The New York Times ran the headline: "Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals".^[62] The illness was soon termed *Gay Related Immunodeficiency* (G.R.I.D.), because it was believed to only affect gay men.^[63] In June 1982, Larry Kramer founded the Gay Men's Health Crisis to provide food and support to gay men dying in New York City. During the early years of the AIDS crisis, gay men were treated pitilessly in hospital quarantine wards, left alone without contact for weeks at a time.^[64]

During the early years of the epidemic, there was significant misinformation surrounding the illness. Rumors swirled that being in the same room or being touched by a gay man could lead one to contract HIV. It was not until April 1984 that the U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Margaret Heckler announced in a press conference that the American scientist Robert Gallo had discovered the *probable cause* of AIDS, the retrovirus which would be named *human immunodeficiency virus* or HIV. In September 1985, during his second term in office, US President Ronald Reagan publicly mentioned AIDS for the first time after being asked about his administration's lack of medical research funding for the crisis.^{[65][66]} Four months later, Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, stated, "One million Americans have already been infected with the virus and that this number will jump to at least 2 million or 3 million within 5 to 10 years."^[67] Gay men, trans women, and bisexual men faced the brunt of deaths during the first decade of the crisis. Activists claimed the government was responding to the epidemic with apathy because of the perceived "social undesirability" of these groups. To address this perceived apathy, activists such as Vito Russo, Larry Kramer, and others,^[68] took more militant approaches to AIDS activism, organizing direct



ACT UP was founded by Larry Kramer to fight for medical funding and research on the HIV/AIDS crisis.



1990 ACT UP radical direct action protesting the Bush Administration's slow pace of federal research for AIDS

action through organizations like ACT UP in order to force pharmaceutical corporations and government agencies to respond to the epidemic with more urgency. ACT UP eventually grew into a transnational organization, with 140 chapters around the world,^[69] while the AIDS crisis ultimately became a global epidemic. By 2019, complications related to AIDS had taken 32.7 million lives worldwide.^[70]

Legal status of gay men in modern society

Africa

There are 54 nations in Africa recognized by the United Nations and/or African Union. In 34 of these states, male homosexuality is explicitly outlawed.^[71] In a 2015 report, Human Rights Watch noted that in Benin and the Central African Republic, male homosexuality is not explicitly outlawed, but both have laws which are applied differently for gay men than for straight men.^[72] In Mauritania, northern Nigeria, Somaliland, and Somalia, male homosexuality is punishable by death.^{[71][73]} In Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Uganda, gay men receive life imprisonment for homosexual acts, though the law is not regularly enforced in Sierra Leone. In Nigeria, legislation has also made it illegal for family members, allies, and friends of gay men to openly express support for homosexuality, and the country is generally recognized for its "cold-blooded" attitudes toward gay men.^{[74][75]} Nigerian law states that any heterosexual person "who administers, witnesses, abets or aids" male homosexual activity should receive a 10-year jail sentence.^[76] In Uganda, Christian fundamentalist organizations from the United States funded the introduction of Kill the Gays legislation to impose the death penalty for gay men.^[77] The bill was ruled unconstitutional by the Ugandan Supreme Court in 2014, but retains support in the country and has been reconsidered for implementation.^{[78][79]} Of all countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Africa has the most liberal attitudes toward gay men. In 2006, South Africa became the fifth country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage, and the Constitution of South Africa guarantees gay men and lesbians full equal rights and protections. South Africa is the only country in Africa where LGBTQ discrimination is constitutionally forbidden; however, social discrimination against South African gay men persists in rural parts of the country, where high levels of religious tradition continue to fuel prejudice and violence.^[80]



Binyavanga Wainaina (right), a Kenyan writer, who came out in 2014 in response to a wave of anti-gay laws in Africa

Caribbean

In the mainland Americas (both North and South), male homosexuality is legal in every country (except Guyana). In the Caribbean, however, nine nations have criminal punishment for "buggery" on their statute books.^[71] These countries include Barbados, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Dominica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Grenada, Saint Lucia, Antigua and Barbuda, Guyana, and Jamaica. In Jamaica, sexual intercourse between men is legally punishable by imprisonment, though the law's repeal is pending. Sexual intercourse between women is already legal,^[82] though lesbians in Jamaica still experience a high level of social stigma.^[83]



Jamaican rapper Buju Banton has been criticized for violently homophobic messages in his music (see: Stop Murder Music).^[81]

In Jamaica, reports of vigilante violence and torture against gay men have been reported by the Jamaican police. In 2013, Amnesty International reported that "Gay men and lesbian women have been beaten, cut, burned, raped and shot on account of their sexuality. ... We are concerned that these reports are just the tip of the iceberg. Many gay men and women in Jamaica are too afraid to go to the authorities and seek help".^[84] As a result of this violence, hundreds of gay men from Jamaica sought to emigrate to countries with better human rights records.^[85] A 2016 poll from J-Flag showed that 88 percent of those polled disapprove of homosexuality,^[86] though since 2018, discriminatory attitudes have decreased slightly.^[87]

In the Caribbean, like in other developing countries around the world, homosexual identity is often associated with Westernization,^[88] and as a result, homophobia is believed to be an anti-colonial tool. Wayne Marshall wrote that gay men are believed to be "decadent products of the West" and "are thus to be resisted alongside other forms of colonization, cultural or political".^[89] Wayne cites the example of the Jamaican dancehall hit "Dem Bow" by Shabba Ranks, which calls for the violent murder of gay men alongside a call for the "freedom for

Black people". Marshall notes the irony of this ideological position, considering the historical evidence that homophobia was introduced to colonies by European colonists.^[90] Nevertheless, Caribbean scholars have noted the importance of opposition to gay men for Jamaican male gender construction. Kingsley Ragashanti Stewart, a professor of anthropology at the University of the West Indies, writes, "A lot of Jamaican men, if you call them a homosexual, ... will immediately get violent. It's the worst insult you could give to a Jamaican man."^[91] Stewart writes that homophobia influences Caribbean society even at the micro level of language. He writes of urban youth vernacular, "It's like if you say, 'Come back here,' they will say, 'No, no, no don't say "come back"! You have to say, 'come forward,' because come back is implying that you're 'coming in the back,' which is how gay men have sex."^[91]

Eastern Europe

In Eastern Europe, there has been a steady erosion of rights for gay men over the course of the last decade. In the Russian republic of Chechnya, gay men have been subjected to forced disappearances—secret abductions, imprisonment, torture—and extrajudicial killing by authorities. An unknown number of men, detained due to suspicion of them being gay or bisexual, have died while held in concentration camps.^{[92][93]} Independent media and human rights groups have reported that gay men are being sent to clandestine camps in Chechnya, described by one eyewitness as "closed prison, the existence of which no one officially knows".^[94] Some gay men have attempted to flee the region, but have been detained by Russian police and sent back to Chechnya.^[95] Reports have emerged of prison officials releasing accused gay men from the camps after securing assurances from their families that their families will kill them (at least one man was reported by a witness as having died after returning to his family).^[94] These imprisoned men are kept in extremely cramped conditions, with 30 to 40 people detained in one room



Activists enact a scene of Chechen mothers mourning their disappeared sons, draped in LGBT and Chechen flags

(two to three metres big), and few are afforded a trial. Witnesses have also reported that the gay men are regularly beaten (with polypropylene pipes below the waist), tortured with electricity, and spat in the face by prison guards.^[94] In some cases the process of torture has resulted in the death of the person being tortured.^{[96][97]} As of 2021, the situation in Chechnya continues to worsen for gay men.^[98] In other countries in Eastern Europe, rights for gay men continue to deteriorate. Polish President Andrzej Duda has pledged to ban teaching about gay men in schools, forbid same-sex marriage and adoption, and establish "LGBT-free zones".^[99]

A 2017 Pew Research Center poll found that the majority of Orthodox Christians in the Eastern European and former USSR states surveyed believe that homosexuality "should not be accepted by society"; 45% of Orthodox Christians in Greece and 31% in the United States answered the same way.^[100]

Southwest Asia and North Africa

In Southwest Asia and North Africa, gay men face some of the harshest and most hostile laws anywhere in the world. Sex between men is explicitly outlawed in 10 of the 18 "Middle Eastern" countries and is punishable by death in six. According to scholars, recent popular turns toward Islamic fundamentalism has strongly influenced the extreme violence against gay men. While all same-sex activity is legal in Bahrain, Cyprus, the West Bank, Turkey, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, and Iraq, male homosexuality is illegal and punishable by imprisonment in Syria, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, and Egypt. Israel is the most progressive concerning LGBTQ rights and recognizing unregistered cohabitation; however, it has faced criticism from academics such as Sarah Schulman and Jason Ritchie for "pinkwashing".^{[102][103]} And although same-sex marriage is not legal in the country, there is public support for recognizing and registering same-sex marriages performed in other countries.^[104]

Male same-sex activity is also punishable by death in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Qatar. In the Gaza Strip and Yemen, punishment for male homosexuality varies between death and imprisonment depending on the act committed. In 2018, a transnational survey conducted in the region by Pew Research Center found that 80% of people polled believed homosexuality was "morally unacceptable",^[105] though others argue that the true number of people who support rights for gay men is unclear due to fear of backlash and punishment.^[106]



Abdellah Taïa has written about the abuse he suffered as a gay child in Morocco.^[101]

Art and culture

High fashion

Since the early 20th century, gay men, both out and closeted, have worked as some of the world's most influential fashion designers and started some of the most important fashion houses. Cristóbal Balenciaga (b. 1895), who started the Balenciaga brand, was gay^[107] but remained private about his sexuality for his entire life.^[108] His long-time partner, Franco-Polish millionaire Władzio Jaworowski d'Attainville, set up the fund for him to start the house. After d'Attainville died, Balenciaga's following collection was



McQueen, Fall 2008

designed entirely in black to mourn his loss.^[109] The French fashion designer Christian Dior (b. 1905) was another hugely influential fashion designer of the 20th century.^[110] Dior never married nor openly identified as a gay man, however, he was known to frequent the gay cultural scene in Paris and was infamously described by Coco Chanel as never having intimately "known" a woman.^{[111][112]} Yves Saint Laurent (b. 1935), also regarded as being among the foremost fashion designers in the twentieth century,^[113] was openly gay; his long-time partner was Pierre Berge.^[114] Gianni Versace (b. 1946), an Italian fashion designer and founder of Versace, publicly came out in an interview with The Advocate in July 1995.^[115] Versace was murdered in 1997.^[116]

A younger generation of gay men gained prominence in the fashion world during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Tom Ford (b. 1961) founded his eponymous brand Tom Ford in 2005 and has stated that he realized he was gay as a young man visiting Studio 54 in the 1980s.^{[117][118]} Alexander McQueen (b. 1969), who was also openly gay, founded his own label Alexander McQueen in 1992 and was recognized as a fashion prodigy for his revolutionary designs.^[119] McQueen said he realized his sexual orientation when he was six years old.^[120] In 2000, McQueen had a marriage ceremony with his partner George Forsyth, a documentary filmmaker, on a yacht in Ibiza.^[121] McQueen died by suicide in 2010, shortly after the death of his mother. In recent years, gay men have continued to produce some of the most influential fashion in the world, including by designers such as Jeremy Scott (b. 1975), Jason Wu (b. 1982), and Alexander Wang (b. 1983).^{[122][123][124]}

Art



"Unfromme Wünsche" by Matthias Laurenz Gräff (top left), Keith Haring in East Harlem in 1986 (top right), American artist Andy Warhol in Moderna Museet, Stockholm (bottom left), and "Darya Zhukova" by Alexander Kargaltsev (bottom right).

In the 20th century, gay men were amongst the Western world's most influential and prolific artists, writers, and dancers. In the United States by mid-century, James Baldwin (b. 1924) was considered one of the best writers of his generation.^[125] His work, including Giovanni's Room (1956) dealt openly with homosexuality and bisexuality at a time when sex between men was still illegal throughout much of the

Western world.^{[126][127]} Other major artists of Baldwin's generation, including Robert Rauschenberg (b. 1925) and Jasper Johns (b. 1930), were less open about their sexuality,^[128] and even made fun of other young gay artists of their generation, such as Andy Warhol, for being too feminine.^[129] In the world of New York dance, Alvin Ailey (b. 1931) fused theater, modern dance, ballet, and jazz with black vernacular, and his choreographic magnum opus Revelations is recognized as one of the most popular and most performed ballets in the world.^{[130][131][132]} Ailey remained closeted for much of his life, and he passed from an AIDS related illness at the age of 58.^[133] David Hockney (b. 1937), another major artist of the Silent Generation, was an important contributor to the pop art movement of the 1960s and is considered one of the most influential British artists of the 20th century.^{[134][135]} He has been openly gay for much of his life.^[136]

Many of the most influential gay and bisexual artists of the Boomer and X generations died at very early ages during the AIDS crises, including Carlos Almaraz (b. 1941), Robert Mapplethorpe (b. 1946), Félix González-Torres (b. 1957), and Keith Haring (b. 1958). Much of the Art of the AIDS Crisis was highly political and critical of the U.S. government and has been described as "afraid, angry, fearful, and defiant".^[137] In the aftermath of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, gay men and other queer artists pioneered a new form of experimental filmmaking called New Queer Cinema.^{[138][139]} Today, gay men such as Mark Bradford, Julio Salgado, and Kehinde Wiley are amongst the most influential artists of their generation.^{[140][141][142]} Much of contemporary Western gay art today deals with themes of body, identity, and experience.^[143]

Outside of the West, art containing themes of gay male sexuality is still considered subversive and taboo. In Singapore, which criminalized all sexual acts between men through Section 377A of the Penal Code until 2022,^[144] art by gay men is considered countercultural. Gay men in Singapore historically have been depicted negatively in local mainstream media, and efforts to counter this discrimination from wider Singaporean society has been made difficult because of the risk of jail, bans, and censorship by the state.^{[144][145][146][147]}

Film and media art

In the United States, Andy Warhol made underground films with queer themes and actors. His work had an international influence in queer film art.^[148] The avant-garde director Rosa von Praunheim has made more than 100 films on queer topics since the late 1960s, some of them have been evaluated internationally. Some films are considered milestones in queer cinema. Von Praunheim is internationally recognized as an icon of queer cinema.^[149] The director Rainer Werner Fassbinder had an early influence on queer cinema with films like Querelle (1982).^[150] These filmmakers and others pioneered queer Hollywood productions like Brokeback Mountain (2005), which reached an audience of millions.^[151]

Drag

Drag queens are a significant part of the popular culture of gay men and are regularly featured in gay bars. Drag queens use drag clothing and makeup to imitate and often exaggerate female gender signifiers and gender roles as part of a performance used for artistic or entertainment purposes. Drag shows often include lip-syncing, dancing, and live singing. They occur at events like drag pageants and gay pride parades and in nightclubs and cabarets, as well as in local gay bars. Drag queens vary by dedication, type, and culture, and range from professionals who star in films and on Broadway, such as Gene Malin, Divine, or Rupaul, to people who do drag only occasionally.



Post-Modern Art Attack

Drag balls themselves have a long history for gay men in the United States.^[152] In 1869 at the Hamilton Lodge in Harlem, the first drag balls were held. These balls were held in secret, but news grew of their existence as a safe place for gay men to congregate.^[152] The balls were deemed immoral and illegal, and a moral reform organization known as the Committee of Fourteen investigated alleged "immoral" activities.^[152] In 1916, the committee released a report describing "phenomenal ... male perverts' in expensive frocks and wigs, looking like women".^[152] By the 1920s, the balls grew in public visibility. In New York, the events, once called Masquerade and Civic Balls, were called "Faggots Balls" by the general public.^[152] The balls, however, also attracted some of the city's top artists and writers, including Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler.^[152] The men, who co-authored *The Young and Evil*, described the drag ball as "a scene whose celestial flavor and cerulean coloring no angelic painter or nectarish poet has ever conceived ... lit up like high mass."^[153] This flourishing of gay life in the 1920s and 30s was part of a period known as the Pansy Craze.^[154]

More recently, the film *Paris is Burning* (1990) detailed the drag ball scene of New York City and showcased the lives and experiences of a group of young "butch queens" (cisgender gay men), transgender women, drag queens, and butch women. Since its release, the film has become a cult classic and has served as an organizing and academic tool for the gay and trans communities (though it has been subject to significant criticism).^[155] Meanwhile, the television reality program RuPaul's Drag Race has been on-air in the United States since 2009 and has introduced the straight mainstream to gay men's popular culture through drag. The original American series has since developed into the global Drag Race franchise.

In the 2020s, a wave of anti-LGBTQ backlash in the United States resulted in what is known as the Drag panic.^[156] As part of this backlash, some U.S. states, such as Tennessee, criminalized the public performance of drag.^[157]

Camp

Camp is a visual aesthetic style often associated with gay men. An English definition of the term first appeared in a 1909 edition of the Oxford English Dictionary: "ostentatious, exaggerated, affected, theatrical; effeminate or homosexual; pertaining to, characteristic of, homosexuals".^[158] From its original meaning, the term has evolved to signify an inversion of aesthetic attributes such as beauty, value, and taste through exaggeration and irony.^[159] Camp is often mistaken with kitsch and has been described as "cheesy". In 1964, Susan Sontag's essay Notes on "Camp" emphasized camp's key elements as: "artifice, frivolity, naïve middle-class pretentiousness, and shocking excess".^[160] In recent years, gay men have sought to disassociate themselves from the term. In a 2018 interview, director Ryan Murphy said he believed camp was "a lazy catchall that gets thrown at gay artists in order to marginalize their ambitions, to frame their work as



"Magenta carpet" at Life Ball 2013

"niche" and preferred to describe his visual aesthetic style as "baroque".^[161] As some gay men have moved away from the term, however, mainstream straight society has appropriated it. In 2019, the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art hosted its annual event, the Met Gala, with the theme titled "Notes on Camp".^[162] That same year, the museum presented its full exhibit "Camp: Notes on Fashion", in which it presented numerous "campy" women's dresses.^[163] Nevertheless, in drag performances and at gay pride events, many gay men continue to embrace a camp aesthetic.^[164]

Representation in media



In The Maltese Falcon, Peter Lorre played an overtly stereotyped effeminate villain.

In many forms of popular entertainment, gay men are portrayed stereotypically as promiscuous, flamboyant, flashy, and sassy. Gay men are also rarely the main characters in mainstream films; they frequently play the role of stereotyped supporting characters or are portrayed as either a victim or the villain.^[165] Despite the stereotypical depictions of gay men, television shows since the 1990s, such as Queer as Folk, Queer Eye, and Modern Family have promoted broader social acceptance of gay men as "normal people". Nevertheless, gay men are still frequently portrayed in the United States as symbols of social decadence by evangelists and organizations such as Focus on the Family.^[166]

Historical Western media representations

Historically, many films have included negative sub-texts regarding male homosexuality, such as in Alfred Hitchcock's films, whose villains used implied homosexuality to heighten senses of evil and alienation.^{[167][168]} In news programming, male homosexuality was rarely directly mentioned, but it was often portrayed as a sickness, perversion, or crime. In 1967, CBC released a news segment on homosexuality; however, the segment was simply a compilation of negative stereotypes of gay men.^[169] The 1970s showed an increase in gay men's visibility in Western media with the 1972 ABC show That Certain Summer. The show was about a gay man raising a family, and although it did not show any explicit relations between the men, it contained no negative stereotypes.^[169]



Boys Beware, a 1961 U.S. propaganda film warning boys to beware the "predatory" dangers of homosexual men

With the emergence of the AIDS epidemic and its explicit associations with gay men, media outlets in the U.S. varied in their coverage, portrayal, and acceptance of gay male communities. The American Family Association, the Coalition for Better Television, and the Moral Majority organized boycotts against advertisers on television programs which showed gay men in a positive light.^[170] Media coverage of gay men during the AIDS crisis depended on the location and therefore the local attitudes toward gay men. For example, in the Bay Area, The San Francisco Chronicle hired an openly gay man as a reporter and ran detailed stories on gay male topics. This was a sharp contrast to The New York Times, which refused to use the word "gay" in its writing, exclusively referring to gay men and lesbians with the term "homosexuals", because it was believed to be a more clinical term. The Times also limited its verbal and visual coverage of issues pertaining to gay men.^{[169][171]}

Contemporary Western media representations

In the 1980s, the AIDS crisis greatly affected the representation of gay men in American media.^[172]

Melanie Kohnen writes that, initially, the news media portrayed AIDS as a disease that affects mainly urban, White gay men; in spite of the fact that most victims of AIDS were gay Black and Hispanic men.^[173] However, by the late 1980s it had become undeniable that most of the victims of AIDS were gay men of color, and the media finally came to acknowledge this commonly-known fact. Yet the new coverage maintained the image of White men as heroic leaders in the fight against AIDS; while ignoring the perspectives of the gay men of color.^[173] Kohnen attributes this favorable (and unwarranted) representation of White men to white privilege.^[173]

During the crisis, American media tended to focus on the "raunchiness" of gay culture, and divided gay men in to two archetypes: "victims" (those affected by HIV) and "villains" (who allegedly spread HIV, deliberately).^[172]

The AIDS pandemic delayed positive representations of gay men until the 1990s,^[172] when the first positive representations of gay men began to appear in American media.^[174] However, most of these gay men were White, masculine, apolitical and never depicted romantically with other men.^[174] This new depiction of gay men catered to heterosexual audiences, and did not reflect the true diversity of the LGBTQ community.^{[174][175]}

Scholars have noted that intersectional representations of gay men of color are generally not present on television.^[175] Additionally, when television shows do depict gay men of color, they are often less visible, or merely the love interests of a White male character. They have also often depicted as "race neutral", meaning that their gayness is paramount to all of their other attributes, thus obscuring their ethnic identity.^[175]

Health

Gay men in the United States are less likely to be overweight or obese compared to their heterosexual counterparts.^[176]

Abuse

Gay men are at an increased risk of being physically and sexually abused, particularly those who exhibit early gender nonconforming behavior (femininity).^[177] Writing about his own experience as a feminine boy, gay Moroccan writer Abdellah Taïa, wrote in a *New York Times* op-ed: "I knew what happened to boys like me in our impoverished society; they were designated victims, to be used, with everyone's blessing, as easy sexual objects by frustrated men."^[101] Gay men are less likely than women to seek



On *Pose*, Billy Porter plays Pray Tell, a Black gay man with AIDS in New York.

mental health assistance, oftentimes due to social stigma and false beliefs around sexual assault, such as "men cannot be forced to have sex" and "men become gay or bisexual because they were sexually abused."^[178]

Sexual health

Around the world, gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (MSM) face significant challenges in terms of their overall sexual health. According to a UNAIDS report, MSM have a "staggering" 27 times higher risk of contracting HIV than other demographic groups, and the highest median prevalence among this population is found in Sub-Saharan Africa.^[179]

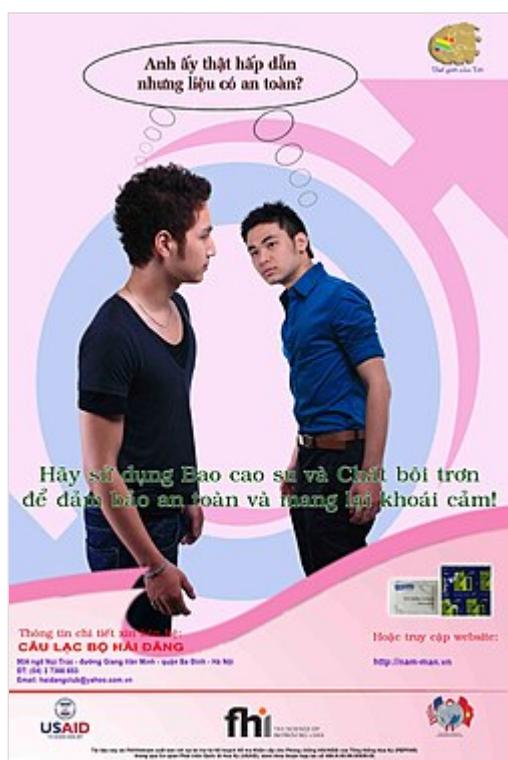
New HIV infection rates for MSM vary by region, but according to a 2018 UN report, HIV cases among MSM represent: 57% of all new cases in North America, Central Europe, and Western Europe; 41% of all new cases in Latin America; 25% of all new cases in Asia, the Pacific Islands, and the Caribbean; 20% of all new cases in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East; and 12% of all new cases in Western and Central Africa.^[180]

In countries with diverse racial populations, such as the United States, France, and the United Kingdom, new HIV infections among gay and bisexual men are found disproportionately in working-class and communities of color.^{[181][182][183]} In the United States, there are currently full-blown HIV crises amongst gay Chicano and Latino men in the Mexico-U.S. borderlands region,^[184] and amongst African American MSM in the South.^[185] In the South, Black gay, bisexual, and other MSM account for six out of every 10 new HIV diagnoses amongst all African Americans.^[185] In recent years, independent news sources have shown that working-class Black and Latino gay men in the United States still face significant health disparities in these crises;^{[186][187]} however, in the United States, as in other places around the world, these problems have only worsened as HIV-positive MSM (especially those from already disadvantaged communities)^[188] have been severely and disproportionately affected by the global COVID-19 pandemic.^[189]

In addition to HIV, young gay, bisexual, and other MSM are also at significantly higher risk for other sexual health-related issues. Because compulsive and condomless sexually related behaviors are also strongly associated with depression,^[190] young MSM (who are disproportionately likely to experience clinical depression)^{[191][192]} are at increased risk of sexually transmitted infections via unsafe sex.^[193] Furthermore, because depression is strongly linked to a history of being sexual abused, the high rate of past childhood sexual trauma among gay men leaves many in the community vulnerable to unhealthy



Gay men are more likely to be abused but less likely to seek help.



HIV prevention poster advocating for safe MSM sex in Vietnam

behaviors and practices.^{[194][195]} As a combination of these complex factors, many gay, bisexual, and MSM have higher rates of STIs, including chlamydia and gonorrhea, and in the United States, account for 83% of all primary and secondary syphilis cases.^[196]

Mental health

There are significant issues affecting the overall mental health of gay men. In the United States, 29.3 percent of gay and bisexual men report experiencing chronic daily psychological distress.^[178] Gay and bisexual men are exposed to significant minority stress, which is the constant exposure to stressors because of their minority identity in society.^[178] Familial and social rejection, homophobia, alienation, and isolation can contribute to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and a lack of self-acceptance.^[178] These issues have been found to be exacerbated in gay men who have experienced sexual abuse.^[178] Even in countries with social and legal protections for gay men, such as the United Kingdom, France, and the United States, structural societal stigma against homosexual men persists, and discrimination has been shown to have negative effects on the mental health of gay men.^[197] In fact, compared to straight men, gay and bisexual men have a higher chance of having both major depression and generalized anxiety disorder.^[197] Gay and bisexual men are also at greater risk of dying by suicide,^[198] they are one of the demographic groups most likely to have tried to commit suicide, as well as to actually die by suicide.^[197] Finally, HIV-positive status continues to have a major impact on the mental health of many gay and bisexual men, who fear disclosing their status to employers, friends, and families, particularly if they have not yet come out.^[197]

Incarceration

United States



Protest against mass incarceration in Chowchilla, California in January 2013

In 2017, a survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice and the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law found that in local and county jails, 6.2 percent of all incarcerated men were sexual minorities, including 3.3 percent who identified as gay or bisexual, and 2.9 percent who did not identify as gay or bisexual but reported having had sex with men (MSM).^[199] This number was higher amongst men within state and federal prisons, where 5.5 percent identified as gay or bisexual, and an additional 3.8 were MSM.^[199] The Williams Institute's research team also found that gay and bisexual men received longer and harsher sentences for the same crimes committed compared to

heterosexual men.^[199] Gay and bisexual men were found to be 2.7 times more likely to receive prison terms exceeding 20 years than straight men, and were more likely to have spent time in solitary confinement while incarcerated: 26.8 of gay and bisexual men had been held in solitary compared to 18.2 of straight men.^[199]

Additionally, gay men are at increased risk of rape and sexual abuse while in prison.^[200] A report by the international human-rights organization Human Rights Watch found that in U.S. prisons, the rape of incarcerated gay men is often administratively dismissed because of the misconception that any sexual

contact involving a gay man and another male is inherently consensual.^[200] As a result, rape victims who are known or believed to be gay are sometimes even denied medical treatment or legal recourse, and perpetrators often go unpunished and thus are allowed to continue abusing their victims.^[200]

Homelessness

For many young gay men and LGBTQ youth around the world, homelessness and housing insecurity are serious issues.^{[201][202]} In the United States, which has the largest homeless population in the Western world outside of Germany, numerical estimates of housing insecure LGBTQ youth range from 1.6 million to 2.8 million.^[201] In one U.S. national sample, nearly half of houseless LGBTQ youth reported they had been kicked out of their home because their family had rejected their sexual orientation or identity.^[203] For young gay men, the precariousness of unstable housing comes with many dangers; for example, studies have found that young gay men and adolescents were more likely than their straight counterparts to be sexually victimized while homeless.^{[204][205]} Amongst adults, no nationally representative datasets exist yet for measuring the sexual orientation or gender identity of homeless or housing insecure individuals;^[206] however, some estimates place the LGBTQ community at between 20 and 40% of the United States' homeless populations.^[207]



London advert protesting the exclusion of unhouse LGBT people

Community and identity

Subcultures



Two young gay men at Taiwan Pride

In North America and Europe, gay men have several subcultures, including Twinks, Bears, Otters, Queens, Jocks, Gaymers, and others.^[208] According to scholars, these subcultures, which largely originated as part of a "gay American way of life", have in some ways become a "global template" for gay culture around the world.^[209] In India, where a gay culture is slowly emerging, despite anti-gay "societal values, the caste system, arranged marriages, [and] the high probability of being disinherited for coming out", some gay men are working to develop a mature and distinct-Indian culture while also adopting aspects of global gay

culture.^[210] One Indian gay man who identifies as a Bear, stated in an interview, "Because [straight people] see me in chunky rings and bracelets, heavy metal tees riding a Harley Davidson, it doesn't fit in with the Indian stereotype of effeminate gay. While I have nothing against being effeminate, not all gay men are so ... Encouraging a bear culture [in India] will see more men feeling comfortable coming out and avoiding the trap of a face-saving heterosexual marriage."^[211]

In Canada, which already has mature urban communities of gay men, some gay artists are working to counter the fact that the social acceptability of a gay subculture is often dependent on how closely it aligns with Western standards of conventional attractiveness.^[212] The video artist Mike Wyeld, whose exhibition "LOVED", showcased the Bear community, stated, "Some of the things that the media's obsessed with — obesity, weight loss, body shape, aging — some of these things we have to be happy with. We get bigger, we get older. You can fight it and be miserable or you can accept it and live with the body that you have and love it."^[212] In the United Kingdom, journalists have noted the role mobile apps such as Grindr have played in creating self-segregating subcultures (also called "tribes") within gay men's communities.^[213]



Two gay men kiss during a pride event

Youth

Gay adolescents, boys, and young men are a uniquely vulnerable segment of the gay male population. In many countries, identity-issues, bullying, and lack of family acceptance are some of the major concerns facing gay-identified youth.^{[214][215][216]} Additionally, gay boys and adolescents around the world are regularly subjected to more extreme forms of violence, including conversion therapy,^[217] familial violence,^{[218][219]} and other forms of physical abuse.^[220] These issues have been shown to have detrimental effects on the well-being of gay and bisexual male youth. In the United States, a 2019 report by the CDC found that suicidal ideation amongst gay and bisexual boys and adolescents is as high as 40.4%.^[221] According to the CDC, however, parental support can play an important role in bettering health outcomes for gay and bisexual youth, decreasing the likelihood a gay teen will: "Experience depression; attempt suicide; use drugs and alcohol; [or] become infected with sexually transmitted diseases."^[222]

For educators, the inclusion of diverse curriculum and the development of peer support venues (such as Queer-Straight Alliances in North America) have been suggested as ways to reduce the frequency and effects of bullying and cyberbullying.^[223] Such measures are particularly important for gay and bisexual male students, who, in 2019, were the second most likely group (behind trans students) to have experienced bullying at school (73.9%) and online (30%) in the most recent 30 days, according to research by Sameer Hinduja and Justin Patchin.^[224] Despite these calls for inclusive and diverse curriculums, Scotland is currently the only country in the world with a mandated LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum in its public school system.^[225] While many nations offer a piecemeal approach to LGBTQ education, others (including several U.S. states)^[226] have explicit bans on the inclusion of gay-friendly education. Despite the challenges gay teenagers face, studies have found that gay male youth also develop skillsets which enable them to more successfully cope with stress and other developmental challenges than their straight peers.^[227] In comparing gay boys and adolescents to their heterosexual peers, gay-identified youth show higher levels of resilience, positive self-esteem, and internal self-control.^[227]



A youth at DC Pride

Fatherhood

In the majority of countries today, adoption by same-sex couples is not legally allowed. In Western Europe, most of South America, and North America, however, gay men can become fathers in a variety of ways, including adoption, surrogates, and births from previous relationships. In recent years, prominent gay men such as Anderson Cooper and Elton John have made headlines for becoming fathers,^{[228][229]} and gay men have been increasingly represented on television as fathers (though these representations have been subject to critiques for their one-dimensionality).^[230] In spite of these advances in visibility and representation, however, gay fathers and their families still experience high levels of discrimination and social stigma from their relatives, neighbors, and other members of their communities.^{[231][232]} In the United States, two-thirds of gay fathers report experiencing social stigma, and one-third report that their children faced stigmatization from other children for having gay parents.^[231] The majority of social scientific research shows the children of gay fathers to be equally well adjusted as the children of heterosexual parents.^[233]



Two fathers with their child

Age

Older gay men are one of the least studied groups within gay men's communities. In Mexico, Vida Alegre opened in 2019 as the first senior center for LGBTQ people in the country.^[234] According to the center's founder, Samantha Flores, loneliness is a major problem for many older gay men in Mexico, stating, "I've had people come in, older gay men, sobbing and pouring their hearts out to me about how unhappy they are ... They usually don't have children, and many of their families have disowned them, so they need to turn to families they have chosen themselves or friends for social contact."^[234] According to Flores, many of these older gay men in Mexico are also living with PTSD because of their many lost friends and partners who died during the AIDS epidemic.^[234] In France, the documentary filmmaker Sébastien Lifshitz made *Les Invisibles*, a 2012 documentary about elderly gay French people, and he found significant ideological differences between younger and older gay people.^[235] Lifshitz stated, "What's important to understand is that this older generation of gay people in France fought against the heterosexual, bourgeois model of French society with all their might. The fact that there are much younger gay couples today that are demanding the right to get married and adopt children is something the older gay generation understands, but does not want for themselves."^[235] Finally, in the United States, scholars have found that most older gay American men are not "strange, lonely creatures" but are instead "well-adjusted to their homosexuality and the aging process".^[236]



Two older gay men in March 2010

Gender identity

For trans and gender nonconforming gay and bisexual men, there are unique aspects of their identity which shape their experience within gay men's communities. In Canada, gay and bisexual trans men often use specific apps and websites, such as Grindr and Tinder, in order to find romantic and sexual partners.^[237] Canadian trans men report that personal developments (such as gender transition) and socio-historical changes (like increasing trans male visibility and the rise of virtual dating applications) are producing rapidly changing sexual and romantic opportunities;^[237] In 2017, most gay Canadian trans men reported having satisfying sexual lives.^[237] In a 2009 interview with New York magazine, the writer Amos Mac, who identifies as queer, said, "I very much [identify] as a fag. I [am] drawn to the community of gay men, and that's how I embody myself. I'm attracted to guys who have a bit of flair to them. They don't have to be gay, but they can be queeny. I love an artistic queen."^[238] In his 2017 book, *Trans Homo*, Avi Ben-Zeev addresses the historical presence of trans gay men within the community, writing, "Elders, like Lou Sullivan, paved the way and have brought some visibility to the fact that trans men are, and have been, an integral part of gay male communities. Yet, we trans homos (and our lovers) are still mysterious creatures to many, even within these communities."^[239] In a 2004 collection of personal essays, one man wrote about his identity formation as a gay trans man, writing "I [never felt] that being gay, or [transgender] was unnatural. I've always felt that the people who never questioned their gender, sexuality, or fertility were the odd ones. If anyone needs an outsider's label, it's the ones who moralize against human sexuality, not the ones who accept it."^[240]

Disability

Gay men with disabilities report feelings of discomfort because of social expectations surrounding physical appearance and conventional standards of attractiveness.^[241] One man, Aaron Anderson, who has Guillain-Barre Syndrome, said, "Gay men are so conditioned to everything has to be perfect. You have to have it all. [My body] is so not perfect. The gay men I know don't know how to deal with it [my disability]. They pretend it's not a thing or superficial acquaintances will just ignore me."^[241] Gay men with disabilities also note that members of the disability community often feel desexualized by society.^[241] This desexualization can have serious ramifications for the health of gay men with disabilities. Jae Jin Pak, of the University of Illinois at Chicago, noted that accurate sexual education and sexuality-related information is generally unavailable to members of the disabled community,^[241] which can leave men in the community without information about safe-sex practices. Meanwhile, within the field of Disability studies, scholars emphasize the importance of establishing a public identity and a common culture for gay men with disabilities.^[242] In recent years, queer men with disabilities have achieved some mainstream media visibility, including through Ryan O'Connell's 2019 Netflix series *Special*, and the online popularity of the sexually fluid American model Nyle DiMarco.



A gay man in a wheelchair at London Pride 2016

Education

In the United States, on average, gay men are almost twice as likely than straight men to disagree that "they feel safe at school".^[243] Gay men are 50% more likely than straight men to have a university degree, and gay men have a slightly higher high school GPA than straight and bisexual men.^[243]

See also



- [Bara \(genre\)](#)
- [Gay characters in fiction](#)
- [Gay literature](#)
- [Gay male literature](#)
- [Gay male speech](#)
- [Gay men's flags](#)
- [Gay Men of African Descent](#)
- [Gay pornography](#)
- [Gay sexual practices](#)
- [History of gay men](#)
- [History of gay men in the United States](#)
- [Homoeroticism](#)
- [Homosexual behavior in animals](#)
- [Homosexuality in modern sports](#)
- [List of gay, lesbian or bisexual people](#)
- [Yaoi](#)

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External links

- Portraits of Gay Men in Love (<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/photo-collection-shows-19th-and-20th-century-gay-relationships-180976161/>) – Smithsonian Institution portrait photographs of gay men in the United States.
 - Reported Effects of Masculine Ideals on Gay Men (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2902177/>) – National Institutes of Health report on masculine idealization
 - Gay Bears at UC Berkeley (<https://bancroft.berkeley.edu/collections/gaybears/gaylib/>) Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20210421062407/https://bancroft.berkeley.edu/collections/gaybears/gaylib/>) 21 April 2021 at the Wayback Machine – UC Berkeley history of the Gay Liberation Movement
 - Interactive AIDS Memorial Quilt (<https://www.aidsmemorial.org/interactive-aids-quilt>) – National AIDS Memorial digital AIDS Memorial Quilt
 - Gay Men's Health Crisis (<https://www.gmhc.org>) – GMHC website
 - Gale Archive of Sexuality and Gender (<https://www.gale.com/primary-sources/archives-of-sexuality-and-gender>) – archive related to the history of sexuality
-



Lesbian

A **lesbian** is a homosexual woman or girl.^{[3][4][5]:48} The word is also used as an adjective for women in relation to their experiences, regardless of their sexual orientation; or as an adjective to associate nouns with female homosexuality.^{[4][5]:22}

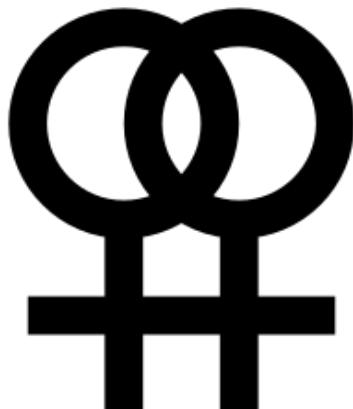
The term lesbian is a derivative of the island of Lesbos, the Greek island home to ancient poet Sappho. Relatively little in history was documented to describe women's lives in general or female homosexuality in particular. The earliest mentions of lesbianism date to around the 600s-500s BC, including Sappho's poetry.

Lesbian relationships and attractions, along with gender nonconforming behaviors more often displayed by lesbians, have been treated in different ways throughout different ages and cultures. While there is a longer documented history of lesbian behavior and relationships throughout different cultures, the idea of a 'lesbian' as a category of person distinct from other women emerged in Europe around the turn of the 19th century. Lesbians' current rights vary widely worldwide, ranging from severe abuse and legal persecution to general acceptance and legal protections.

Modern polls often estimate lesbians to be 1-3% of the population (i.e., 2-6% of women). Lesbian social movements often advocate for legal changes (such as anti-discrimination protections, child custody protections, and legal civil unions or marriages), as well as for cultural, familial, and religious acceptance of lesbian orientations and relationships.



Two lesbians holding a lesbian pride flag at the 2022 Fierté Montréal march^[1]



Symbol for female homosexuality consisting of two intersecting female symbols^[2]

Etymology

The word *lesbian* is the demonym of the Greek island of Lesbos, home to the 6th-century BCE poet Sappho.^[3] Some of Sappho's surviving poetry discusses her love for other women.^{[6]:47–49}

Before the mid-19th century,^[7] the word *lesbian* referred to any aspect of Lesbos, including a type of wine.^[a] A shift of the word to describe erotic relationships between women had been documented in 1870.^[9] In 1875, a critic referred to Baudelaire's poem "Delphine and Hippolyte" (a poem about love between two women, and without reference to Lesbos) as "Lesbian".^[10] In 1890, the term *lesbian* was used in the National Medical Dictionary as an adjective to describe tribadism.^[11]



Sappho and Erinna in a Garden at Mytilene by Simeon Solomon, 1864

in women.^[18] Biological characteristics known to be affected by prenatal hormone exposure have been shown to vary by sexual orientation in women.^{[19][20]} The finding that digit ratios (one characteristic affected by prenatal hormone exposure) differ between lesbian and heterosexual women has been replicated in cross-cultural studies.^[20]

Neuroimaging studies have found differences between heterosexual and homosexual women in neurological structures, including both those known to be affected by prenatal androgen exposure^[21] and those not known to be affected by prenatal androgen exposure.^{[22][23]} A later meta-analysis concluded that the small sample sizes and small number of studies meant that findings were inconclusive as of 2021.^[24]

Genetics also play a role; around 20% of the variance of sexual orientation in women is controlled by genetics.^[25]

Lesbian identity formation

When a woman realizes she is a lesbian, it may cause an "existential crisis". When a woman was raised in an environment with negative stereotypes of lesbians, she may need to work through these stereotypes and prejudices to come to terms with her orientation.^{[26]:93}

Lesbians in modern times share an identity that parallels those built on ethnicity, including the concept of group heritage and group pride.^[27]

Compared to gay men, lesbians more often developed their sexual self-concepts either alone or in intimate relationships, instead of in communities, and disclosed them less often.^{[26]:153}

The terms *lesbian*, *invert* and *homosexual* were interchangeable with *sapphist* around the turn of the 20th century.^[9] The use of *lesbian* in medical literature became prominent; by 1925, the word was recorded as a noun to mean the female equivalent of *sodomite*.^{[9][12]}

Sexuality and identity

Biological factors

Prenatal androgen exposure correlates with same-sex sexual behavior



Lesbian community flag introduced in social media in 2018, with the dark orange stripe representing gender variance^{[13][14]}



Lesbian feminist flag consisting of a labrys (a double-bladed axe) within the inverted black triangle, set against a violet-hue background. The labrys represents lesbian strength.^[15]



Lesbian flag derived from the colors of the lipstick lesbian flag design^{[16][17]}

Self-identification and behavior

Some women experience a consistently lesbian orientation. Other women experience varying degrees of fluidity in their orientation.^[28]

Lesbians who have never been with men may be referred to as "gold star lesbians." Lesbians who had sex with men before coming out may face ridicule from other lesbians or identity challenges with regard to defining what it means to be a lesbian.^[29]

Some researchers observe that behavior and identity sometimes do not match: self-identified straight women may have sex with women, or self-identified lesbians may have sex with men.^{[5]:22[30]}

Several studies have found that the sexual behavior and attractions of exclusively-lesbian women are significantly more likely to be aligned with their identity than those of exclusively-heterosexual women. These included studies of reported attraction throughout the fertility cycle, and direct measures of arousal towards different imagery.^[31]

The importance of sex

A 1983 survey asked couples "About how often during the last year have you and your partner had sex relations?". The survey found that long-term lesbian couples named lower numbers than long-term heterosexual or homosexual male couples.^[32] This conclusion became known as "lesbian bed death".^[33] Numerous critiques were leveled at the study, including that the language could be misinterpreted to mean "heterosexual intercourse", and that the survey sample was limited to a biased sample of self-identified lesbians in 1983.^[34]

Researchers report that lesbian and heterosexual women are just as likely to view achieving orgasm as important,^[35] and that the two groups report statistically equivalent rates of overall sexual and romantic satisfaction.^{[36][37]} The research suggests that lesbian women tend to achieve said satisfaction through higher quality rather than more frequent sex, and that they engage in different romantic and sexual scripts than heterosexual women.^{[37][35]}

Lesbians in history

There has been extensive debate as to what qualifies a historic relationship as 'lesbian'. In 1989, an academic cohort named the Lesbian History Group wrote:

Because of society's reluctance to admit that lesbians exist, a high degree of certainty is expected before historians or biographers are allowed to use the label. Evidence that would suffice in any other situation is inadequate here... A woman who never married, who lived with another woman, whose friends were mostly women, or who moved in known lesbian or mixed gay circles, may well have been a lesbian. ... But this sort of evidence is not 'proof'. What our critics want is incontrovertible evidence of sexual activity between women. This is almost impossible to find.^{[38]:184}

Female sexuality is often not adequately represented in historical texts and documents. Until very recently, much of what has been documented about women's sexuality has been written by men, in the context of male understanding, and relevant to women's associations to men—as their wives, daughters, or mothers, for example.^[39]

Ancient Greece



Sappho by Amanda Brewster Sewell, 1891.
Sappho of Lesbos gave the term *lesbian* the connotation of erotic desire between women.

being seduced by two lesbian characters.^[43]

In visual culture, historian Nancy Rabinowitz notes that some ancient Greek red vase images portray women in affectionate or erotic scenes.^{[44]:27–28[39]}

Ancient Rome

In first century sources, accounts of lesbian characters include the story of Iphis and Ianthe, related in the Metamorphoses;^{[45]:79–86} a story, related by the fabulist Phaedrus, about Prometheus exchanging the genitals of different men and women;^[46] and a satirical figure of a masculine woman who has sex with women, named Philaenis, related in the epigrams of Martial.^{[47][45]:98–99}

In the ruins of Pompeii, a Roman town destroyed in 79 CE, archaeologists discovered a love poem graffitied onto a wall.^[45] The poem is written with feminine declensions for both speaker and addressee, and identified archivally as Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum 4.5296.^[48]

A love spell from 3rd or 4th century CE Roman Egypt was written to enchant a woman named Gorgonia to fall in love with a woman named Sophia.^{[45]:89–92}

Ancient Americas

Both male and female homosexuality were known in Aztec culture. Although both were generally disapproved of, there is no evidence that homosexuality was actively suppressed until after the Spanish Conquest.^[49] Female homosexuality is described in the Florentine Codex, a 16th-century study of the



A wall painting of a lesbian sex scene.
Suburban baths, Pompeii

Aztec world written by the Spanish Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún. It describes Aztec lesbians as masculine in appearance and behavior and never wishing to be married.^[49] The book *Monarquía indiana* by Fray Juan de Torquemada, published in 1615, briefly mentions the persecution of Aztec lesbians: "The woman, who with another woman had carnal pleasures, for which they were called *Patlache*, which means: female incubus, they both died for it."^{[49][c]}

Early modern Europe (pre-1400s)

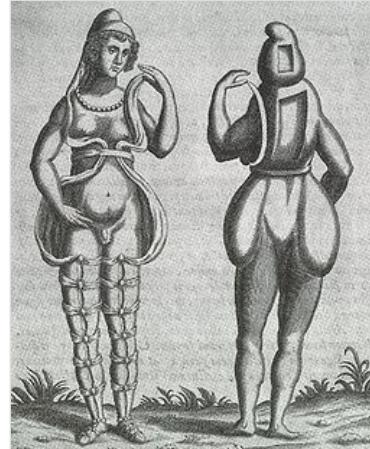
The earliest law against female homosexuality appeared in France in 1270.^{[38]:191} In Spain, Italy, and the Holy Roman Empire, sodomy between women was included in acts considered unnatural and punishable by burning to death, although few instances are recorded of this taking place.^{[6]:130} The earliest such execution occurred in Speier, Germany, in 1477.^{[38]:190}

Forty days' penance was demanded of nuns who "rode" each other or were discovered to have touched each other's breasts. An Italian nun named Sister Benedetta Carlini seduced other nuns when possessed by a Divine spirit named "Splenditello"; as punishment, she was placed in solitary confinement for the last 40 years of her life.^{[38]:190}

In England, female homoeroticism was so common in literature and theater that historians suggest it was fashionable for a period during the Renaissance.^{[50]:1} Englishwoman Mary Frith has been described as lesbian.^[51]

Ideas about women's sexuality were linked to contemporary understanding of female physiology. The vagina was considered an inward version of the penis; in lesbians, nature was thought to be trying to right itself by prolapsing the vagina to form a penis.^{[50]:12} The idea of hermaphroditism became synonymous with lesbianism. A longer, engorged clitoris was thought to be used in lesbian sex. Penetration was the focus of concern in all sexual acts, and a woman who was thought to have uncontrollable desires because of her engorged clitoris was called a "tribade" (literally, one who rubs).^{[50]:14–16} For a while, masturbation and lesbian sex carried the same meaning.^{[6]:129}

Tribades were simultaneously considered members of the lower class trying to ruin virtuous women, and representatives of an aristocracy corrupt with debauchery. Satirical writers began to suggest that political rivals (or more often, their wives) engaged in tribadism in order to harm their reputations. Queen Anne was rumored to have a passionate relationship with her close advisor Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough. When Churchill was ousted as the queen's favorite, she purportedly spread allegations of the queen having affairs with her bedchamberwomen.^{[6]:137} Marie Antoinette was also the subject of such speculation between 1795 and 1796.^{[50]:17–18}



Lesbianism and hermaphroditism, depicted here in an engraving c. 1690, were very similar concepts during the Renaissance.

Modern Western Civilizations (1500s-present day)

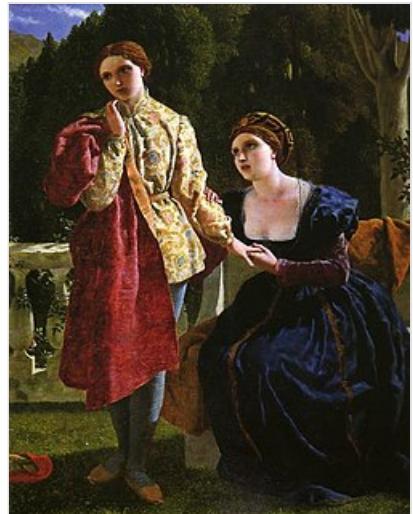
1500s-1600s

Homoerotic elements in early literature were pervasive, specifically the masquerade of one gender for another to seduce an unsuspecting woman. Such plot devices were used in *Twelfth Night* (1601), *The Faerie Queene* (1590), and *The Bird in a Cage* (1633).^{[50]:1-11,22-24}

During the Renaissance, some women put on male personae and went undetected for years or decades. These women have been described as transvestite lesbians.^{[52][53]} Some historians view cases of cross-dressing women to be manifestations of women seizing social power, or their way of making sense out of their desire for women.^{[54]:51-54}

In the 1600s, Queen Christina of Sweden had a tendency to dress as a man, abdicated the throne in 1654 to avoid marriage, and was known to pursue romantic relationships with women.^{[55]:54-55}

Catharine Linck and other women who were accused of using dildos, such as two nuns in 16th century Spain executed for using "material instruments", were punished more severely than those who did not.^{[38]:191[54]:51-54} Linck was executed in Prussia in 1721.^{[54]:51-54}



Gender masquerade was a popular dramatic device in the 16th and 17th centuries, such as this scene of Viola and Olivia from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* painted by Frederick Pickersgill (1859).

1700s

Two marriages between women were recorded in Cheshire, England, in 1707 (between Hannah Wright and Anne Gaskill) and 1708 (between Ane Norton and Alice Pickford) with no comment about both parties being female.^{[50]:30[6]:136}

In 1709, English aristocrat Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, wrote to Anne Wortley: "Nobody was so entirely, so faithfully yours ... I put in your lovers, for I don't allow it possible for a man to be so sincere as I am."^{[55]:119}

The Swiss woman Anne Grandjean, disguised as male, married and relocated with her wife to Lyons, but was exposed by a woman with whom she had had a previous affair and sentenced to time in the stocks and prison.^{[54]:51-54}

In the 1700s, English poet Anna Seward had a devoted friendship with Honora Sneyd. Sneyd was the subject of many of Seward's poems. When Sneyd married despite Seward's protest, Seward's poems became angry, and she continued to write about Sneyd long after her death.^{[55]:132-136}

Also in the 1700s, Deborah Sampson fought in the American Revolution under the name Robert Shurtliffe, and pursued relationships with women.^[56]

Also in the 1700s, English writer and philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft was attached to a woman named Fanny Blood. Writing to another woman, Wollstonecraft declared, "The roses will bloom when there's peace in the breast, and the prospect of living with my Fanny gladdens my heart:—You know not how I love her."^{[55]:139[d]}

Henry Fielding wrote a pamphlet titled *The Female Husband* in 1746, based on the life of Mary Hamilton, who was arrested after marrying a woman while masquerading as a man, and was sentenced to public whipping and six months in jail.^{[54]:51–54}

The Irish Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby were nicknamed the Ladies of Llangollen. Butler and Ponsonby eloped in 1778, to the relief of Ponsonby's family (concerned about their reputation had she run away with a man)^{[55]:75} to live together in Wales for 51 years and be thought of as eccentrics.^{[6]:227–229} Their story was considered "the epitome of virtuous romantic friendship" and inspired poetry by Anna Seward and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.^{[50]:45–46}



1800s-early 1900s

Re-examining romantic friendships

During the 17th through 19th centuries in the West, a woman expressing passionate love for another woman was fashionable, accepted, and encouraged.^{[6]:136} These relationships were termed romantic friendships, Boston marriages, or "sentimental friends".^[58] These relationships were documented by large volumes of letters written between women. Any sexual components of the relationships were not publicly discussed. Romantic friendships were promoted as alternatives to and practice for a woman's marriage to a man.^{[55]:74–77}

In a rare instance of sexuality being the focus of a romantic friendship, two Scottish schoolteachers in the early 19th century were accused by a student of visiting in the same bed, kissing, and making the bed shake. The student's grandmother reported the teachers to the authorities, who were skeptical that their actions were sexual in nature, or that they extended beyond the bounds of normal friendship: "Are we to say that every woman who has formed an intimate friendship and has slept in the same bed with another is guilty? Where is the innocent woman in Scotland?"^{[6]:233}

Around the turn of the 20th century, the development of higher education provided opportunities for women. In all-female surroundings, a culture of romantic pursuit was fostered in women's colleges. Older students mentored younger ones, called on them socially, took them to all-women dances, and sent them flowers, cards, and poems that declared their undying love for each other.^{[55]:297–313} These were called "smashes" or "spoons", and they were written about quite frankly in stories for girls aspiring to attend college in publications such as Ladies Home Journal, a children's magazine titled St. Nicholas, and a collection called Smith College Stories, without negative views.^{[57]:255} Enduring loyalty, devotion, and love were major components to these stories, and sexual acts beyond kissing were consistently undescribed.^{[55]:297–313}



Intimacy between women was fashionable between the 17th and 19th centuries, although sexuality was rarely publicly acknowledged. (Photograph c. 1900.)

Faderman calls this period "the last breath of innocence" before 1920 when characterizations of female affection were connected to sexuality, marking lesbians as a unique and often unflatteringly portrayed group.^{[55]:297–313} Specifically, Faderman connects the growth of women's independence and their beginning to reject strictly prescribed roles in the Victorian era to the scientific designation of lesbianism as a type of aberrant sexual behavior.^{[54]:45–49}

Notable relationships

In the 1800s, English Diarist Anne Lister, captivated by Butler and Ponsonby, recorded her affairs with women between 1817 and 1840. Some of it was written in code, detailing her sexual relationships with Marianna Belcombe and Maria Barlow.^{[59]:390}

In the 1800s, Edward De Lacy Evans was born female in Ireland, but took a male name during the voyage to Australia and lived as a man for 23 years in Victoria, marrying three times.^{[6]:224}

American poet Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) wrote over 300 letters and poems to Susan Gilbert, who later became her sister-in-law, and later engaged in another romantic correspondence with Kate Scott Anthon.^{[57]:145–148}

American freeborn Black women Addie Brown and Rebecca Primus left evidence of their passion in letters: "No kisses is like youres".^{[6]:234} They wrote openly about their sexual affection for one another, and despite their working-class economic status their writings survived, both of which are unusual for the time.

In 1870, American Alice Baldy wrote to Josie Varner, "Do you know that if you touch me, or speak to me there is not a nerve of fibre in my body that does not respond with a thrill of delight?"^{[6]:232}

In the early 1900s, the unmarried professor Jeannette Augustus Marks at Mount Holyoke College, lived with the college president, Mary Woolley, for 36 years. Even while unmarried and living with a woman, Marks discouraged young women from "abnormal" friendships and insisted happiness could only be attained with a man.^{[6]:239[e]}

In 1909, Percy Redwood created a scandal in New Zealand when she was found to be Amy Bock, who had married a woman from Port Molyneaux; newspapers argued whether it was a sign of insanity or an inherent character flaw.^[60]

History of sexology (late 1800s-early 1900s)

In research on "inversion", German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld categorized what was normal sexual behavior for men and women, and therefore categorized to what extent men and women deviated from these "ideal types".^{[6]:168} Sexologists Richard von Krafft-Ebing from Germany and Britain's Havelock Ellis wrote some of the earliest and more enduring categorizations of female same-sex attraction, approaching it as a form of insanity and debating whether change was possible.^{[55]:241–242}

The work of Krafft-Ebing and Ellis was widely read and helped to create public consciousness of female homosexuality.^[f] In the absence of any other material to describe their emotions, homosexuals accepted the designation of different or perverted, and used their outlaw status to form social circles in Paris and Berlin. *Lesbian* began to describe elements of a subculture.^{[6]:178–179}

Early 1900s

From the 1890s to the 1930s, American heiress Natalie Clifford Barney held a weekly salon of artistic celebrities in Paris, where lesbian topics were the focus. Combining Greek influences with contemporary French eroticism, she attempted to create an updated and idealized version of Lesbos in her salon.^{[62]:234} Salon attendees included prominent lesbian artists such as novelist Radclyffe Hall,^{[63]:48} artist Romaine Brooks; writer Colette, writer Djuna Barnes, and social host Gertrude Stein.^{[64]:153–167}



The Victory of Faith by Saint George Hare has been described by Kobena Mercer as depicting an interracial lesbian couple, likening it to *Les Amis* by Jules Robert Auguste.^[61]

Berlin had a vibrant homosexual culture in the 1920s, and about 50 clubs catered to lesbians. Die Freundin Magazines like (*The Girlfriend*) and Garçonne (aka *Frauenliebe* (*Woman Love*)) were aimed at lesbians and male transvestites.^{[6]:241–244} These publications were controlled by men as owners, publishers, and writers. Around 1926, Selli Engler founded Die BIF – Blätter Idealer Frauenfreundschaften (*The BIF – Papers on Ideal Women Friendships*), the first lesbian publication owned, published and written by women. In 1928, the lesbian bar and nightclub guide *Berlins lesbische Frauen* (*The Lesbians of Berlin*) by Ruth Margarite Röllig^[65] further popularized the German capital as a center of lesbian activity. Clubs varied between large tourist attractions to small neighborhood cafes. The cabaret song "Das lila Lied" ("The Lavender Song") became an anthem to the lesbians of Berlin. Although it was sometimes tolerated, homosexuality was illegal in Germany and law enforcement used permitted gatherings as an opportunity to register the names of homosexuals for future reference.^[66] Magnus Hirschfeld's Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, which promoted tolerance for homosexuals in Germany, welcomed lesbian participation, and a surge of lesbian-themed writing and political activism in the German feminist movement became evident.^{[62]:230–231}



Berlin's thriving lesbian community in the 1920s published *Die Freundin* magazine between 1924 and 1933.

In 1928, Radclyffe Hall published the novel *The Well of Loneliness*. The novel's plot centers around Stephen Gordon, an invert woman. The novel was intended to be a call for tolerance for inverters by publicizing their disadvantages and lack of control over the condition.^{[55]:320} The novel's trial for obscenity was described as "the crystallizing moment in the construction of a visible modern English lesbian subculture" by professor Laura Doan.^[67]



Radclyffe Hall's image appeared in many newspapers discussing the content of *The Well of Loneliness*.

Newspaper stories frankly divulged that the book's content includes "sexual relations between Lesbian women", and photographs of Hall often accompanied details about lesbians in most major print outlets within a span of six months.^[67] Hall reflected the appearance of a "mannish" woman in the 1920s: short cropped hair, tailored suits (often with pants), and monocle that became widely recognized as a "uniform".^[67]



Harlem resident Gladys Bentley was renowned for her blues songs about her affairs with women.

women regularly.^[69]

In the United States, the 1920s was a decade of social experimentation, particularly with sex. This was heavily influenced by the writings of Sigmund Freud, who theorized that sexual desire would be sated unconsciously, despite an individual's wish to ignore it.^{[54]:63–67} Freud said that while most people have phases of homosexual attraction or experimentation, he attributed exclusive same-sex attraction to stunted development resulting from trauma or parental conflicts.^{[62]:242[g]} Freud's theories were much more pervasive in the U.S. than in Europe. Large cities that provided a nightlife were immensely popular, and women began to seek out sexual adventure. Bisexuality became chic, particularly in America's first gay neighborhoods.^{[54]:63–67}

No location saw more visitors for its possibilities of homosexual nightlife than Harlem, the predominantly African American section of New York City. White "slummers" enjoyed jazz and nightclubs. Blues singers Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Ethel Waters, and Gladys Bentley openly sang about affairs with women.^{[54]:71[69]} Homosexuals began to draw comparisons between their newly recognized minority status and that of African Americans.^{[54]:68} Among African American residents of Harlem, lesbian relationships were common and tolerated, though not overtly embraced. Some women staged lavish wedding ceremonies, even filing licenses using masculine names with New York City.^{[54]:73} Most homosexual women were married to men and participated in affairs with

Across town, Greenwich Village also saw a growing homosexual community; both Harlem and Greenwich Village provided furnished rooms for single men and women, which was a major factor in their development as centers for homosexual communities.^{[38]:181} The Village attracted Bohemian intellectuals who rejected Victorian ideals. Homosexuals were predominantly male, although figures such as poet Edna St. Vincent Millay and social host Mabel Dodge were known for their affairs with women and promotion of tolerance of homosexuality.^{[55]:82–83} Women in the U.S. who could not visit Harlem or live in Greenwich Village were first able to visit saloons in the 1920s without being considered prostitutes. The existence of a public space for women to socialize in bars that catered to lesbians "became the single most important public manifestation of the subculture for many decades", according to historian Lillian Faderman.^{[54]:79–80}

Great Depression

The primary component necessary to encourage lesbians to be public and seek other women was economic independence, which virtually disappeared in the 1930s with the Great Depression. Independent women in the 1930s were generally seen as holding jobs that men should have. Most lesbians in the U.S. found it necessary to marry, engaging either in traditional marriages or "front" marriages to a gay man where both could discreetly pursue homosexual relationships.^{[54]:94–96}

The hostile social attitude led to the formation of small, close-knit, bar-centric communities in large cities. Women in other locales typically remained isolated. Speaking of homosexuality in any context was socially forbidden. Slang terms referred to openly gay people as "in the Life".^{[54]:105–112[h]}

Homosexual subculture disappeared in Germany with the rise of the Nazis in 1933.^{[6]:191–193}

American First Lady from 1933 to 1945, Eleanor Roosevelt, exchanged rings with and wrote daily letters to journalist Lorena Hickok, expressing her love for Hickok, using endearments, and expressing a desire to kiss her.^{[55]:297–313}

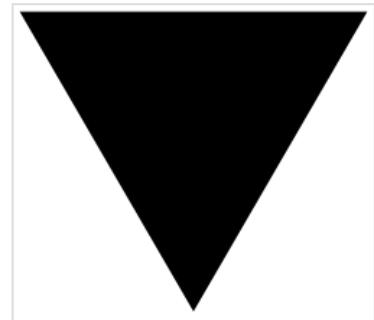
World War II

The onset of World War II caused a massive upheaval in people's lives as military mobilization engaged millions of men. Women were also accepted into the military in the U.S. Women's Army Corps (WACs) and U.S. Navy's Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES). Unlike processes to screen out male homosexuals, which had been in place since the creation of the American military, there were no methods to identify or screen for lesbians; they were put into place gradually during World War II. Despite common attitudes regarding women's traditional roles in the 1930s, independent and masculine women were directly recruited by the military in the 1940s, and frailty discouraged.^{[71]:28–33}



Women's experiences in the work force and the military during World War II gave them economic and social options that helped to shape lesbian subculture.

Some women arrived at the recruiting station in a man's suit, denied ever being in love with another woman, and were easily inducted.^{[71]:28–33} Sexual activity was forbidden and blue discharge was almost certain if one identified oneself as a lesbian. As women found each other, they formed into tight groups on base, socialized at service clubs, and began to use code words. Historian Allan Bérubé documented that homosexuals in the armed forces either consciously or subconsciously refused to identify themselves as homosexual or lesbian, and also never spoke about others' orientation.^{[71]:104}



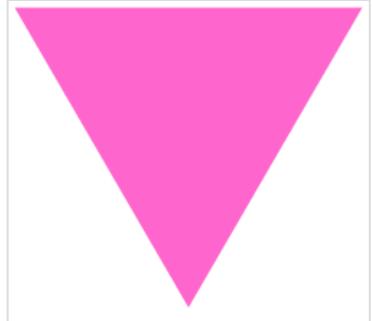
People who did not conform to Nazi ideals were considered asocial, imprisoned, and identified with a black triangle. Lesbians were deemed asocial.

The most masculine women were not necessarily common, though they were visible, so they tended to attract women interested in finding other lesbians. Women had to broach the subject about their interest in other women carefully, sometimes taking days to develop a common understanding without asking or stating anything outright.^{[71]:100}

Women who did not enter the military were aggressively called upon to take industrial jobs left by men, in order to continue national productivity. The increased mobility, sophistication, and independence of many women during and after the war made it possible for women to live without husbands, something that would not have been feasible under different economic and social circumstances, further shaping lesbian networks and environments.^{[54]:129–130}

In Germany, there was no explicit law against lesbianism. Lesbians who were Jewish, Roma, or politically dissident, were persecuted primarily for these other characteristics.^[72] Prior to 1939, lesbians were imprisoned as 'asocials', which was "a broad category applied to all people who evaded Nazi

rule."^[73] Asocials were identified with an inverted black triangle.^[72] In the 1990s in the U.S., some lesbians used the black triangle symbol as an identifier, and the pink triangle was also used for the combined lesbian-gay movement.^[73]



Many lesbians reclaimed the symbolism of the pink triangle, though the Nazis only applied it to gay men.

Postwar

Following World War II, a nationwide movement pressed to return to pre-war society as quickly as possible in the U.S.^[74] Partially due to the increasing national paranoia about communism and the pervasiveness of psychoanalytic theory, the U.S. government began persecuting homosexuals around 1950. The government fired open homosexuals and began a widespread effort to gather intelligence about employees' private lives.^{[62]:277} The U.S. military and government conducted interrogations of women's sexual histories.^{[54]:150–155} State and local governments followed suit, arresting people for congregating in bars and parks, and enacting laws against cross-dressing for both sexes.^[74]

Postwar practices to eliminate homosexuals from public service positions also began to Australia,^[75] Canada,^[76] and the UK.^{[50]:109–114} A section to create an offence of "gross indecency" between females was added to a bill in the United Kingdom House of Commons and passed there in 1921, but was rejected in the House of Lords, apparently because they were concerned any attention paid to sexual misconduct would also promote it.^{[50]:109–114}

Concurrently with government persecution, in 1952, homosexuality was listed as a pathological emotional disturbance in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*.^{[62]:247} The view that homosexuality was a curable sickness was widely believed in the medical community, general population, and among many lesbians themselves.^[77]

Very little information was available about homosexuality beyond medical and psychiatric texts. Community meeting places consisted of bars that were commonly raided by police, with those arrested exposed in newspapers. In response, eight women in San Francisco met in their living rooms in 1955 to socialize and have a safe place to dance. When they decided to make it a regular meeting, they became the first organization for lesbians in the U.S., titled the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB). In 1956, the DOB began publishing a magazine titled *The Ladder*.^[78] *The Ladder* was mailed to hundreds—eventually thousands—of DOB members discussing the nature of homosexuality, sometimes challenging the idea that it was a sickness, with readers offering their own reasons why they were lesbians and suggesting ways to cope with the condition or society's response to it.^[77] British lesbians followed with the publication of *Arena Three* beginning in 1964, with a similar mission.^{[50]:153–158}

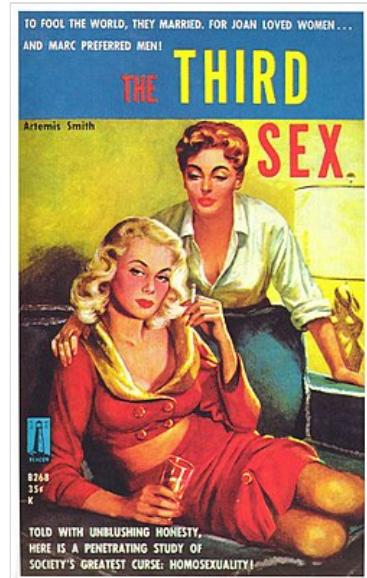


The 1957 first edition of *The Ladder*, mailed to hundreds of women in the San Francisco area, urged women to take off their masks.

Butch and femme dichotomy

Early working-class lesbian subculture in the U.S. and Canada developed rigid gender roles. These roles dated back to Harlem and Greenwich Village in the 1920s.^[50] In this subculture, a couple was defined as "dichotomous individuals, if not male and female, then butch and femme".^{[54]:167–168} Although many municipalities enacted laws against cross-dressing, some women (*butches*) would socialize in bars dressed in men's clothing and mirroring traditional masculine behavior. Others (*femmes*) wore traditionally feminine clothing. Butch and femme modes of socialization were so integral within lesbian bars that women who refused to choose between the two would be ignored, or at least unable to date anyone, and butch/butch or femme/femme romantic relationships were unacceptable.^{[54]:167–168}

By the 1950s and 1960s, the roles were pervasive and not limited to North America: from 1940 to 1970, butch/femme bar culture flourished in Britain, though there were fewer class distinctions than in lesbian communities in the U.S.^{[50]:141–143 [54]:170–174} Butch and femme were considered coarse by American lesbians of higher social standing during this period.^{[54]:175–178}



Though marketed to heterosexual men, lesbian pulp fiction provided an identity to isolated women in the 1950s.

Fiction

Regardless of the lack of information about homosexuality in scholarly texts, another forum for learning about lesbianism was growing. A paperback book titled Women's Barracks describing a woman's experiences in the Free French Forces was published in 1950. It told of a lesbian relationship the author had witnessed. After 4.5 million copies were sold, it was consequently named in the House Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials in 1952.^[79] Its publisher, Gold Medal Books, followed with the novel Spring Fire in 1952, which sold 1.5 million copies. Gold Medal Books was overwhelmed with mail from women writing about the subject matter, and followed with more books, creating the genre of lesbian pulp fiction.^[79]

Between 1955 and 1969, over 2,000 books were published using lesbianism as a topic, and they were sold in corner drugstores, train stations, bus stops, and newsstands all over the U.S. and Canada. Literary scholar, Yvonne Keller created several subclasses for lesbian pulp fiction, to help highlight the differences between the types of pulp fiction being released.^[80] Virile adventures were written by authors using male pseudonyms, and almost all were marketed to heterosexual men. During this time, another subclass emerged called "Pro-Lesbian". The emergence of pro-lesbian fiction began with authors seeing the voyeuristic and homophobic nature of virile adventures. With only a handful of lesbian pulp fiction authors were women writing for lesbians, including Ann Bannon, Valerie Taylor, Paula Christian, and Vin Packer/Ann Aldrich. These authors focused on the relationship between the women instead of writing sexually explicit material, defying the standards of the "virile adventure" model.^[80]

The differences between virile adventures and pro-lesbian covers and titles were distinct enough that Bannon, who also purchased lesbian pulp fiction, later stated that women identified the material iconically by the cover art.^[81] Pro-lesbian covers were innocuous and hinted at their lesbian themes, and virile adventures ranged from having one woman partially undressed to sexually explicit covers, to

demonstrate the invariably salacious material inside.^[80] In addition to this, coded words and images were used on the covers. Instead of "lesbian", terms such as "strange", "twilight", "queer", and "third sex", were used in the titles.^[82] Many of the books used cultural references: naming places, terms, describing modes of dress and other codes to isolated women. As a result, pulp fiction helped to proliferate a lesbian identity simultaneously to lesbians and heterosexual readers.^[83]

Second-wave feminism / Late 1960s-1980s

The social rigidity of the 1950s and early 1960s encountered a backlash as social movements to improve the standing of African Americans, the poor, women, and gays all became prominent. The gay rights movement and the feminist movement connected after a violent confrontation occurred in New York City in the 1969 Stonewall riots.^{[6]:212–216}

From the late 1950s to the 1970s, the sexual revolution took place, and many women took advantage of their new social freedom to try new experiences. Women who previously identified as heterosexual tried sex with women, though many maintained their heterosexual identity.^{[54]:203}

From the 1960s to the 1980s, the movement of second-wave feminism developed. Lesbianism as a political identity grew to describe a social philosophy among women, often overshadowing sexual desire as a defining trait. Different groups and authors defined "lesbian" as "the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion",^{[26]:70} "a woman-identified woman who does not fuck men. It does not mean compulsory sexual activity with women.",^{[50]:177} or "a woman whose primary erotic, psychological, emotional and social interest is in a member of her own sex[...]."^{[84]:7} Women who subscribed to this philosophy dubbed themselves lesbian-feminists. In the ideal society, named Lesbian Nation, "woman" and "lesbian" were interchangeable.^{[54]:218–219}

Separatist feminists expressed their disdain with an inherently sexist and patriarchal society, and concluded the most effective way to overcome sexism and attain the equality of women would be to deny men any power or pleasure from women. Many believers strove to separate themselves physically and economically from traditional male-centered culture.^{[54]:218–219} As equality was a priority for lesbian-feminists, disparity of roles between men and women or butch and femme were viewed as patriarchal. Lesbian-feminists also eschewed the perceived chauvinism of gay men; many lesbian-feminists refused to work with men, or take up their causes.^{[54]:210–211}

Although lesbian-feminism was a significant shift, not all lesbians agreed with it. Lesbian-feminism was a youth-oriented movement: its members were primarily college educated, with experience in New Left and radical causes, but they had not seen any success in persuading radical organizations to take up women's issues.^{[26]:11} Many older lesbians who had acknowledged their sexuality in more conservative times felt maintaining their ways of coping in a homophobic world was more appropriate.^[85] Lesbians who believed they were born homosexual, and used the descriptor "lesbian" to define sexual attraction, often considered the separatist opinions of lesbian-feminists to be detrimental to the cause of gay rights.^{[54]:217–218}

In 1970, the Daughters of Bilitis folded over which direction to focus on: feminism or gay rights issues.^[85]

From 1974 to 1993, the organization Salsa Soul Sisters, today known as the African Ancestral Lesbians United for Societal Change, was a lesbian womanist organization operating in New York City.^{[86]:55}

In October 1980, the [First Black Lesbian Conference](#) was held, an outgrowth from the First National Third World Lesbian and Gay Conference.^{[87][88]}

Third-wave feminism / 1980s-2000s

In the 1980s, a significant movement rejected the desexualization of lesbianism by cultural feminists, causing a heated controversy called the [feminist sex wars](#).^{[54]:246–252} Butch and femme roles returned, although not as strictly followed as they were in the 1950s. They became a mode of chosen sexual self-expression for some women in the 1990s. Once again, women felt safer claiming to be more sexually adventurous, and sexual flexibility became more accepted.^[89]

In 1997, Marxist political activist [Angela Davis](#) came out a lesbian in an interview with [Out magazine](#).^[90]

Lesbians of color

"Lesbians of color" is an umbrella term for Black, Latina, Asian, Arab, Native American, and other non-white lesbians. Lesbians of color have often been a marginalized group,^[91] and experienced racism in addition to homophobia and misogyny.^[92]

Some scholars have noted that past lesbian communities were primarily white and American, and that some lesbians of color had difficulties integrating into these communities at large. Many lesbians of color have stated that they were often systematically excluded from lesbian spaces based on the fact that they are women of color.^[93] The early lesbian feminist movement was criticized for excluding race and class issues from their spaces and for a lack of focus on issues that did not benefit white women.^[91]

Additionally, lesbians of color face unique sets of challenges within their respective racial communities, as communities of color often view homosexuality as a "white" lifestyle and see the acceptance of homosexuality as a setback in achieving equality.^[92] Lesbians of color, especially those of immigrant populations, often hold the sentiment that their orientation adversely affects assimilation into the dominant culture.^[91] Within racial communities, the decision to [come out](#) can be costly, as the threat of loss of support from family, friends, and the community at large is probable. Lesbians of color are often exposed to a range of adverse consequences, including [microaggression](#), discrimination, menace, and violence.^[93]

[Audre Lorde](#), [Barbara Smith](#), and [Cherrie Moraga](#) are cited as major theorists within the various lesbians of color movements for their insistence on inclusion and equality, from both racial communities and white lesbian communities.^[91]

The many intersections surrounding lesbians of color can often contribute to an increased need for mental health resources. Lesbians of color are more likely to experience a number of psychological issues due to the various experiences of sexism, racism, and homophobia.^[94] Mental health providers often use [heteronormative](#) standards to gauge the health of lesbian relationships, and the relationships of lesbian women of color are often subjects of judgment because they are seen as the most deviant.^[94]



Attendees at 2012 New York City [Pride parade](#)

Native North America

Some Indigenous peoples of the Americas conceptualize a third gender for women who dress as, and fulfill the roles usually filled by, men in their cultures.^{[95][96]} In other cases they may use different terms for feminine women and masculine women.^[97] These identities are rooted in the context of the ceremonial and cultural lives of the particular Indigenous cultures, and "simply being gay and Indian does not make someone a Two-Spirit."^[98] These ceremonial and social roles, which are conferred and confirmed by the person's elders, "do not make sense" when defined by non-Native concepts of sexual orientation and gender identity.^[96] Rather, they must be understood in an Indigenous context, as traditional spiritual and social roles held by the person in their Indigenous community.^{[98][96][99]}

Tribal law can differ from colonial law. For example, the Navajo Nation's *Diné Marriage Act of 2005*, which bans recognition of specifically same-sex marriages performed outside the Nation, remains in place as of 2025 despite ongoing disputes.^{[100][101][102]}

Middle East

Arabic-language historical records have used various terms to describe sexual practices between women.^[103] A common one is "sahq", which refers to rubbing. Lesbian practices and identities are largely absent from the historical record. The common term to describe lesbianism in Arabic today is essentially the same term used to describe men, and thus the distinction between male and female homosexuality is to a certain extent linguistically obscured in contemporary queer discourse.^[103] Overall, the study of contemporary lesbian experience in the region is complicated by power dynamics in the postcolonial context, shaped even by what some scholars refer to as "homonationalism", the use of politicized understanding of sexual categories to advance specific national interests on the domestic and international stage.^[104]

Women in the Middle East have been historically segregated from men. In the 7th and 8th centuries, some extraordinary women dressed in male attire when gender roles were less strict. The Caliphal court in Baghdad featured women who dressed as men, including false facial hair, but they competed with other women for the attentions of men.^{[105][103]}

In the ninth century, the Muslim philosopher al-Kindi, who was born and educated in modern-day Iraq, explicitly discusses lesbianism: "Lesbianism is due to a vapor which, condensed, generates in the labia heat and an itch which only dissolve and become cold through friction and orgasm. When friction and orgasm take place, the heat turns into coldness because the liquid that a woman ejaculates in lesbian intercourse is cold whereas..."^[106]

In the tenth century, the erotic writings *Jawami `al-ladhdha (Encyclopedia of Pleasure)*, by Abul Hasan Ali ibn Nasr al-Katib, was written also in modern-day Iraq. It describes a committed relationship between a Christian woman and an Arab woman in pre-Islamic Iraq, and the mourning process one went through when the other died.^[106]

According to the 12th-century writings of Sharif al-Idrisi, highly intelligent women were more likely to be lesbians; their intellectual prowess put them on a more even par with men.^[105]

While male-written accounts of lesbianism in the Middle East exist, a 1978 treatise about repression in Iran asserted that women were completely silenced: "In the whole of Iranian history, [no woman] has been allowed to speak out for such tendencies ... To attest to lesbian desires would be an unforgivable crime."^[105]

A lesbian anthropologist in 1991 visited Yemen and reported that women in the town she visited were unable to comprehend her romantic relationship to another woman. Women in Pakistan are expected to marry men; those who do not are ostracized. Women may have intimate relations with other women as long as their wifely duties are met, their private matters are kept quiet, and the woman with whom they are involved is somehow related by family or logical interest to her lover.^[105]

Individuals identifying with or otherwise engaging in lesbian practices in the region can face family violence and societal persecution, including "honor killings". The justifications provided by murderers relate to a person's perceived sexual immorality, loss of virginity (outside of acceptable frames of marriage), and target female victims primarily.^[107]

Lesbians also face government persecution in the Middle East. In Yemen, homosexuality is criminalized, and women can face lashings, up to three years in prison or the death penalty for consensual lesbian sex.^{[108][109]} In 2017, the Egyptian government arrested and tortured out lesbian and activist Sarah Hegazi after she flew a rainbow flag at a concert.^[110]

Latin America

In Latin America, lesbian subcultures increased as several countries transitioned to or reformed democratic governments. However, social harassment has been common even in places where homosexuality is legal. Laws against child corruption, morality, or "the good ways" (*faltas a la moral o las buenas costumbres*) have been used to persecute homosexuals.^[111] Lesbian groups and advocacy have faced repression in many countries where dictators have seized power, including Argentina.^[111]

Argentinian lesbian group *Nuestro Mundo* (NM) was created in 1969.^[111]

Mexican lesbian group *Lesbos* was founded in 1977. In 1997, 13 lesbian organizations were active in Mexico City.^[111]

In Chile, the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet forbade the creation of lesbian groups until 1984. The first lesbian group *Ayuquelén* ("joy of being" in Mapuche) was first founded in 1984, prompted by the very public homophobic murder of a woman. *Ayuquelén* worked to remove the sodomy laws then in place in Chile.^[111]

In Nicaragua in 1986, the Sandinista National Liberation Front expelled gay men and lesbians from its midst. State persecution prevented the formation of associations until AIDS became a concern, when educational efforts forced sexual minorities to band together. The first lesbian organization was *Nosotras*,



Sara Hegazi, an Egyptian arrested in 2017 for flying a rainbow flag

founded in 1989. An effort to promote visibility from 1991 to 1992 provoked the government to declare homosexuality illegal in 1994, effectively ending the movement until 2004, when *Grupo Safo – Grupo de Mujeres Lesbianas de Nicaragua* was created, four years before homosexuality became legal again.^[111]

Africa

Founded in 2004 in Namibia, the Coalition of African Lesbians is a pan-Africanist, radical feminist network of fourteen nonprofits across ten African countries, working to eradicate stigma, legal discrimination, and violence against lesbians.^[112]

Cross-gender roles and marriage between women has also been recorded in over 30 traditional African societies.^{[6]:262} Women may marry other women, raise their children, and be generally thought of as men in societies in Nigeria, Cameroon, and Kenya. The Hausa people of Sudan have a term equivalent to lesbian, *kifi*, that may also be applied to males to mean "neither party insists on a particular sexual role".^{[6]:259}

Near the Congo River, a female who participates in strong emotional or sexual relationships with another female among the Nkundo people is known as *yaikya bonsango* (a woman who presses against another woman). Lesbian relationships are also known in matrilineal societies in Ghana among the Akan people. In Lesotho, females engage in what is commonly considered sexual behavior to the Western world: they kiss, sleep together, rub genitals, participate in cunnilingus, and maintain their relationships with other females vigilantly. Since the people of Lesotho believe sex requires a penis, they do not consider their behavior sexual, nor label themselves lesbians.^{[6]:237–238}

In Tanzania, lesbians are known as or called "Msagaji" (singular), "Wasagaji" (plural), which in Swahili means grinder or grinding because of the perceived nature of lesbian sex that would involve the mutual rubbing of vulvas.^[113]

Corrective rape is reported to be on the rise in South Africa.^[114] The crime is sometimes supervised by members of the woman's family or local community,^[115] and is a major contributor to HIV infection in South African lesbians.^[114] "Corrective rape" is not recognized by the South African legal system as a hate crime despite the fact that the South African Constitution states that no person shall be discriminated against based on their social status and identity, including sexual orientation.^{[116][117][118]} Legally, South Africa protects gay rights extensively, but the government has not taken proactive action to prevent corrective rape, and women do not have much faith in the police and their investigations.^{[119][120]} Local South African organizations including nonprofit "Luleki Sizwe" and The Triangle Project, between 500 (per Triangle Project) and 3600 (Luleki Sizwe) South Africans suffer from corrective rape every year,^{[121][119]} the vast majority of lesbians live in fear of corrective rape, and victims are less likely to report the crime because of their society's homophobia.^[119]

Asia

China before westernization was another society that segregated men from women. Historical Chinese culture has not recognized a concept of sexual orientation, or a framework to divide people based on their same-sex or opposite-sex attractions.^{[122]:29} Although there was a significant culture surrounding homosexual men, there was none for women. Outside their duties to bear sons to their husbands, women were perceived as having no sexuality at all.^{[6]:311}

This did not mean that women could not pursue sexual relationships with other women, but that such associations could not impose upon women's relationships to men. Rare references to lesbianism were written by Ying Shao, who identified same-sex relationships between women in imperial courts who behaved as husband and wife as *dui shi* (paired eating). "Golden Orchid Associations" in Southern China existed into the 20th century and promoted formal marriages between women, who were then allowed to adopt children.^{[38]:187} Westernization brought new ideas that all sexual behavior not resulting in reproduction was aberrant.^{[122]:30–31}



A historic shunga woodblock printing (c. 1500) from Japan depicting two women having sex

The liberty of being employed in silk factories starting in 1865 allowed some women to style themselves *tzu-shu nii* (never to marry) and live in communes with other women. Other Chinese called them *sou-hei* (self-combers) for adopting hairstyles of married women. These communes passed because of the Great Depression and were subsequently discouraged by the communist government for being a relic of feudal China.^{[38]:195} In contemporary Chinese society, *tongzhi* (same goal or spirit) is the term used to refer to homosexuals; most Chinese are reluctant to divide this classification further to identify lesbians.^{[122]:28}

In Japan, the term *re Zubian*, a Japanese pronunciation of "lesbian", was used during the 1920s. Westernization brought more independence for women and allowed some Japanese women to wear pants.^{[6]:246} The cognate *tomboy* is used in the Philippines, and particularly in Manila, to denote women who are more masculine.^{[122]:122} Virtuous women in Korea prioritize motherhood, chastity, and virginity; outside this scope, very few women are free to express themselves through sexuality, although there is a growing organization for lesbians named *Kkirikkiri*.^{[122]:75} The term *pondan* is used in Malaysia to refer to gay men, but since there is no historical context to reference lesbians, the term is used for female homosexuals as well.^{[122]:145} As in many Asian countries, open homosexuality is discouraged in many social levels, so many Malaysians lead double lives.^{[122]:148–150}

In India, a 14th-century Indian text mentioning a lesbian couple who had a child as a result of their lovemaking is an exception to the general silence about female homosexuality. According to Ruth Vanita, this invisibility disappeared with the release of a film titled *Fire* in 1996, prompting some theaters in India to be attacked by religious extremists. Terms used to label homosexuals are often rejected by Indian activists for being the result of imperialist influence, but most discourse on homosexuality centers on men. Women's rights groups in India continue to debate the legitimacy of including lesbian issues in their platforms, as lesbians and material focusing on female homosexuality are frequently suppressed.^[123]

Demographics

Kinsey Report

The most extensive early study of female homosexuality was provided by the Institute for Sex Research, who published an in-depth report of the sexual experiences of American women in 1953. More than 8,000 women were interviewed by Alfred Kinsey and the staff of the Institute for Sex Research for Kinsey Reports. The reports' methodology was criticized during and after its publication.^{[124][125][126]}

Despite the criticism, the reports were unexpectedly popular. They reported that 28% of women had been aroused by another female, and 19% had a sexual contact with another female.,^{[127]:453[i]} and that around nine percent of the women had orgasmed.^{[127]:453–454}

The report's dispassionate discussion of homosexuality as a form of human sexual behavior was revolutionary. Up to this study, only physicians and psychiatrists studied sexual behavior, and almost always the results were interpreted with a moral view.^[126]

Hite Report

In 1976, sexologist Shere Hite did a qualitative survey of 3,019 women on their sexual experiences, and published it as *The Hite Report*. Hite's questions differed from Kinsey's, focusing more on how women identified and what they preferred, rather than their prior experiences. Respondents to Hite's questions indicated that 8% preferred sex with women and 9% answered that they identified as bisexual or had sexual experiences with men and women, though they refused to indicate preference.^[128]

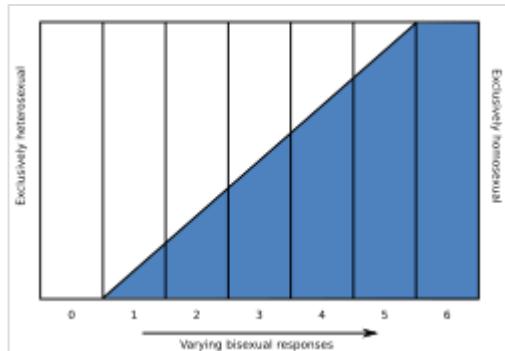
Hite found it "striking" that many women who had no lesbian experiences indicated they were interested in sex with women, particularly because the question was not asked.^[128] Hite found the two most significant differences between respondents' experience with men and women were the focus on clitoral stimulation, and more emotional involvement and orgasmic responses.^[128]

Population estimates

Lesbians in the U.S. are estimated to be about 2.6% of the population, according to a 2000 survey.^[129] Another American survey showed that between 2000 and 2005, the number of people claiming to be in same-sex relationships increased by 30%—five times the rate of population growth in the U.S. The study attributed the jump to people being more comfortable self-identifying as homosexual to the federal government.^[j]

A survey by the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) in 2010 found that 1.5% of Britons identified themselves as gay or bisexual, and the ONS suggests that this is in line with other surveys showing the number between 0.3% and 3%.^{[131][132]}

Polls in Australia recorded a range of self-identified lesbian or bisexual women from 1.3% to 2.2% of the total population.^[133]



Kinsey's scale of sexual responses showing exclusively heterosexual and homosexual, with the varying degrees of bisexuality in between

Health

Physical

Medical research and care sometimes use the term women who have sex with women (WSW) instead of lesbian.^[134]

In a 2006 American survey of 2,345 lesbian and bisexual women, only 9.3% had ever been asked their sexual orientation by a physician. A third of the women had received a negative reaction from a medical professional after identifying themselves as lesbian or bisexual.^[135]

When women do seek medical attention, medical professionals often fail to take a complete medical history. A patient's complete history helps medical professionals identify higher risk areas. In a 1995 U.S. survey of 6,935 self-identified lesbians, 77% had had one or more lifetime male sexual partners, and 6% had that contact within the previous year.^{[136][k]}

Cancer

The risk factors for developing ovarian cancer rates are higher in lesbians than heterosexual women, perhaps because many lesbians lack the protective factors of pregnancy, abortion, contraceptives, breast feeding, and miscarriages.^[137]

Many lesbians neglect to see a physician because they do not participate in heterosexual activity and require no birth control, which is the initiating factor for most women to seek consultation with a gynecologist when they become sexually active.^{[138]:359} As a result, many lesbians are not screened for cancer regularly with Pap smears.^[139]

Lifestyle factors

Factors that add to risk of heart disease include obesity and smoking, both of which are more prevalent among lesbians. Studies show that lesbians are generally less concerned about weight issues than heterosexual women; and lesbians consider women with higher body masses to be more attractive than heterosexual women do. Research is needed to determine specific causes of obesity and smoking in lesbians.^{[139][135]}

Lesbians are more likely to exercise regularly than heterosexual women. Lesbians, unlike heterosexual women, do not generally exercise for aesthetic reasons.^[140]

Sexual health

Some sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are communicable between women, including human papillomavirus (HPV), trichomoniasis, syphilis, and herpes simplex virus (HSV). Transmission of specific STIs among women who have sex with women depends on the sexual practices women engage in. Any object that comes in contact with cervical secretions, vaginal mucosa, or menstrual blood, including fingers or penetrative objects may transmit STIs.^[141] Orogenital contact may indicate a higher risk of acquiring HSV,^[142] even among women who have had no sex with men.^[134]

Bacterial vaginosis (BV) occurs more often in lesbians, but it is unclear if BV is transmitted by sexual contact; it occurs in celibate as well as sexually active women. BV often occurs in both partners in a lesbian relationship;^[143] a recent study of women with BV found that 81% had partners with BV.^[134]

Lesbians do not frequently transmit human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), although transmission is possible through vaginal and cervical secretions. The highest rate of transmission of HIV to lesbians is from intravenous drug use or sex with women who have sexual intercourse with bisexual men.^{[138][144]}

Mental

Lesbian women report feeling significantly different and isolated during adolescence.^{[145][26]:153} These emotions have been cited as appearing on average at 15 years old in lesbians and 18 years old in bisexual women.^[146]

More than half the respondents to a 1994 survey of health issues in lesbians reported they had suicidal thoughts, and 18% had attempted suicide.^{[5]:70} American studies in the 2010s and 2020s have found that LGBT people experience higher rates of mental distress, and that this relationship is mediated by experiences of rejection and adverse childhood experiences.^[147]

Depression is reported among lesbians at a rate similar to heterosexual women.^{[5]:69} Depression is a more significant problem among women who feel they must hide their sexual orientation from friends and family, or experience compounded ethnic or religious discrimination, or endure relationship difficulties with no support system.^{[26]:157–158} Generalized anxiety disorder is more likely to appear among lesbian and bisexual women than heterosexual women.^{[145][1]}

Studies have shown that heterosexual men and lesbians have different standards for what they consider attractive in women. Lesbians who view themselves with male standards of female beauty may experience lower self-esteem, eating disorders, and higher incidence of depression.^[140]

A population-based study completed by the National Alcohol Research Center found that lesbians and bisexual women are less likely than heterosexual women to abstain from alcohol, and have a higher likelihood of reporting problems with alcohol, as well as not being satisfied with treatment for substance abuse programs.^[149] Many lesbian communities are centered in bars, and drinking is an activity that correlates to community participation for lesbians and bisexual women.^{[5]:81}

Media representation

The majority of media about lesbians has been produced by men;^{[26]:389–390} women's publishing companies did not develop until the 1970s, films about lesbians made by women did not appear until the 1980s, and women-written television shows portraying lesbians written only began to be created in the 21st century. When depictions of lesbians began to surface, they were often one-dimensional, simplified stereotypes.^{[26]:389–390}

Literature

Ancient lesbian writers include Sappho.^[m] Ancient stories interpreted as examples of lesbianism include the Book of Ruth,^{[57]:22–23}^{[59]:108} Camilla and Diana, Artemis and Callisto, and Iphis and Ianthe.^{[57]:24–27}

For ten centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire, lesbianism disappeared from literature.^{[59]:11} Foster points to the particularly strict view that Eve—representative of all women—caused the downfall of mankind; original sin among women was a particular concern, especially because women were perceived as creating life.^{[57]:30–31} During this time, women were largely illiterate and discouraged from intellectual pursuit, and men shaped ideas about sexuality.^{[59]:6}

In the 15th and 16th centuries, French and English depictions of relationships between women, writers' attitudes spanned from amused tolerance to arousal. Physical relationships between women were often encouraged, as long as they did not supersede heterosexual relationships; there was a cultural belief that lesbian sex and relationships could not be as fulfilling as heterosexual sex and relationships.^{[55]:26–29} At worst, if a woman became enamored of another woman, she became a tragic figure. Male intervention into relationships between women was necessary only when women acted as men and demanded the same social privileges.^{[55]:29}

In the 18th century, writings mentioning lesbianism included the 1749 English erotica Fanny Hill^[150] and the 1778 erotica L'Espion Anglais.^[151]

Lesbianism became almost exclusive to French literature in the 19th century, based on male fantasy and the desire to shock bourgeois moral values.^{[55]:264,268} Honoré de Balzac, in The Girl with the Golden Eyes (1835), employed lesbianism in his story about three people living amongst the moral degeneration of Paris, and again in later works. His work influenced novelist Théophile Gautier's Mademoiselle de Maupin, which provided the first description of a physical type that became associated with lesbians: tall, wide-shouldered, slim-hipped, and athletically inclined.^{[57]:51–65} Charles Baudelaire repeatedly used lesbianism as a theme in his poems "Lesbos", "Femmes damnées 1" ("Damned Women"), and "Femmes damnées 2".^{[59]:435}



In Bed by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1893). The Parisian artist employed the association between lesbianism and prostitution.^{[55]:281–283}

Reflecting French society, as well as employing stock character associations, many of the lesbian characters in 19th-century French literature were prostitutes or courtesans: personifications of vice who died early, violent deaths in moral endings.^{[55]:281–283} Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 1816 poem "Christabel" and the novella Carmilla (1872) by Sheridan Le Fanu both present lesbianism associated with vampirism.^{[55]:277,288–289}

Gradually, women began to write, and began to write about lesbian relationships. Until the 1920s, most major works involving lesbianism were penned by men. Foster suggests that women would have encountered suspicion about their own lives had they used same-sex love as a topic, and that some writers including Louise Labé, Charlotte Charke, and Margaret Fuller either changed the pronouns in their

literary works to male, or made them ambiguous.^{[57]:116–127} Author George Sand was portrayed as a character in several works in the 19th century; writer Mario Praz credited the popularity of lesbianism as a theme to Sand's appearance in Paris society in the 1830s.^{[55]:263[n]}

In the 20th century, Katherine Mansfield, Amy Lowell, Gertrude Stein, H.D., Vita Sackville-West, Virginia Woolf, and Gale Wilhelm wrote popular works that had same-sex relationships as themes.^{[38]:182} In 1928, *The Well of Loneliness* and three other novels with lesbian themes were published in England: Elizabeth Bowen's *The Hotel*, Woolf's *Orlando*, and Compton Mackenzie's satirical novel *Extraordinary Women*.^[152] Unlike *The Well of Loneliness*, none of these other novels were banned.^{[57]:281–287[ol]}

As the paperback book came into fashion, lesbian themes were relegated to pulp fiction. Many of the pulp novels typically presented very unhappy women, or relationships that ended tragically. Marijane Meaker later wrote that she was told to make the relationship end badly in *Spring Fire* because the publishers were concerned about the books being confiscated by the U.S. Postal Service.^[155] Patricia Highsmith, writing as Claire Morgan, wrote *The Price of Salt* in 1951 and refused to follow this directive.^{[59]:1024–1025}

In the 1970s, lesbian feminist magazines such as *The Furies*^[156] and *Sinister Wisdom* began publication.^[157]

Well-known writers who wrote on lesbian topics or about lesbian-themed plots included Rita Mae Brown, Dorothy Allison,^{[26]:377–379} Audre Lorde, and Cherríe Moraga.^{[26]:379}

Film

Lesbianism, or the suggestion of it, began early in filmmaking. The same constructs of how lesbians were portrayed—or for what reasons—as what had appeared in literature were placed on women in the films. Women challenging their feminine roles was a device more easily accepted than men challenging masculine ones. Actresses appeared as men in male roles because of plot devices as early as 1914 in *A Florida Enchantment* featuring Edith Storey. In *Morocco* (1930) Marlene Dietrich kisses another woman on the lips, and Katharine Hepburn plays a man in *Christopher Strong* in 1933 and again in *Sylvia Scarlett* (1936). Hollywood films followed the same trend set by audiences who flocked to Harlem to see edgy shows that suggested bisexuality.^{[158]:27–28}

Overt female homosexuality was introduced in the 1929 film *Pandora's Box*. German films depicting homosexuality were distributed throughout Europe, but 1931's *Mädchen in Uniform* was not distributed in the U.S. because of the depiction of an adolescent's love for a female teacher in boarding school.^{[159]:58}

After the introduction of the Hays Code in the U.S. in 1930, most references to homosexuality in American films were censored. The originally-lesbian play *The Children's Hour* was converted into a heterosexual love triangle and retitled *These Three*. The 1933 biopic *Queen Christina* veiled most of the speculation about Christina of Sweden's affairs with women.^{[159]:58} Censors removed a lesbian scene from the 1951 film *The Pit of Loneliness*, saying that it was "Immoral, would tend to corrupt morals".^{[159]:102} The code was relaxed somewhat after 1961, and the next year William Wyler remade *The Children's Hour* with Audrey Hepburn and Shirley MacLaine. After MacLaine's character admits her love for Hepburn's, she hangs herself; this set a precedent for miserable endings in films addressing homosexuality.^{[159]:139}

Gay characters also were often killed off at the end, such as the death of Sandy Dennis' character at the end of The Fox in 1968. If not victims, lesbians were depicted as villains or morally corrupt, such as portrayals of brothel madames by Barbara Stanwyck in Walk on the Wild Side from 1962 and Shelley Winters in The Balcony in 1963. Lesbians as predators were presented in Rebecca (1940), women's prison films like Caged (1950), or in the character Rosa Klebb in From Russia with Love (1963).^{[159]:143–156} Lesbian vampire themes have reappeared in Dracula's Daughter (1936), Blood and Roses (1960), Vampyros Lesbos (1971), and The Hunger (1983).^{[159]:49} Basic Instinct (1992) featured a bisexual murderer played by Sharon Stone; it was one of several films that set off a storm of protests about the depiction of gay people as predators.^{[158]:150–151}



Lesbianism, or homosexuality, was never spoken about in The Children's Hour, but it is transparent why Shirley MacLaine's character hangs herself.

The first film to address lesbianism with significant depth was The Killing of Sister George in 1968, which was filmed in The Gateways Club, a longstanding lesbian pub in London. Film historian Vito Russo considers the film a complex treatment of a multifaceted, openly lesbian character who is forced into silence about her orientation by other lesbians.^{[159]:170–173} Personal Best in 1982, and Lianna in 1983 treated lesbian relationships more sympathetically and showed lesbian sex scenes, though in neither film are the relationships happy ones. Personal Best was criticized for engaging in the clichéd plot device of one woman returning to a relationship with a man, implying that lesbianism is a phase, as well as treating the lesbian relationship with "undisguised voyeurism".^{[158]:185–186} More ambiguous portrayals of lesbian characters were seen in Silkwood (1983), The Color Purple (1985), and Fried Green Tomatoes (1991), despite explicit lesbianism in the source material.^[160]

An era of independent filmmaking brought different stories, writers, and directors to films. Desert Hearts (1985) was directed by lesbian Donna Deitch, and is loosely based on Jane Rule's novel Desert of the Heart. It received mixed critical commentary, but earned positive reviews from the gay press.^{[158]:194–195} The late 1980s and early 1990s ushered in a series of films treating gay and lesbian issues seriously, made by gays and lesbians, nicknamed New Queer Cinema.^{[158]:237} Films using lesbians as a subject included Rose Troche's avant garde romantic comedy Go Fish (1994) and the first film about African American lesbians, Cheryl Dunye's The Watermelon Woman, in 1995.^{[158]:241–242}

Later lesbian films included The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls in Love (1995), When Night Is Falling (1995), Better Than Chocolate (1999), and the social satire But I'm a Cheerleader (1999).^{[158]:270} A twist on the lesbian-as-predator theme was the added complexity of motivations of lesbian characters in the Oscar-winning biopic of Aileen Wuornos, Monster (2003).

Theatre

The first stage production to feature a lesbian kiss and open depiction of two women in love is the 1907 Yiddish play God of Vengeance (Got fun nekome) by Sholem Asch. Rivkele, a young woman, and Manke, a prostitute in her father's brothel, fall in love. On March 6, 1923, during a performance of the play in a New York City theatre, producers and cast were informed that they had been indicted by a Grand Jury for violating the Penal Code that defined the presentation of "an obscene, indecent, immoral and impure theatrical production." They were arrested the following day when they appeared before a judge. Two months later, they were found guilty in a jury trial. The producers were fined \$200 and the cast received

suspended sentences. The play is considered by some to be "the greatest drama of the Yiddish theater".^{[161][162]} *God of Vengeance* was the inspiration for the 2015 play *Indecent* by Paula Vogel, which features lesbian characters Rifkele and Manke.^{[163][164]} *Indecent* was nominated for multiple 2017 Tony Awards.^[165]

Broadway musical *The Prom* featured lesbian characters Emma Nolan and Alyssa Greene. In 2019, the production was nominated for six Tony Awards, including Best Musical, and received the Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Musical. A performance from *The Prom* was included in the 2018 *Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade* and made history by showing the first same-sex kiss in the parade's broadcast.^{[166][167]} *Jagged Little Pill* featured lesbian character Jo, who is dealing with her religious mother's disapproval.^[168]

Television

Television began to address homosexuality much later than film. Local talk shows in the late 1950s first addressed homosexuality by inviting panels of experts (usually not gay themselves) to discuss the problems of gay men in society. Lesbianism was rarely included. The first time a lesbian was portrayed on network television was the NBC drama *The Eleventh Hour* in the early 1960s, which ended with the lesbian character being "converted" to heterosexuality.^{[169]:7–9}

Lesbian invisibility in TV continued into the 1970s, even as male homosexuality and coming-out reveals became the subject of dramas (*The Bold Ones*, *Marcus Welby, M.D.*, *Medical Center*). These shows allowed homosexuality to be discussed clinically, with the main characters guiding troubled gay characters or correcting homophobic antagonists, while simultaneously comparing homosexuality to psychosis, criminal behavior, or drug use.^{[169]:13–44}

Another stock plot device in the 1970s was the gay character in a police drama. They served as victims of blackmail or anti-gay violence, but more often as criminals. Beginning in the late 1960s with *N.Y.P.D.*, *Police Story*, and *Police Woman*, the use of homosexuals in stories became much more prevalent.^{[159]:186–189} Lesbians were included as villains, motivated to murder by their desires, internalized homophobia, or fear of being exposed as homosexual. One episode of *Police Woman* earned protests by the *National Gay Task Force* before it aired for portraying a trio of murderous lesbians who killed retirement home patients for their money.^{[169]:68} NBC edited the episode because of the protests, but a sit-in was staged in the head of NBC's offices.^{[169]:69}

In the middle of the 1970s, gay men and lesbians began to appear as police officers or detectives. Other shows, such as the 1982 *Cagney & Lacey* made conscious attempts to soften the two groundbreaking female detective characters so they would not appear to be lesbians.^{[169]:75–76} In 1991, a bisexual lawyer character on *L.A. Law* shared the first significant lesbian kiss^[p] on primetime television, stirring a controversy despite being labeled "chaste" by *The Hollywood Reporter*.^{[169]:89}

Though television did not begin to use recurring homosexual characters until the late 1980s, some early situation comedies used a stock character that author Stephen Tropiano calls "gay-straight": supporting characters who were quirky, did not comply with gender norms, or had ambiguous personal lives, that "for all purposes "should' be gay". These included Zelda from *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*, Miss Hathaway from *The Beverly Hillbillies*, and Jo from *The Facts of Life*.^{[169]:185–186} In the mid-1980s

through the 1990s, sitcoms frequently employed a "coming out" episode, where a friend of one of the stars admits she is a lesbian, forcing the cast to deal with the issue. *Designing Women*, *The Golden Girls*, and *Friends* used this device.^{[169]:202–204}

Recurring openly lesbian characters were seen on *Married... with Children*, *Mad About You*, and *Roseanne*, in which a highly publicized episode.^{[26]:394,399} By far the sitcom with the most significant impact to the image of lesbians was *Ellen*, which generated enormous publicity from the 1997 coming out episode; Ellen DeGeneres appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine with the headline "Yep, I'm Gay". Parties were held in many U.S. cities to watch the episode, and the opposition from conservative organizations was intense. *WBMA-LP*, the ABC affiliate in *Birmingham, Alabama*, refused to air the first run of the episode, citing conservative values of the local viewing audience. Even as "The Puppy Episode" won an Emmy for writing, network executives cancelled the Ellen show.^{[169]:245–249}



Ellen DeGeneres with her Emmy Award in 1997. Her coming out in the media, as well as her sitcom, "ranks, hands down, as the single most public exit in gay history", changing media portrayals of lesbians in Western culture.^[171]

Dramas following *L.A. Law* began incorporating homosexual themes, particularly with continuing storylines on *Relativity*, *Picket Fences*, *ER*, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and *Deep Space Nine*, all of which tested the boundaries of sexuality and gender roles.^{[169]:128–136} A popular show directed at adolescents was *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. In the fourth season of *Buffy*, *Tara* and *Willow* admit their love for each other without any special fanfare and the relationship is treated as are the other romantic relationships on the show.^{[169]:183–184}

In the 2000s came network television series devoted solely to gay characters. Showtime's American rendition of *Queer as Folk* ran from 2000 to 2005; two of the main characters were a lesbian couple. Showtime promoted the series as "No Limits", and *Queer as Folk* addressed homosexuality graphically. The aggressive advertising paid off as the show became the network's highest rated, doubling the numbers of other Showtime programs after the first season.^{[169]:150–152} In 2004, Showtime introduced *The L Word*, a dramatic series devoted to a group of lesbian and bisexual women, which ran for six seasons and was then temporarily rebooted in 2019.^[172]

Chic and popular culture

Lesbian visibility has improved since the early 1980s. This is in part due to public figures who have drawn speculation and/or comment from the public and the press about their sexuality. The primary figure earning this attention was *Martina Navratilova*, who served as tabloid fodder for years as she denied being lesbian, admitted to being bisexual, had very public relationships with *Rita Mae Brown* and *Judy Nelson*, and acquired as much press about her sexuality as she did her athletic achievements.^[173]

Other public figures acknowledged their homosexuality, such as musicians *k.d. lang* and *Melissa Etheridge*. *Madonna* pushed sexual boundaries in her performances. In 1993, heterosexual supermodel *Cindy Crawford* posed for a cover of *Vanity Fair* in a provocative arrangement that showed Crawford

pretending to shave k.d. lang's face.^[174] The image "became an internationally recognized symbol of the phenomenon of lesbian chic".^[173]

The year 1994 marked a rise in lesbian visibility, particularly appealing to women with feminine appearances. Between 1992 and 1994, *Mademoiselle*, *Vogue*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Glamour*, *Newsweek*, and *New York* magazines featured stories about women who admitted sexual histories with other women.^[171]

One analyst reasoned the recurrence of lesbian chic was due to the often-used homoerotic subtexts of gay male subculture being considered off-limits because of AIDS in the late 1980s and 1990s, joined with the distant memory of lesbians as they appeared in the 1970s: unattractive and militant. In short, lesbians became more attractive to general audiences when they ceased having political convictions.^[173] All the attention on feminine and glamorous women created what culture analyst Rodger Streitmatter characterizes as an unrealistic image of lesbians packaged by heterosexual men; the trend influenced an increase in the inclusion of lesbian material in pornography aimed at men.^[171]

A resurgence of lesbian visibility was noted in 2009 when sexually fluid female celebrities, such as Cynthia Nixon and Lindsay Lohan, commented openly about their relationships with women, and reality television addressed same-sex relationships. Psychiatrists and feminist philosophers wrote that the rise in women acknowledging same-sex relationships was due to growing social acceptance, but also conceded that "only a certain kind of lesbian—slim and elegant or butch in just the right androgynous way—is acceptable to mainstream culture."^[175]



The August 1993 cover of *Vanity Fair* that marked the arrival of lesbian chic as a social phenomenon in the 1990s

Legal rights

Custody and parenting

Family issues were significant concerns for lesbians when gay activism became more vocal in the 1960s and 1970s. Custody issues in particular were of interest since often courts would not award custody to mothers who were openly homosexual, even though the general procedure acknowledged children were awarded to the biological mother.^{[26]:125–126[50]:182}

Several studies performed as a result of custody disputes compared outcomes for children of single lesbian mothers and single nonlesbian mothers. They found that children's mental health, happiness, overall adjustment, sexual orientation, and sex roles, were similar between both groups.^{[26]:125–126}

The ability to adopt domestically or internationally children or provide a home as a foster parent is also a political and family priority for many lesbians, as is improving access to artificial insemination.^{[26]:128–129}

Marriage

Before the 1970s, the idea that same-sex adults formed long-term committed relationships was unknown to many people. In the 1990s in the U.S., the majority of lesbians (between 60% and 80%) reported being in a long-term relationship.^{[26]:117} Sociologists credit the high number of paired women to women's higher propensity to commit to relationships. Unlike heterosexual relationships that tend to divide work based on sex roles, lesbian relationships divide chores evenly between both members. Studies have also reported that emotional bonds are closer in lesbian and gay relationships than heterosexual ones.^{[26]:118–119}

As of 2025, same-sex marriage is legal in thirty-nine countries.^[176]

Criminalization of sexual activity

Although criminalization of homosexuality primarily affects gay and bisexual men, at least thirty-eight countries criminalize same-sex activity between women.^[177]

See also



- [African-American LGBTQ community](#)
- [Discrimination against lesbians](#) – Irrational fear of, and aversion to, lesbians
- [Domestic violence in lesbian relationships](#) – Pattern of violent and coercive behavior in a female same-sex relationship
- [Dyke](#) – Lesbian slang term
- [Dyke march](#) – Lesbian-led gathering and protest march
- [Female bonding](#) – Close personal relationship between women
- [History of lesbianism](#)
- [History of lesbianism in the United States](#)
- [Homosexual behavior in animals](#) – Sexual behavior among non-human species that is interpreted as homosexual
- [Homosociality](#) – Socializing with the same sex
- [Lesbian bar](#) – Drinking establishment catering to lesbians
- [Lesbian erasure](#) – Act of minimizing lesbian representation
- [Lesbian erotica](#) – Visual art depiction of female-female sexuality
- [Lesbian literature](#) – Subgenre of literature with lesbian themes
- [Lesbian Visibility Week](#) – Annual observance
- [LGBT themes in speculative fiction](#)
- [Lipstick lesbian](#) – Slang for a stereotypically feminine lesbian
- [List of lesbian periodicals](#)
- [Queerplatonic relationship](#) – Non-romantic intimate partnerships
- [Women's music](#) – Movement of popular music for, by, and about women
- [Yuri](#) – Fiction genre depicting female same-sex relationships

Notes

- a. An attempt by natives of Lesbos (also called "Mytilene" in Greece) in 2008 to reclaim the word to refer only to people from the island was unsuccessful in a Greek court. Inhabitants of Lesbos claimed the use of *lesbian* to refer to female homosexuality violated their human rights and "disgrace[d] them around the world".^[8]
- b. "[H]e begins by treating of the origin of human nature. The sexes were originally three, men, women, and the union of the two; and they were made round—having four hands, four feet, two faces on a round neck, and the rest to correspond. Terrible was their strength and swiftness; and they were essaying to scale heaven and attack the gods. Doubt reigned in the celestial councils; the gods were divided between the desire of quelling the pride of man and the fear of losing the sacrifices. At last Zeus hit upon an expedient. Let us cut them in two, he said; then they will only have half their strength, and we shall have twice as many sacrifices. He spake, and split them as you might split an egg with a hair; and when this was done, he told Apollo to give their faces a twist and re-arrange their persons, taking out the wrinkles and tying the skin in a knot about the navel. The two halves went about looking for one another, and were ready to die of hunger in one another's arms. Then Zeus invented an adjustment of the sexes, which enabled them to marry and go their way to the business of life. Now the characters of men differ accordingly as they are derived from the original man or the original woman, or the original man-woman. Those who come from the man-woman are lascivious and adulterous; those who come from the woman form female attachments; those who are a section of the male follow the male and embrace him, and in him all their desires centre."
- c. "La muger, que con otra muger tenía deleitaciones carnales, a las quales llamaban Patlache, que quiere decir: incuba, morían ambas por ello." (*Monarquía Indiana*, transl.)
- d. Wollstonecraft and Blood set up a girls' boarding school so they could live and work together, and Wollstonecraft named her first child after Blood. Wollstonecraft's first novel *Mary: A Fiction*, in part, addressed her relationship with Fanny Blood.^{[57]:55–60}
- e. Other historical figures rejected being labeled as lesbians despite their behavior: Djuna Barnes, author of *Nightwood*, a novel about an affair Barnes had with Thelma Wood, earned the label "lesbian writer", which she protested by saying, "I am not a lesbian. I just loved Thelma." Virginia Woolf, who modeled the hero/ine in *Orlando* on Vita Sackville-West, with whom she was having an affair, set herself apart from women who pursued relationships with other women by writing, "These Sapphists *love* women; friendship is never untinged with amorosity."^{[59]:4–5}
- f. In Germany between 1898 and 1908 over a thousand articles were published regarding the topic of homosexuality.^{[55]:248} Between 1896 and 1916, 566 articles on women's "perversions" were published in the United States.^{[54]:49}
- g. A 1966 survey of psychological literature on homosexuality began with Freud's 1924 theory that it is a fixation on the opposite sex parent. As Freud's views were the foundation of psychotherapy, further articles agreed with this, including one in 1951 that asserted that homosexuals are actually heterosexuals that play both gender roles, and homosexuals are attempting to perpetuate "infantile, incestuous fixation(s)" on relationships that are forbidden.^[68]

- h. Historian Vern Bullough published a paper based on an unfinished study of mental and physical traits performed by a lesbian in Salt Lake City during the 1920s and 1930s. The compiler of the study reported on 23 of her colleagues, indicating there was an underground lesbian community in the conservative city. Bullough remarked that the information was being used to support the attitude that lesbians were not abnormal or maladjusted, but it also reflected that women included in the study strove in every way to conform to social gender expectations, viewing anyone who pushed the boundaries of respectability with hostility. Bullough wrote, "In fact, their very success in disguising their sexual orientation to the outside world leads us to hypothesize that lesbianism in the past was more prevalent than the sources might indicate, since society was so unsuspecting."^[70]
- i. Sexual contact, according to Kinsey, included lip kissing, deep kissing, body touching, manual breast and genital stimulation, oral breast and genital stimulation, and object-vaginal penetration.^{[127]:466–467}
- j. The study estimated the total population of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals at 8.8 million, but did not differentiate between men and women.^[130]
- k. Another summary of overall surveys found that women who identify as lesbian, 80–95% had previous sexual contact with men, and some report sexual behavior that was risky.^[134]
- l. Lesbian and bisexual women are also more likely to report symptoms of multiple disorders that include major depression, panic disorder, alcohol and drug abuse.^[148]
- m. Sappho has also served as a subject of many works of literature by writers such as John Donne, Alexander Pope, Pierre Louÿs, and several anonymous writers, that have addressed her relationships with women and men. She has been used as an embodiment of same-sex desire, and as a character in fictions loosely based on her life.^{[59]:125,208,252,319,566}
- n. The cross-dressing Sand was also the subject of a few of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's sonnets.^{[59]:426–427} Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* in 1853 initiated a genre of boarding school stories with homoerotic themes.^{[59]:429}
- o. A fifth novel in 1928, American author Djuna Barnes' *Ladies Almanack*, is a *roman à clef* of a lesbian literary and artistic salon in Paris and circulated at first within those circles; Susan Sniader Lanser calls it a "sister-text" to Hall's landmark work,^[153] as Barnes includes a character based on Radclyffe Hall and passages that may be a response to *The Well of Loneliness*^[154]
- p. *21 Jump Street* included a kiss between series regular Holly Robinson Peete and guest star Katy Boyer in "A Change of Heart" (1990) but it did not inspire the critical or popular attention later such kisses would engender.^{[170]:235}

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3. "Lesbian" (<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100100998>). *Oxford Reference: A Dictionary of Psychology*. Oxford University Press. Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20210410214103/https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100100998>) from the original on 10 April 2021. Retrieved 10 December 2018.

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External links

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 - Lesbian Archive (<https://womenslibrary.org.uk/explore-the-library-and-archive/the-archive-collection/the-lesbian-archive/>) at Glasgow Women's Library (Scotland)
 - Southern Lesbian Feminist Activist Herstory Project (<https://slfaherstoryproject.org/>)
 - *Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project* (<https://www.olohp.org/>) (OLOHP)
 - *Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project* (https://findingaids.smith.edu/agents/corporate_entities/1078) collection at Smith College
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 - *Lesbians in the Twentieth Century, 1900–1999* (<https://outhistory.org/exhibits/show/lesbians-20th-century/intro>), Esther Newton, *OutHistory*, 2008 (Lesbian History project, University of Michigan)
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Bisexuality

Bisexuality is romantic attraction, sexual attraction, or sexual behavior toward both males and females.^{[1][2][3]} It may also be defined as the attraction to more than one gender,^[4] to people of both the same and different gender, or the attraction to people regardless of their sex or gender identity (*pansexuality*).^{[5][6]}

The term *bisexuality* is mainly used for people who experience both heterosexual and homosexual attraction.^{[1][2][7]} Bisexuality is one of the three main classifications of sexual orientation along with heterosexuality and homosexuality, all of which exist on the heterosexual–homosexual continuum. A bisexual identity does not necessarily equate to equal sexual attraction to both sexes; commonly, people who have a distinct but not exclusive sexual preference for one sex over the other also identify themselves as bisexual.^[8]

Scientists do not know the exact determinants of sexual orientation, but they theorize that it is caused by a complex interplay of genetic, hormonal, and environmental influences,^{[9][10][11]} and do not view it as a choice.^{[9][10][12]} Although no single theory on the cause of sexual orientation has yet gained widespread support, scientists favor biologically based theories.^[9] There is considerably more evidence supporting nonsocial, biological causes of sexual orientation than social ones, especially for males.^{[3][7][13]}

Bisexuality has been observed in various human societies,^[14] as well as elsewhere in the animal kingdom,^{[15][16][17]} throughout recorded history. The term *bisexuality*, like the terms *hetero-* and *homosexuality*, was coined in the 19th century by Charles Gilbert Chaddock.^{[18][19]}

Definitions

Sexual orientation, identity, and behavior

Bisexuality is variously defined as romantic or sexual attraction to both males and females,^{[1][2][3]} to more than one gender,^[20] or attraction to both people of the same gender and different genders.^[21] The American Psychological Association states that "sexual orientation falls along a continuum. In other words, someone does not have to be exclusively homosexual or heterosexual, but can feel varying degrees of both. Sexual orientation develops across a person's lifetime—different people realize at different points in their lives that they are heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual."^{[8][22]} Attraction can take numerous forms for bisexuals, such as sexual, romantic, emotional, or physical.^[23]



Bisexual flag, designed by Michael Page in 1998

Sexual attraction, behavior, and identity may also be incongruent, as sexual attraction or behavior may not necessarily be consistent with identity. Some individuals identify themselves as heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual without having had any sexual experience. Others have had homosexual experiences but do not consider themselves to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual.^[22] Likewise, self-identified gay or lesbian individuals may occasionally sexually interact with members of the opposite sex but do not identify as bisexual.^[22] The terms *queer*,^[24] *polysexual*,^[24] *heteroflexible*, *homoflexible*, *men who have sex with men* and *women who have sex with women* may also be used to describe sexual identity or identify sexual behavior.^[25]

Some sources state that bisexuality encompasses romantic or sexual attraction to all gender identities or that it is romantic or sexual attraction to a person irrespective of that person's biological sex or gender, equating it to or rendering it interchangeable with pansexuality.^{[5][6]} The concept of pansexuality deliberately rejects the gender binary, the "notion of two genders and indeed of specific sexual orientations",^[6] as pansexual people are open to relationships with people who do not identify as strictly men or women.^{[5][6]} Sometimes the phrase bisexual umbrella, or bisexual community, is used to describe any non-monosexual behaviors, attractions, and identities, usually for purposes of collective action and challenging monosexist cultural assumptions.^[26] The term "bisexual community" includes those who identify as bisexual, pansexual/omnisexual, biromantic, polysexual, or sexually fluid.^{[27][28]}

The bisexual activist Robyn Ochs defines bisexuality as "the potential to be attracted—romantically and/or sexually—to people of more than one sex and/or gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree."^[29]

According to Rosario, Schrimshaw, Hunter, Braun (2006):

...the development of a lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) sexual identity is a complex and often difficult process. Unlike members of other minority groups (e.g., ethnic and racial minorities), most LGB individuals are not raised in a community of similar others from whom they learn about their identity and who reinforce and support that identity. Rather, LGB individuals are often raised in communities that are either ignorant of or openly hostile toward homosexuality.^[8]



Bisexual Organizing Project booth at Bemidji Pride, Bemidji, Minnesota

Bisexuality as a transitional identity has also been examined. In a longitudinal study about sexual identity development among lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) youths, Rosario et al. "found evidence of both considerable consistency and change in LGB sexual identity over time". Youths who had identified as both gay/lesbian and bisexual prior to baseline were approximately three times more likely to identify as gay/lesbian than as bisexual at subsequent assessments. Of youths who had identified only as bisexual at earlier assessments, 60 to 70 percent continued to thus identify, while approximately 30 to 40 percent assumed a gay/lesbian identity over time. Rosario et al. suggested that "although there were youths who consistently self-identified as bisexual throughout the study, for other youths, a bisexual identity served as a transitional identity to a subsequent gay/lesbian identity."^[8]

By contrast, a longitudinal study by [Lisa M. Diamond](#), which followed women identifying as lesbian, bisexual, or unlabeled, found that "more women adopted bisexual/unlabeled identities than relinquished these identities", over a ten-year period. The study also found that "bisexual/unlabeled women had stable overall distributions of same-sex/other-sex attractions".^[30] Diamond has also studied male bisexuality, noting that survey research found "almost as many men transitioned at some point from a gay identity to a bisexual, queer or unlabeled one, as did from a bisexual identity to a gay identity."^{[31][32]}

There may also be a difference between sexual and romantic attractions in bisexuals over time. One study found that in the short term bisexual men and women were much more likely to change their sexual behavior than heterosexual or homosexual individuals. Bisexual men were less likely to have a change in romantic attraction but those that did were more likely to have a greater change than in sexual feelings while bisexual women were more likely than bisexual men to have a change in romantic attraction. This suggests that sexual and romantic attraction is not fixed for bisexual individuals and changes over time.^[33]

Kinsey scale

In the 1940s, the zoologist [Alfred Kinsey](#) created a scale to measure the continuum of sexual orientation from heterosexuality to homosexuality. Kinsey studied human sexuality and argued that people have the capability of being hetero- or homosexual even if this trait does not present itself in the current circumstances.^[34] The Kinsey scale is used to describe a person's sexual experience or response at a given time. It ranges from 0, meaning exclusively heterosexual, to 6, meaning exclusively homosexual.^[35] People who rank anywhere from 2 to 4 are often considered bisexual; they are often not fully one extreme or the other.^[36] The sociologists [Martin S. Weinberg](#) and [Colin J. Williams](#) write that, in principle, people who rank anywhere from one to five could be considered bisexual.^[37]

Psychologist Jim McKnight writes that while the idea that bisexuality is a form of sexual orientation intermediate between homosexuality and heterosexuality is implicit in the Kinsey scale, that conception has been "severely challenged" since the publication of [*Homosexualities*](#) (1978), by Weinberg and the psychologist [Alan P. Bell](#).^[38]

Criticism

The Kinsey scale is criticized for various reasons. One of the main reasons is the inverse relation in attraction to males and females that the Kinsey scale represents. The Kinsey scale implies that having a higher level attraction to one gender results in less attraction to the other, which some studies do not support.^[39] This aspect of the Kinsey scale can impact the results of studies that utilize the scale, as there is a biological difference between bisexuals and gay people.^[40]

Other scales

- [Klein Sexual Orientation Grid](#)
 - A more descriptive orientation grid that takes into account: Sexual attraction, sexual behavior, sexual fantasies, emotional preference, social preference, lifestyle preference, and self-identification. It also has different measures for certain variables and is not binary by design.
- [Shively Scale](#)

- Measures physical and affectional attraction on two separate scales.
- Sell Assessment of Sexual Orientation
 - Measures sexual attraction, sexual orientation identity, and sexual behavior and reports the extent of all of those factors.
- Multidimensional Scale of Sexuality (MSS)
 - Uses nine categories to categorize bisexuality. These categories are evaluated on sexual behavior, sexual attraction, arousal to erotic material, emotional factors, and sexual dreams and fantasies. The combined answers to all of these questions make up the score.

Demographics and prevalence

Scientific estimates as to the prevalence of bisexuality have varied from 0.7 to 8 percent. *The Janus Report on Sexual Behavior*, published in 1993, concluded that 5 percent of men and 3 percent of women considered themselves bisexual, while 4 percent of men and 2 percent of women considered themselves homosexual.^[41]

A 2002 survey in the United States by the National Center for Health Statistics found that 1.8 percent of men ages 18–44 considered themselves bisexual, 2.3 percent homosexual, and 3.9 percent as "something else". The same study found that 2.8 percent of women ages 18–44 considered themselves bisexual, 1.3 percent homosexual, and 3.8 percent as "something else".^[42] In 2007, an article in the Health section of *The New York Times* stated that "1.5 percent of American women and 1.7 percent of American men identify themselves [as] bisexual."^[43] Also in 2007, it was reported that 14.4 percent of young US women identified themselves as "not strictly heterosexual", with 5.6 percent of the men identifying as gay or bisexual.^[44] A study in the journal *Biological Psychology* in 2011 reported that there were men who identify themselves as *bisexuals* and who were aroused by both men and women.^[45] In the first large-scale government survey measuring Americans' sexual orientation, the NHIS reported in July 2014 that only 0.7 percent of Americans identify as bisexual.^[46]

A collection of recent Western surveys finds that about 10% of women and 4% of men identify as mostly heterosexual, 1% of women and 0.5% of men as bisexual, and 0.4% of women and 0.5% of men as mostly homosexual.^{[3]:55}

Across cultures, there is some variance in the prevalence of bisexual behavior,^[47] but there is no persuasive evidence that there is much variance in the rate of same-sex attraction.^[3] The World Health Organization estimates a worldwide prevalence of men who have sex with men between 3 and 16%, many of whom have sex with women as well.^[48]

A YouGov survey found that the proportion of young adults living in the United Kingdom identifying as bisexual surged 14 percentage points from 2015 to 2019.^[49]

Studies, theories and social responses

There is no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons that an individual develops a heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual orientation.^{[9][10][11]} Although scientists favor biological models for the cause of sexual orientation,^[9] they do not believe that the development of sexual orientation is the

result of any one factor. They generally believe that it is determined by a complex interplay of biological and environmental factors, and is shaped at an early age.^{[1][10][11]} There is considerably more evidence supporting nonsocial, biological causes of sexual orientation than social ones, especially for males.^[3] There is no substantive evidence which suggests parenting or early childhood experiences play a role with regard to sexual orientation.^[50] Most scientists do not believe that sexual orientation is a choice that can be changed at will.^{[9][10][12]}

In 2000, American Psychiatric Association stated: "To date there are no replicated scientific studies supporting any specific biological etiology for homosexuality. Similarly, no specific psychosocial or family dynamic cause for homosexuality has been identified, including histories of childhood sexual abuse."^[51] Research into how sexual orientation may be determined by genetic or other prenatal factors plays a role in political and social debates about homosexuality, and also raises fears about genetic profiling and prenatal testing.^[52]

Magnus Hirschfeld argued that adult sexual orientation can be explained in terms of the bisexual nature of the developing fetus: he believed that in every embryo there is one rudimentary neutral center for attraction to males and another for attraction to females. In most fetuses, the center for attraction to the opposite sex developed while the center for attraction to the same sex regressed, but in fetuses that became homosexual, the reverse occurred. Simon LeVay has criticized Hirschfeld's theory of an early bisexual stage of development, calling it confusing; LeVay maintains that Hirschfeld failed to distinguish between saying that the brain is sexually undifferentiated at an early stage of development and saying that an individual actually experiences sexual attraction to both men and women. According to LeVay, Hirschfeld believed that in most bisexual people the strength of attraction to the same sex was relatively low, and that it was therefore possible to restrain its development in young people, something Hirschfeld supported.^[53]

Hirschfeld created a ten-point scale to measure the strength of sexual desire, with the direction of desire being represented by the letters A (for heterosexuality), B (for homosexuality), and A + B (for bisexuality). On this scale, someone who was A3, B9 would be weakly attracted to the opposite sex and very strongly attracted to the same sex, an A0, B0 would be asexual, and an A10, B10 would be very attracted to both sexes. LeVay compares Hirschfeld's scale to that developed by Kinsey decades later.^[54]

Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, believed that every human being is bisexual in the sense of incorporating general attributes of both sexes. In his view, this was true anatomically and therefore also psychologically, with sexual attraction to both sexes being an aspect of this psychological bisexuality. Freud believed that in the course of sexual development the masculine side of this bisexual disposition would normally become dominant in men and the feminine side in women, but that all adults still have desires derived from both the masculine and the feminine sides of their natures. Freud did not claim that everyone is bisexual in the sense of feeling the same level of sexual attraction to men and women. Freud's belief in innate bisexuality was rejected by Sándor Radó in 1940 and, following Radó, by many later psychoanalysts. Radó argued that there is no biological bisexuality in humans.^[55]

Alan P. Bell, Martin S. Weinberg, and Sue Kiefer Hammersmith reported in Sexual Preference (1981) that sexual preference was much less strongly connected with pre-adult sexual feelings among bisexuals than it was among heterosexuals and homosexuals. Based on this and other findings, they suggested that bisexuality is more influenced by social and sexual learning than is exclusive homosexuality.^[56] Letitia Anne Peplau et al. wrote that while Bell et al.'s view "sounds plausible, it has not been tested explicitly and seems at odds with available evidence".^[57]

Human bisexuality has mainly been studied alongside homosexuality. Van Wyk and Geist argue that this is a problem for sexuality research because the few studies that have observed bisexuals separately have found that bisexuals are often different from both heterosexuals and homosexuals. Furthermore, bisexuality does not always represent a halfway point between the dichotomy. Research indicates that bisexuality is influenced by biological, cognitive and cultural variables in interaction, and this leads to different types of bisexuality.^[47]

In the current debate around influences on sexual orientation, biological explanations have been questioned by social scientists, particularly by feminists who encourage women to make conscious decisions about their life and sexuality. A difference in attitude between homosexual men and women has also been reported, with men more likely to regard their sexuality as biological, "reflecting the universal male experience in this culture, not the complexities of the lesbian world." There is also evidence that women's sexuality may be more strongly affected by cultural and contextual factors.^[58]

American academic Camille Paglia has promoted bisexuality as an ideal.^[59] American Harvard professor Marjorie Garber made an academic case for bisexuality with her 1995 book *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life*, in which she argued that most people would be bisexual if not for repression and other factors such as lack of sexual opportunity.^[60]

Brain structure and chromosomes

LeVay's (1991) examination at autopsy of 18 homosexual men, 1 bisexual man, 16 presumably heterosexual men and 6 presumably heterosexual women found that the INAH 3 nucleus of the anterior hypothalamus of homosexual men was smaller than that of heterosexual men and closer in size of heterosexual women. Although grouped with homosexuals, the INAH 3 size of the one bisexual subject was similar to that of the heterosexual men.^[47]

Some evidence supports the concept of biological precursors of bisexual orientation in genetic males. According to John Money (1988), genetic males with an extra Y chromosome are more likely to be bisexual, paraphilic and impulsive.^[47]

Evolutionary theory

Some evolutionary psychologists have argued that same-sex attraction does not have adaptive value because it has no association with potential reproductive success. Instead, bisexuality can be due to normal variation in brain plasticity. More recently, it has been suggested that same-sex alliances may have helped males climb the social hierarchy giving access to females and reproductive opportunities. Same-sex allies could have helped females to move to the safer and resource richer center of the group, which increased their chances of raising their offspring successfully.^[61] Likewise, Barron and Hare suggest that same-sex attraction is a spandrel of prosocial traits, which has been consistently selected among humans over time. These prosocial traits include social affiliation, communication, integration, as well as reduced reactive aggression among members of the same sex.^[62]

David Buss criticized the alliance hypothesis, stating that there is no evidence that most young men in most cultures use sexual behavior to establish alliances; instead, the norm is for same-sex alliances to not be accompanied by any sexual activity.^[63] Additionally, he states that there is no evidence that men who

engage in bisexual behavior do better than other men at forming alliances or ascending in status.^[63] Barron and Hare state that there are ethnographic examples of same-sex activity being used to strengthen social bonds among males and females.^[62]

Brendan Zietsch of the Queensland Institute of Medical Research proposes the alternative theory that men exhibiting female traits become more attractive to females and are thus more likely to mate, provided the genes involved do not drive them to complete rejection of heterosexuality.^[64] Barron and Hare concur and argue that this is one of the reasons why bisexuality is more common than exclusive homosexuality among animal populations, including human populations. However, this is underreported due to enforced binary dichotomies in previous research and cultural factors.^[62]

Also, in a 2008 study, its authors stated that "There is considerable evidence that human sexual orientation is genetically influenced, so it is not known how homosexuality, which tends to lower reproductive success, is maintained in the population at a relatively high frequency." They hypothesized that "while genes predisposing to homosexuality reduce homosexuals' reproductive success, they may confer some advantage in heterosexuals who carry them" and their results suggested that "genes predisposing to homosexuality may confer a mating advantage in heterosexuals, which could help explain the evolution and maintenance of homosexuality in the population."^[65] Barron and Hare say that this finding is only shown in Western European societies, with said finding being weakly supported in "other populations or cultures".^[62]

Masculinization

Masculinization of women and hypermasculinization of men has been a central theme in sexual orientation research. There are several studies suggesting that bisexuals have a high degree of masculinization. LaTorre and Wendenberg (1983) found differing personality characteristics for bisexual, heterosexual and homosexual women. Bisexuals were found to have fewer personal insecurities than heterosexuals and homosexuals. This finding described bisexuals as self-assured and less likely to have mental instabilities. The confidence of a secure identity consistently translated to more masculinity than other subjects. This study did not explore societal norms, prejudices, or the feminization of homosexual males.^[47]

In a research comparison, published in the *Journal of the Association for Research in Otolaryngology*, women usually have a better hearing sensitivity than males, assumed by researchers as a genetic disposition connected to child bearing. Homosexual and bisexual women have been found to have a hypersensitivity to sound in comparison to heterosexual women, suggesting a genetic disposition to not tolerate high pitched tones. While heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual men have been found to exhibit similar patterns of hearing, there was a notable differential in a sub-group of males identified as hyperfeminized homosexual males who exhibited test results similar to heterosexual women.^[66]

Prenatal hormones

The prenatal hormonal theory of sexual orientation suggests that people who are exposed to excess levels of sex hormones have masculinized brains and show increased homosexuality or bisexuality. Studies providing evidence for the masculinization of the brain have, however, not been conducted to date. Research on special conditions such as congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH) and exposure to

diethylstilbestrol (DES) indicate that prenatal exposure to, respectively, excess testosterone and estrogens are associated with female–female sex fantasies in adults. Both effects are associated with bisexuality rather than homosexuality.^[58]

There is research evidence that the digit ratio of the length of the 2nd and 4th digits (index finger and ring finger) is somewhat negatively related to prenatal testosterone and positively to estrogen. Studies measuring the fingers found a statistically significant skew in the 2D:4D ratio (long ring finger) towards homosexuality with an even lower ratio in bisexuals. It is suggested that exposure to high prenatal testosterone and low prenatal estrogen concentrations is one cause of homosexuality whereas exposure to very high testosterone levels may be associated with bisexuality. Because testosterone in general is important for sexual differentiation, this view offers an alternative to the suggestion that male homosexuality is genetic.^[67]

The prenatal hormonal theory suggests that a homosexual orientation results from exposure to excessive testosterone causing an over-masculinized brain. This is contradictory to another hypothesis that homosexual preferences may be due to a feminized brain in males. However, it has also been suggested that homosexuality may be due to high prenatal levels of unbound testosterone that results from a lack of receptors at particular brain sites. Therefore, the brain could be feminized while other features, such as the 2D:4D ratio could be over-masculinized.^[61]

Sex drive

Van Wyk and Geist summarized several studies comparing bisexuals with hetero- or homosexuals that have indicated that bisexuals have higher rates of sexual activity, fantasy, or erotic interest. These studies found that male and female bisexuals had more heterosexual fantasy than heterosexuals or homosexuals; that bisexual men had more sexual activities with women than did heterosexual men, and that they masturbated more but had fewer happy marriages than heterosexuals; that bisexual women had more orgasms per week and they described them as stronger than those of hetero- or homosexual women; and that bisexual women became heterosexually active earlier, masturbated and enjoyed masturbation more, and were more experienced in different types of heterosexual contact.^[47]

Research suggests that, for most women, high sex drive is associated with increased sexual attraction to both women and men. For men, however, high sex drive is associated with increased attraction to one sex or the other, but not to both, depending on sexual orientation.^[68] Similarly for most bisexual women, high sex drive is associated with increased sexual attraction to both women and men; while for bisexual men, high sex drive is associated with increased attraction to one sex, and weakened attraction to the other.^[61]

Sociosexuality

Richard A. Lippa proposed that there exist two dimensions of sexual orientation: a gender typicality dimension, and a monosexuality dimension. With the gender typicality dimension being associated with the heterosexual-homosexual distinction, while the sociosexuality dimension has many behavioral effects. He proposes someone who would be at any point in the heterosexual-homosexual spectrum will become bisexual if they are high on the sociosexuality dimension. This dimension being associated with higher sociosexuality, higher neuroticism, lower agreeableness, lower honesty-humility, higher openness to experience, and a minor degree of gender nonconformity.^[69] He proposes this as explaining phenomena

such as increased juvenile delinquency among bisexuals,^[70] increased mental health issues and substance use disorder among bisexuals,^[71] and increased dark triad traits among bisexual women.^[72] Critics of this theory have described elements observed as coming from experiences of biphobia,^[69] but Lippa counters that these phenomena are present even among heterosexual identifying people with some same sex attraction, who would likely be heterosexual passing.^{[69][73]}

Community

General social impacts

The bisexual community (also known as the bisexual/pansexual, bi/pan/fluid, or non-monosexual community) includes members of the LGBTQ community who identify as bisexual, pansexual or fluid.^[74] Because some bisexual people do not feel that they fit into either the gay or the heterosexual world, and because they have a tendency to be "invisible" in public, some bisexual persons are committed to forming their own communities, culture, and political movements. Some who identify as bisexual may merge themselves into either homosexual or heterosexual society. Other bisexual people see this merging as enforced rather than voluntary; bisexual people can face exclusion from both homosexual and heterosexual society on coming out.^[75] Psychologist Beth Firestein states that bisexuals tend to internalize social tensions related to their choice of partners^[76] and feel pressured to label themselves as homosexuals instead of occupying the difficult middle ground where attraction to people of both sexes would defy society's value on monogamy.^[76] These social tensions and pressure may affect bisexuals' mental health, and specific therapy methods have been developed for bisexuals to address this concern.^[76]

Bisexual people also often hide their actual orientation due to societal pressures, a phenomenon colloquially called "being closeted".^[77] In the U.S., a 2013 Pew survey showed that 28% of bisexuals said that "all or most of the important people in their life are aware that they are LGBT" compared to 77% of gay men and 71% of lesbians. Furthermore, when broken down by gender, only 12% of bisexual men said that they were "out" vs. 33% of bisexual women.^[78]



Participants representing Bi Pride in the 1993 March on Washington



Bisexual people representing Bi Pride in London 2016

Perceptions and discrimination

Like people of other LGBTQ sexualities, bisexuals often face discrimination. In addition to the discrimination associated with homophobia, bisexuals frequently contend with discrimination from gay men, lesbians, and straight society around the word *bisexual* and bisexual identity itself.^{[79][80][81]} The belief that everyone is bisexual (especially women as opposed to men),^{[82][83]} or that bisexuality does not

exist as a unique identity, is common.^{[79][84]} This stems from two views: In the heterosexist view, people are presumed to be sexually attracted to the opposite sex, and it is sometimes reasoned that a bisexual person is simply a heterosexual person who is sexually experimenting.^[81] In the monosexist view, it is believed that people cannot be bisexual unless they are equally sexually attracted to both sexes, regulating sexual orientation to being about the sex or gender one prefers.^{[79][80]} In this view, people are either exclusively homosexual (gay/lesbian) or exclusively heterosexual (straight),^[79] closeted homosexual people who wish to appear heterosexual,^[85] or heterosexuals who are experimenting with their sexuality.^{[81][86]} Assertions that one cannot be bisexual unless equally sexually attracted to both sexes, however, are disputed by various researchers, who have reported bisexuality to fall on a continuum, like sexuality in general.^{[8][43]}

Male bisexuality is particularly presumed to be non-existent,^[83] with sexual fluidity studies adding to the debate. In 2005, researchers Gerulf Rieger, Meredith L. Chivers, and J. Michael Bailey used penile plethysmography to measure the arousal of self-identified bisexual men to pornography involving only men and pornography involving only women. Participants were recruited via advertisements in gay-oriented magazines and an alternative paper. They found that the self-identified bisexual men in their sample had genital arousal patterns similar to either homosexual or heterosexual men. The authors concluded that "in terms of behavior and identity, bisexual men clearly exist", but that male bisexuality had not been shown to exist with respect to arousal or attraction.^[87] Some researchers hold that the technique used in the study to measure genital arousal is too crude to capture the richness (erotic sensations, affection, admiration) that constitutes sexual attraction.^[43] The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force called the study and The New York Times coverage of it flawed and biphobic.^[88]

The American Institute of Bisexuality stated that Bailey's study was misinterpreted and misreported by both The New York Times and its critics.^[89] In 2011, Bailey and other researchers reported that among men with a history of several romantic and sexual relationships with members of both sexes, high levels of sexual arousal were found in response to both male and female sexual imagery.^{[90][91]} The subjects were recruited from a Craigslist group for men seeking intimacy with both members of a heterosexual couple. The authors said that this change in recruitment strategy was an important difference, but it may not have been a representative sample of bisexual-identified men. They concluded that "bisexual-identified men with bisexual arousal patterns do indeed exist", but could not establish whether such a pattern is typical of bisexual-identified men in general.^{[91][92]}

Bisexual erasure (or bisexual invisibility) is the tendency to ignore, remove, falsify, or reexplain evidence of bisexuality in culture, history, academia, news media and other primary sources.^{[79][80][93]} In its most extreme form, bisexual erasure includes denying that bisexuality exists.^{[79][93]} It is often a manifestation of biphobia,^{[79][80][93]} although it does not necessarily involve overt antagonism.

There is increasing inclusion and visibility of bisexuals, particularly in the LGBTQ community.^{[94][95]} American psychologist Beth Firestone writes that since she wrote her first book on bisexuality, in 1996, "bisexuality has gained visibility, although progress is uneven and awareness of bisexuality is still minimal or absent in many of the more remote regions of our country and internationally."^[96]

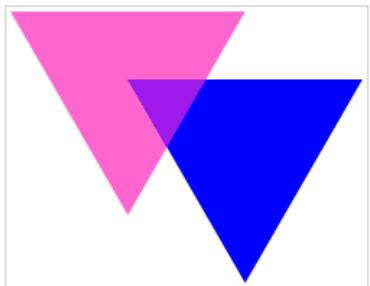
Symbols and observances

A common symbol of the bisexual community is the bisexual flag, designed by Michael Page and unveiled in 1998, which has a deep pink stripe at the top for homosexuality, a blue one on the bottom for heterosexuality, and a purple one – blending the pink and blue – in the middle to represent bisexuality.^[97]



The bisexual pride flag

Another symbol with a similarly symbolic color scheme is the biangles symbol of bisexuality, a pair of overlapping pink and blue triangles, forming lavender where they intersect. This design is an expansion on the pink triangle, a well-known symbol for the gay community.^[98] The biangles symbol was designed by artist Liz Nania as she co-organized a bisexual contingent for the Second National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights in 1987.^{[99][100]} However, some bisexual individuals object to the use of a pink triangle, as it was a symbol that Adolf Hitler's regime used to tag and persecute homosexuals. In response, a double crescent moon symbol was devised by Vivian Wagner in 1998.^{[101][102]} This symbol is common in Germany and surrounding countries.^[102]



The biangles symbol of bisexuality, designed by artist Liz Nania

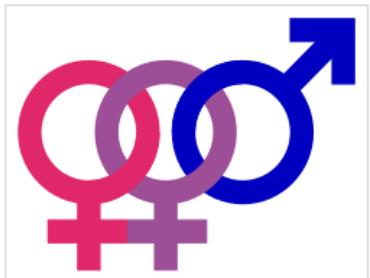
Celebrate Bisexuality Day (also called Bisexual Pride Day, Bi Visibility Day, CBD, Bisexual Pride and Bi Visibility Day, and Bisexuality+ Day) is observed annually on September 23^[103] to recognize and celebrate bisexual people, the bisexual community, and the history of bisexuality.^[104]



The double crescent moon bisexuality symbol, designed by Vivian Wagner

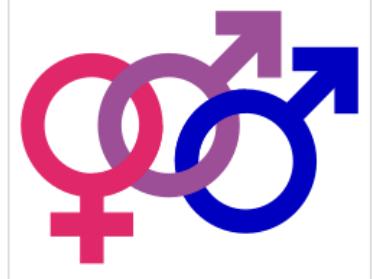
In BDSM

In Steve Lenius' original 2001 paper, he explored the acceptance of bisexuality in a supposedly pansexual BDSM community. The reasoning behind this is that "coming-out" had become primarily the territory of the gay and lesbian, with bisexuals feeling the push to be one or the other (and being right only half the time either way). What he found in 2001, was that people in BDSM were open to discussion about the topic of bisexuality and pansexuality and all controversies they bring to the table, but personal biases and issues stood in the way of actively using such labels. A decade later, Lenius (2011) looked back on his study and considered if anything has changed. He concluded that the standing of bisexuals in the BDSM and kink community was unchanged, and believed that positive shifts in attitude were moderated by society's changing views towards different sexualities and orientations. But Lenius (2011) does emphasize that the pansexual promoting BDSM community helped advance greater acceptance of alternative sexualities.^{[105][106]}



Venus flanked by Venus and Mars symbols for a bisexual woman

Brandy Lin Simula (2012), on the other hand, argues that BDSM actively resists gender conforming and identified three different types of BDSM bisexuality: gender-switching, gender-based styles (taking on a different gendered style depending on gender of partner when playing), and rejection of gender (resisting the idea that gender matters in their play partners). Simula (2012) explains that practitioners of BDSM routinely challenge our concepts of sexuality by pushing the limits on pre-existing ideas of sexual orientation and gender norms. For some, BDSM and kink provides a platform in creating identities that are fluid, ever-changing.^[107]



Mars flanked by Venus and Mars symbols for a bisexual man

In feminism

Feminist positions on bisexuality range greatly, from acceptance of bisexuality as a feminist issue to rejection of bisexuality as reactionary and anti-feminist backlash to lesbian feminism.^[108] A number of women who were at one time involved in lesbian-feminist activism have since come out as bisexual after realizing their attractions to men. A widely studied example of lesbian-bisexual conflict in feminism was the Northampton Pride March in Massachusetts during the years between 1989 and 1993, where many feminists involved debated over whether bisexuals should be included and whether or not bisexuality was compatible with feminism.^[109]

Common lesbian-feminist critiques leveled at bisexuality were that bisexuality was anti-feminist, that bisexuality was a form of false consciousness, and that bisexual women who pursue relationships with men were "deluded and desperate." Tensions between bisexual feminists and lesbian feminists have eased since the 1990s, as bisexual women have become more accepted in the feminist community,^[110] but some lesbian feminists such as Julie Bindel are still critical of bisexuality. Bindel has described female bisexuality as a "fashionable trend" being promoted due to "sexual hedonism" and broached the question of whether bisexuality even exists.^[111] She has also made tongue-in-cheek comparisons of bisexuals to cat fanciers and devil worshippers.^[112] Sheila Jeffreys writes in *The Lesbian Heresy* that while many feminists are comfortable working alongside gay men, they are uncomfortable interacting with bisexual men. Jeffreys states that while gay men are unlikely to sexually harass women, bisexual men are just as likely to be bothersome to women as heterosexual men.^[113]

Donna Haraway was the inspiration and genesis for cyberfeminism with her 1985 essay "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" which was reprinted in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (1991). Haraway's essay states that the cyborg "has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labor, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all powers of the parts into a higher unity."^[114]

A bisexual woman filed a lawsuit against the magazine Common Lives/Lesbian Lives, alleging discrimination against bisexuals when her submission was not published.^[115]

History

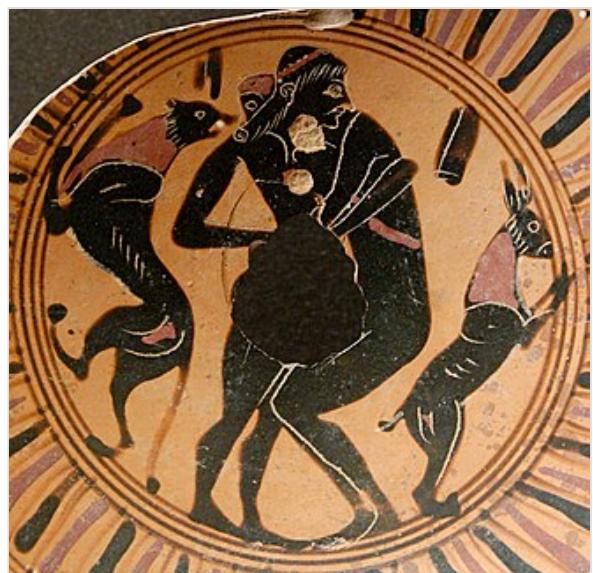
Ancient Greeks and Romans did not associate sexual relations with well-defined labels, as modern Western society does. Men who had male lovers were not identified as homosexual, and may have had wives or other female lovers.

Ancient Greek religious texts, reflecting cultural practices, incorporated bisexual themes. The subtexts varied, from the mystical to the didactic.^[116] Spartans thought that love and erotic relationships between experienced and novice soldiers would solidify combat loyalty and unit cohesion, and encourage heroic tactics as men vied to impress their lovers. Once the younger soldiers reached maturity, the relationship was supposed to become non-sexual, but it is not clear how strictly this was followed. There was some stigma attached to young men who continued their relationships with their mentors into adulthood.^[116] For example, Aristophanes calls them *euryprôkttoi*, meaning 'wide arses', and depicts them like women.^[116]

Similarly, in ancient Rome, gender did not determine whether a sexual partner was acceptable, as long as a man's enjoyment did not encroach on another man's integrity. It was socially acceptable for a freeborn Roman man to want sex with both female and male partners, as long as he took the penetrative role.^[117] The morality of the behavior depended on the social standing of the partner, not gender *per se*. Both women and young men were considered normal objects of desire, but outside marriage a man was supposed to act on his desires only with slaves, prostitutes (who were often slaves), and the *infames*. It was immoral to have sex with another freeborn man's wife, his marriageable daughter, his underage son, or with the man himself; sexual use of another man's slave was subject to the owner's permission. Lack of self-control, including in managing one's sex life, indicated that a man was incapable of governing others; too much indulgence in "low sensual pleasure" threatened to erode the elite male's identity as a cultured person.^[118]



Shudo (Japanese pederasty): a young male entertains an older male lover, covering his eyes while surreptitiously kissing a female servant.



Young man and adolescent engaging in intercural sex, fragment of a black-figure Attic cup, 550 BC–525 BC, Louvre

In early modern times, John Hoyle was an Englishman known for his bisexuality.^[119] Alfred Kinsey conducted the first large surveys of homosexual behavior in the United States during the 1940s. The results shocked the readers of his day because they made same-sex behavior and attractions seem so common.^[3] His 1948 work *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* stated that among men "nearly half (46%) of the population engages in both heterosexual and homosexual activities, or reacts to persons of both sexes, in the course of their adult lives" and that "37% of the total male population has at least some

overt homosexual experience to the point of orgasm since the onset of adolescence."^[120] Kinsey himself disliked the use of the term *bisexual* to describe individuals who engage in sexual activity with both males and females, preferring to use *bisexual* in its original, biological sense as *hermaphroditic*, stating, "Until it is demonstrated [that] taste in a sexual relation is dependent upon the individual containing within his anatomy both male and female structures, or male and female physiological capacities, it is unfortunate to call such individuals bisexual."^{[79][120]} Although more recent researchers believe that Kinsey overestimated the rate of same-sex attraction,^{[3][13]:9[121]:147} his work is considered pioneering and some of the most well known sex research of all time.^{[121]:29}

Media

Bisexuality tends to be associated with negative media portrayals; references are sometimes made to stereotypes or mental disorders. In an article regarding the 2005 film *Brokeback Mountain*, sex educator Amy Andre argued that in films, bisexuals are often depicted negatively:^[122]

I like movies where bisexuals come out to each other together and fall in love, because these tend to be so few and far between; the most recent example would be 2002's lovely romantic comedy, *Kissing Jessica Stein*. Most movies with bi characters paint a stereotypical picture.... The bi love interest is usually deceptive (*Mulholland Drive*), over-sexed (*Sex Monster*), unfaithful (*High Art*), and fickle (*Three of Hearts*), and might even be a serial killer, like Sharon Stone in *Basic Instinct*. In other words, the bisexual is always the cause of the conflict in the film.

—Amy Andre, *American Sexuality Magazine*

Using a content analysis of more than 170 articles written between 2001 and 2006, sociologist Richard N. Pitt Jr. concluded that the media pathologized black bisexual men's behavior while either ignoring or sympathizing with white bisexual men's similar actions. He argued that the black bisexual man is often described as a *duplicitous heterosexual* man spreading the HIV/AIDS virus. Alternatively, the white bisexual man is often described in pitying language as a *victimized homosexual* man forced into the closet by the heterosexist society around him.^[123]

Film

In 1914 the first documented appearance of bisexual characters (female and male) in an American motion picture occurred in *A Florida Enchantment*, by Sidney Drew.^[125] However, under the censorship required by the *Hays Code*, the word *bisexual* could not be mentioned, and almost no bisexual characters appeared in American film from 1934 until 1968.^[125]

Notable and varying portrayals of bisexuality can be found in mainstream movies such as *Something for Everyone* (1970), *Sunday Bloody Sunday* (1971), *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), *The Fourth Man* (1983), *Henry & June* (1990), *Basic Instinct* (1992), *Showgirls* (1995), *The Pillow Book* (1996), *Chasing Amy* (1997), *Velvet Goldmine* (1998), *Kissing Jessica Stein* (2001), *Mulholland Drive* (2001), *Frida* (2002), *The Rules of Attraction* (2002), *Alexander* (2004), *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), *Black Swan* (2010), and *Call Me by Your Name* (2017).

Literature

Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) is an early example of bisexuality in literature. The story, of a man who changes into a woman without a second thought, was based on the life of Woolf's lover Vita Sackville-West. Woolf used the gender switch to avoid the book being banned for homosexual content. The pronouns switch from male to female as Orlando's gender changes. Woolf's lack of definite pronouns allows for ambiguity and lack of emphasis on gender labels.^[126] Her 1925 book *Mrs Dalloway* focused on a bisexual man and a bisexual woman in sexually unfulfilled heterosexual marriages in later life. Following Sackville-West's death, her son Nigel Nicolson published *Portrait of a Marriage*, one of her diaries recounting her affair with a woman during her marriage to Harold Nicolson. Other early examples include works of D. H. Lawrence, such as *Women in Love* (1920), and Colette's *Claudine* (1900–1903) series.

The main character in Patrick White's novel, *The Twyborn Affair* (1979), is bisexual. Contemporary novelist Bret Easton Ellis' novels, such as *Less than Zero* (1985) and *The Rules of Attraction* (1987) frequently feature bisexual male characters; this "casual approach" to bisexual characters recurs throughout Ellis' work.^[127]

Music

Rock musician David Bowie famously declared himself bisexual in an interview with *Melody Maker* in January 1972, a move coinciding with the first shots in his campaign for stardom as Ziggy Stardust.^[128] In a September 1976 interview with *Playboy*, Bowie said, "It's true—I am a bisexual. But I can't deny that I've used that fact very well. I suppose it's the best thing that ever happened to me."^[129] In a 1983 interview, he said it was "the biggest mistake I ever made",^{[130][131]} elaborating in 2002 he explained "I don't think it was a mistake in Europe, but it was a lot tougher in America. I had no problem with people knowing I was bisexual. But I had no inclination to hold any banners or be a representative of any group of people. I knew what I wanted to be, which was a songwriter and a performer [...] America is a very puritanical place, and I think it stood in the way of so much I wanted to do."^[132]

Queen singer Freddie Mercury was also open about his bisexuality, though he did not publicly discuss his relationships.^[133]

In 1995, Jill Sobule sang about bi-curiosity in her song "I Kissed a Girl", with a video that alternated images of Sobule and a boyfriend along with images of her with a girlfriend. Another song with the same name by Katy Perry also hints at the same theme. Some activists, researchers, and general listeners suggest Perry's song merely reinforces the stereotype of bisexuals experimenting and of bisexuality not being a real sexual preference.^{[134][135]} Lady Gaga has also stated that she is bisexual,^[136] and has acknowledged that her song "Poker Face" is about fantasizing about a woman while being with a man.^[137]



Angelina Jolie is an openly bisexual American actress.^[124]

Brian Molko, lead singer of *Placebo*, is openly bisexual.^[138] Green Day frontman Billie Joe Armstrong has also identified himself as bisexual, saying in a 1995 interview with *The Advocate*, "I think I've always been bisexual. I mean, it's something that I've always been interested in. I think people are born bisexual, and it's just that our parents and society kind of veer us off into this feeling of 'Oh, I can't.' They say it's taboo. It's ingrained in our heads that it's bad, when it's not bad at all. It's a very beautiful thing."^[139] In 2014, Armstrong discussed songs such as "Coming Clean" stating, "It was a song about questioning myself. There are these other feelings you may have about the same sex, the opposite sex, especially being in Berkeley and San Francisco then. People are acting out what they're feeling: gay, bisexual, transgender, whatever. And that opens up something in society that becomes more acceptable. Now we have gay marriage becoming recognized... I think it's a process of discovery. I was willing to try anything."^[140]

R&B artist Frank Ocean came out as bisexual in a *Tumblr* post in 2012; in the post, Ocean described his feelings towards a man he had spent his summer with four years prior.^[141]

Television

In the *Netflix* original series *Orange is the New Black*, the main character, Piper Chapman, played by actress Taylor Schilling, is a bisexual female inmate who is shown having relationships with both men and women. In season one, before entering the prison, Piper is engaged to male fiancé Larry Bloom, played by actor Jason Biggs. Then, upon entering the prison, she reconnects with former lover (and fellow inmate), Alex Vause, played by Laura Prepon.^{[142][143]} Another character who is portrayed as bisexual in the show is an inmate named Lorna Morello, played by actress Yael Stone. She has an intimate relationship with fellow inmate Nicky Nichols, played by Natasha Lyonne, while still yearning for her male "fiance", Christopher MacLaren, played by Stephen O'Reilly.^[143]

The *FOX* television series *House* features a bisexual female doctor, Remy "Thirteen" Hadley, played by Olivia Wilde, from season four onwards. The same network had earlier aired the television series *The O.C.*, which for a time featured bisexual Alex Kelly (also played by Olivia Wilde), the local rebellious hangout spot's manager, as a love interest of Marissa Cooper.^[144] In the *HBO* drama *Oz*, Chris Keller was a bisexual serial killer who tortured and raped various men and women.^[145]

Beginning with the 2009 season, *MTV*'s *The Real World* series featured two bisexual characters,^[146] Emily Schromm,^[147] and Mike Manning.^[148]

The *Showcase* supernatural crime drama, *Lost Girl*, about creatures called Fae who live secretly among humans, features a bisexual protagonist, Bo,^[149] played by Anna Silk. In the story arc she is involved in a love triangle between Dyson, a wolf-shapeshifter (played by Kris Holden-Ried), and Lauren Lewis,^[150] a human doctor (played by Zoie Palmer) in servitude to the leader of the Light Fae clan.

In the *BBC* TV science fiction show *Torchwood*, several of the main characters appear to have fluid sexuality. Most prominent among these is Captain Jack Harkness, a pansexual who is the lead character and an otherwise conventional science fiction action hero. Within the logic of the show, where characters can also interact with alien species, producers sometimes use the term "omnisexual" to describe him.^[151] Jack's ex, Captain John Hart, is also bisexual.^[152] Of his female exes, significantly at least one ex-wife and at least one woman with whom he has had a child have been indicated. Some critics draw the conclusion that the series more often shows Jack with men than women.^[153] Creator Russell T Davies says one of pitfalls of writing a bisexual character is you "fall into the trap" of "only having them sleep

with men." He describes of the show's fourth series, "You'll see the full range of his appetites, in a really properly done way."^[154] The preoccupation with bisexuality has been seen by critics as complementary to other aspects of the show's themes. For heterosexual character Gwen Cooper, for whom Jack harbors romantic feelings, the new experiences she confronts at Torchwood, in the form of "affairs and homosexuality and the threat of death", connote not only the Other but a "missing side" to the Self.^[155] Under the influence of an alien pheromone, Gwen kisses a woman in Episode 2 of the series. In Episode 1, heterosexual Owen Harper kisses a man to escape a fight when he is about to take the man's girlfriend. Quiet Toshiko Sato is in love with Owen, but has also had brief romantic relationships with a female alien and a male human.

Webseries

In October 2009, "A Rose By Any Other Name"^[156] was released as a "webisode" series on YouTube. Directed by bisexual rights advocate Kyle Schickner,^[157] the plot centers around a lesbian-identified woman who falls in love with a straight man and discovers she is actually bisexual.^[158]

Among other animals

Some non-human animal species exhibit bisexual behavior.^{[15][16][17]} Examples of mammals that display such behavior include the bonobo, orca, walrus,^{[159][160]} and the bottlenose dolphin.^{[15][16][17][159][161][162]} Examples of birds include some species of gulls and Humboldt penguins. Other examples of bisexual behavior occur among fish and flatworms.^[162]

See also

 LGBTQ portal
 Human sexuality portal

- [Bicurious](#)
- [Biphobia](#)
- [Bisexual chic](#)
- [Bisexual erasure](#)
- [Bisexual literature](#)
- [Bisexual theory](#)
- [Journal of Bisexuality](#)
- [List of bisexual characters in literature](#)
- [List of gay, lesbian or bisexual people](#)
- [List of LGBTQ-related organizations](#)
- [List of media portrayals of bisexuality](#)
- [List of bisexual people](#)
- [Situational sexual behavior](#)
- [Victimization of bisexual women](#)

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External links

- [Official website \(https://bi.org/\)](https://bi.org/) of the American Institute of Bisexuality
 - [American Psychological Association's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns Office \(http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/\)](http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/)
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Queer

Queer is often used as an umbrella term for people who are non-heterosexual or non-cisgender.^{[1][2]} It is alternately used to refer to all people who reject sexual and gender norms and share radical politics characterized by solidarity across lines of identity.^{[3][4][5][6][7][8]} Queer is also a self-identity term for many people (similar to but distinct from gay, lesbian, and bisexual), characterized by rejection or disruption of binary categories of sexual orientation and gender.^{[9][10][6][11]}

Originally meaning 'strange' or 'peculiar', *queer* came to be used pejoratively against LGBTQ people in the late 19th century. From the late 1980s, queer activists began to reclaim the word as a neutral or positive self-description.^{[4][12][13]}

In the 21st century, *queer* became increasingly used to describe a broad spectrum of non-heteronormative sexual or gender identities and politics.^[3] Academic disciplines such as queer theory and queer studies have emerged to examine a wide variety of issues, either informed by this type of perspective, or to examine the lives of LGBTQ people. These share a general opposition to binarism, normativity, and a perceived lack of intersectionality, some of them connected only tangentially to the LGBTQ movement. Queer arts, queer cultural groups, and queer political groups are examples of modern expressions of queer identities.

Critics include LGBTQ community members who associate the term more with its colloquial, derogatory usage;^[14] those who wish to dissociate themselves from queer radicalism;^[15] and those who see it as too amorphous or trendy.^[16] Supporters of the term include those who use it to contrast with a more assimilationist part of the gay rights movement, and to signify greater willingness to defy societal norms in pursuit of gender and sexual identity liberation. They may associate it with the advancement of radical perspectives that were also present within past gay liberation movements, such as anti-consumerism or anti-imperialism, or with events such as the Stonewall rebellion.^{[17][12]}

Queer is sometimes expanded to include any non-normative sexuality expression, including cisgender queer heterosexuality, although some LGBTQ people view this use of the term as appropriation.^[18] Some non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender individuals self-describe themselves as *queer* for the relative ambiguity and rejection of explicit categorization this provides compared to labels such as lesbian and gay.^{[19][20]} PFLAG states that as such a personal identity, *queer* is "valued by some for its defiance, by some because it can be inclusive of the entire community, and by others who find it to be an appropriate term to describe their more fluid identities."^[21] Recent studies have found that 5–20% of non-heterosexuals and 21–36% of trans, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming people identify as queer.^[22]

Origins and early use

Entering the English language in the 16th century, *queer* originally meant 'strange', 'odd', 'peculiar', or 'eccentric'. It might refer to something suspicious or "not quite right", or to a person with mild derangement or who exhibits socially inappropriate behaviour.^{[3][1]} The Northern English expression "there's nowt so queer as folk", meaning "there is nothing as strange as people", employs this

meaning.^[23] Related meanings of *queer* include a feeling of unwellness or something that is questionable or suspicious.^{[3][1]} In the 1922 comic monologue "My Word, You Do Look Queer", the word is taken to mean "unwell".^[24] The expression "in Queer street" is used in the United Kingdom for someone in financial trouble. Over time, *queer* acquired a number of meanings related to sexuality and gender, from narrowly meaning "gay or lesbian"^[25] to referring to those who are "not heterosexual" to referring to those who are either not heterosexual or not cisgender (those who are LGBTQ+).^{[25][26]} The term is still widely used in Hiberno-English with its original meaning as well as to provide adverbial emphasis (very, extremely).^[27]

Early pejorative use

By the late 19th century, *queer* was beginning to gain a connotation of sexual deviance, used to refer to feminine men or men who were thought to have engaged in same-sex relationships. An early recorded usage of the word in this sense was in an 1894 letter by John Douglas, 9th Marquess of Queensberry, as read aloud at the trial of Oscar Wilde.^{[28][29]}

Queer was used in mainstream society by the early 20th century, along with *fairy* and *faggot*, as a pejorative term to refer to men who were perceived as flamboyant. This was, as historian George Chauncey notes, "the predominant image of *all* queers within the straight mind".^[30]

Starting in the underground gay bar scene in the 1950s,^[31] then moving more into the open in the 1960s and 1970s, the homophile identity was gradually displaced by a more radicalized gay identity. At that time *gay* was generally an umbrella term including lesbians, as well as gay-identified bisexuals and transsexuals; gender nonconformity, which had always been an indicator of gayness,^[31] also became more open during this time. During the endonymic shifts from *invert* to *homophile* to *gay*, *queer* was usually pejoratively applied to men who were believed to engage in receptive or passive anal or oral sex with other men^[32] as well as those who exhibited non-normative gender expressions.^[33]

Early 20th-century queer identity

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, *queer*, *fairy*, *trade*, and *gay* signified distinct social categories within the gay male subculture. In his book *Gay New York*, Chauncey noted that *queer* was used as a within-community identity term by men who were stereotypically masculine.^[34] Many queer-identified men at the time were, according to Chauncey, "repelled by the style of the *fairy* and his loss of manly status, and almost all were careful to distinguish themselves from such men", especially because the dominant straight culture did not acknowledge such distinctions. *Trade* referred to straight men who would engage in same-sex activity; Chauncey describes trade as "the 'normal men' [queers] claimed to be."^[30]



Drag Ball in Webster Hall, c. 1920s. Many queer-identifying men distanced themselves from the "flagrant" public image of gay men as effeminate "fairies".^{[30]:16,298}

In contrast to the terms used within the subculture, medical practitioners and police officers tended to use medicalized or pathological terms like "invert", "pervert", "degenerate", and "homosexual".^[30]

None of the terms, whether inside or outside of the subculture, equated to the general concept of a homosexual identity, which emerged only with the ascension of a binary (heterosexual/homosexual) understanding of sexual orientation in the 1930s and 1940s. As this binary became embedded into the social fabric, *queer* began to decline as an acceptable identity in the subculture.^[30]

Similar to the earlier use of *queer*, *gay* was adopted by many U.S. assimilationist men in the mid-20th century as a means of asserting their normative status and rejecting any associations with effeminacy. The idea that *queer* was a pejorative term became more prevalent among younger gay men following World War II. As the gay identity became more widely adopted in the community, some men who preferred to identify as *gay* began chastising older men who still referred to themselves as *queer* by the late 1940s:

In calling themselves gay, a new generation of men insisted on the right to name themselves, to claim their status as men, and to reject the "effeminate" styles of the older generation. [...] Younger men found it easier to forget the origins of gay in the campy banter of the very queens whom they wished to reject.^{[30]:19-20}

In other parts of the world, particularly England, *queer* continued to be the dominant term used by the community well into the mid-twentieth century, as noted by historical sociologist Jeffrey Weeks:

By the 1950s and 1960s to say "I am queer" was to tell of who and what you were, and how you positioned yourself in relation to the dominant, "normal" society. ... It signaled the general perception of same-sex desire as something eccentric, strange, abnormal, and perverse.^[35]

Reclamation

General

Beginning in the 1980s, the label *queer* began to be reclaimed from its pejorative use as a neutral or positive self-identifier by LGBTQ people.^[3] An early example of this usage was by an LGBTQ organisation called Queer Nation, which was formed in March 1990 and circulated an anonymous flier at the New York Gay Pride Parade in June 1990 titled "Queers Read This".^[4] The flier included a passage explaining their adoption of the label *queer*:

Ah, do we really have to use that word? It's trouble. Every gay person has his or her own take on it. For some it means strange and eccentric and kind of mysterious [...] And for others "queer" conjures up those awful memories of adolescent suffering [...] Well, yes, "gay" is great. It has its place. But when a lot of lesbians and gay men wake up in the



Queer resistance banner at a march

morning we feel angry and disgusted, not gay. So we've chosen to call ourselves queer. [...] It's a way of suggesting we close ranks, and forget (temporarily) our individual differences because we face a more insidious common enemy. Yeah, queer can be a rough word but it is also a sly and ironic weapon we can steal from the homophobe's hands and use against him.^[4]



The Taiwan Gender Queer Rights Advocacy Alliance (TGQRAA) held a march in Kaohsiung City in 2015

Queer people, particularly queer Black and Brown people, also began to reclaim *queer* in response to a perceived shift in the gay community toward liberal conservatism, catalyzed by Andrew Sullivan's 1989 piece in *The New Republic*, titled *Here Comes the Groom: The Conservative Case for Gay Marriage*.^[17] By identifying themselves as *queer* rather than *gay*, LGBTQ activists sought to reject causes they viewed as assimilationist, such as marriage, military inclusion and adoption.^[12] This radical stance, including the rejection of U.S. imperialism,^[12] continued the tradition of earlier lesbian and gay anti-war activism, and solidarity with a variety of leftist movements, as seen in the positions taken at the first two National Marches on Washington in 1979 and 1987, the radical direct action of groups like ACT UP, and the historical importance of events like the Stonewall riots. The radical queer groups following in this tradition of LGBTQ activism contrasted firmly with "the holy trinity of marriage, military service and adoption [which had] become the central preoccupation of a gay movement centered more on obtaining straight privilege than challenging power."^[12] Commentators such as Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore have argued that it was exactly these "revolting queers" (who were now being pushed aside) who had made it safe for the assimilationists to now have the option of assimilation.^[12]

This radical political stance has remained embedded in the reclaimed use of the word *queer*. Ever since the early 1990s, *queer* has been used as both an umbrella term and as a distinct self-identity term by people for whom no other label better describes their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.^{[6][9][36][5]}

As an umbrella term, *queer* is often used to describe all people who are non-heterosexual and non-cisgender,^{[1][2]} but it is alternately used to describe all people who defy or deviate from sexual and gender norms and share radical anti-assimilationist politics.^{[5][9][6][37]} For many people, the word *queer* is a political identity—one that is characterized by solidarity across sexual, gender, racial, class, and disabled identity lines.^{[7][8]} The Trans Language Primer notes:

While it has gained relatively wide usage in the present, there are still many that maintain that in order to be queer, one must be invested in liberation beyond respectability and assimilation. "We're here! We're queer! Get over it!" and "Not gay as in happy, but queer as in fuck you," are popular in the queer community precisely because they capture this spirit of radical liberation.^[38]

As a distinct self-identity term, *queer* is defined by a rejection and disruption of binary categories, particularly man/woman and gay/straight,^{[9][10]} and for many people it is an intentionally politicized identity that exists in opposition to identities such as gay, lesbian, and bisexual.^{[6][11]} Recent studies have found that 5–20% of non-heterosexuals identify as queer.^[22] Trans and nonbinary people are more likely to identify as queer than cisgender people, with recent studies finding that 21–36% of trans, nonbinary,

and gender nonconforming people identify as queer.^{[22][9][39][40]} As a self-identity label, *queer* can encompass sexuality and/or gender;^{[36][38]} in a 2025 international survey of more than 40,000 nonbinary people, more than half reported that they use the word *queer* as a self-identity term in relation to gender.^[41]

Other usage

The term may be capitalized when referring to an identity or community, in a construction similar to the capitalized use of Deaf.^[42] The 'Q' in extended versions of the LGBTQ acronym, such as *LGBTQIA+*,^[43] is most often considered an abbreviation of queer. It can also stand for questioning.^{[44][21]}

Reactions

Reclamation and use of the term *queer* is controversial; several people and organizations, both LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ, object to some or all uses of the word for various reasons.^[45] Some LGBTQ people dislike the use of *queer* as an umbrella term because they associate it with political and social radicalism. Sociologist Joshua Gamson argues that the controversy about the word also marks a social and political divide in the LGBTQ community between those (including civil-rights activists) who perceive themselves as "normal" and who wish to be seen as ordinary members of society and those who see themselves as separate, confrontational or not part of the ordinary social order.^[15] Other LGBTQ people disapprove of reclaiming or using *queer* because they consider it offensive, in part due to its continued use as a pejorative.^[14] Some LGBTQ people avoid *queer* because they perceive it as faddish slang or as academic jargon.^[16]

Scope

Intersex and queer identities

Scholars and activists have proposed different ways in which queer identities apply or do not apply to intersex people. Sociologist Morgan Holmes and bioethicists Morgan Carpenter and Katrina Karkazis have documenting a heteronormativity in medical rationales for the surgical normalization of infants and children born with atypical sex development, and Holmes and Carpenter have described intersex bodies as *queer bodies*.^{[46][47][48][49]} In "What Can Queer Theory Do for Intersex?" Iain Morland contrasts queer "hedonic activism" with an experience of insensate post-surgical intersex bodies to claim that "queerness is characterized by the sensory interrelation of pleasure and shame".^[50]

Emi Koyama describes a move away from a queer identity model within the intersex movement:

Such tactic [of reclaiming labels] was obviously influenced by queer identity politics of the 1980s and 90s that were embodied by such groups as Queer Nation and Lesbian Avengers. But unfortunately, intersex activists quickly discovered that the intersex movement could not succeed under this model. For one thing, there were far fewer intersex people compared to the large and visible presence of LGBTQ people in most urban centers. For another, activists soon realized that most intersex individuals were not interested in building intersex communities or culture; what they sought were professional psychological support to live

ordinary lives as ordinary men and women and not the adoption of new, misleading identity. ... To make it worse, the word "intersex" began to attract individuals who are not necessarily intersex, but feel that they might be, because they are queer or trans. ... Fortunately, the intersex movement did not rely solely on queer identity model for its strategies.^[51]

Queer heterosexuality

Queer is sometimes expanded to include any non-normative sexuality,^[52] including (cisgender) "queer heterosexuality". This has been criticized by some LGBTQ people, who argue that *queer* can only be reclaimed by those it has been used to oppress: "A straight person identifying as queer can feel like choosing to appropriate the good bits, the cultural and political cachet, the clothes and the sound of gay culture, without ... the internalized homophobia of lived gay experience."^[53] Many queer people believe that "you don't have to identify as queer if you're on the LGBTQIA+ spectrum, but you do have to be on the LGBTQIA+ spectrum to identify as queer."^[18]

Academia

In academia, the term *queer* (and the related verb *queering*) broadly indicate the study of literature, discourse, academic fields, and other social and cultural areas from a non-heterosexual or non-cisgender viewpoint. Though the fields of queer studies and queer theory are broad, such studies often focus on LGBTQ+ lives, and may involve challenging the assumption that being heterosexual and cisgender are the default or "normal". Queer theory, in particular, may embrace ambiguities and fluidity in traditionally "stable" categories such as *gay* or *straight*.^{[54][55]}

Queer studies is the study of issues relating to sexual orientation and gender identity, usually focusing on LGBTQ people and cultures. Originally centered on LGBTQ history and literary theory, the field has expanded to include the academic study of issues raised in biology, sociology, anthropology, history of science, philosophy, psychology, sexology, political science, ethics, and other fields by an examination of the identity, lives, history, and perception of queer people. Organizations such as the Irish Queer Archive attempt to collect and preserve history related to queer studies.

Queer theory is a field of post-structuralist critical theory that emerged in the early 1990s out of the fields of queer studies and women's studies. Applications of queer theory include queer theology and queer pedagogy. Philosopher Judith Butler has described queer theory as a site of "collective contestation", referring to its commitment to challenging easy categories and definitions.^[56] Critics of queer theory argue that this refusal of straightforward categories can make the discipline overly abstract or detached from reality.^[57]

Queer theorists such as Rod Ferguson, Jasbir Puar, Lisa Duggan, and Chong-suk Han have critiqued the mainstream gay political movement as allied with neoliberal and imperialistic agendas, including gay tourism, gay and trans military inclusion, and state- and church-sanctioned marriages for monogamous gay couples. Puar, a queer theorist of color, specifically coined the term homonationalism to refer to the perceived rise of American exceptionalism, nationalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy within the gay community, catalyzed in response to the September 11 attacks.^[58]

In their research on the queer movements of [Indonesia](#) and [Malaysia](#), scholars Jón Ingvar Kjaran and Mohammad Naeimi have said that the "localization of modern queer identity", rooted in local interpretations of queer theory and "Muslim modernism", has helped queer Indonesians and Malaysians to "promote their self-construction and organize a collective mobilization for their rights". They contrast this with the rhetoric of those conservative Muslim homophobes who portray "gay" or "LGBTQ" identities as a form of Western imperialism, as well as the "Eurocentric discourse", homonationalism and homonormativity of "LGBTQ politics" in the global north.^[59]

Culture and politics

Several LGBTQ social movements around the world use the identifier *queer*, such as the [Queer Cyprus Association](#) in Cyprus and the [Queer Youth Network](#) in the UK. In India, pride parades include [Queer Azaadi Mumbai](#) and the [Delhi Queer Pride Parade](#). The use of *queer* and *Q* is also widespread in Australia, including national counselling and support service Qlife^[60] and [QNews](#).

Other social movements exist as offshoots of queer culture or combinations of queer identity with other views.^{[59][61][62]} Adherents of [queer nationalism](#) support the notion that the LGBTQ community forms a distinct people due to their unique culture and customs. [Queercore](#) (originally *homocore*) is a cultural and social movement that began in the mid-1980s as an offshoot of [punk](#) expressed in a do-it-yourself style through zines, music, writing, art and film.^{[63][64]}

The term [queer migration](#) is used to describe the movement of LGBTQ people around the world often to escape discrimination or ill treatment due to their orientation or gender expression. Organizations such as the [Iranian Railroad for Queer Refugees](#) and [Rainbow Railroad](#) attempt to assist individuals in such relocations.^[65]

Flags

A pride flag for the queer community was created in 2015, though it is not widely known.^[66] Its colors include blue and pink for [attraction to the same gender](#), orange and green for [non-binary](#) people, and black and white for [agender](#), [asexual](#), and [aromantic](#) people.



Queer pride flag

Art

The label *queer* is often applied to art movements, particularly cinema.

New queer cinema was a movement in queer-themed independent filmmaking in the early 1990s. Modern queer film festivals include the [Melbourne Queer Film Festival](#) and [Mardi Gras Film Festival](#) (run by Queer Screen) in Australia, the [Mumbai Queer Film Festival](#) in India, the [Asian Queer Film Festival](#) in Japan, and [Queersicht](#) in Switzerland. Chinese film director Cui Zi'en titled his 2008 documentary about homosexuality in China [Queer China](#), which premiered at the 2009 Beijing Queer Film Festival after previous attempts to hold a queer film festival were shut down by the government.^[67]

Multidisciplinary queer arts festivals include the [Outburst Queer Arts Festival](#) in Northern Ireland,^[68] the [Queer Arts Festival](#) in Canada,^[69] and the [National Queer Arts Festival](#) in the US.^[70]

Television shows that use *queer* in their titles include the UK series *Queer as Folk*^[71] and its American-Canadian remake of the same name, *Queer Eye*,^[72] and the cartoon *Queer Duck*.^[73]

See also

- [Gay Shame](#) – Radical queer collective and movement
- [Heterosexism](#) – System of bias and prejudice in favor of heterosexuality
- [Homophobia](#) – Negative attitudes towards homosexual people
- [Queers \(TV series\)](#)
- [Sexual minority](#) – Individuals with a minority sexual orientation or gender identity
- [Sexuality and gender identity–based cultures](#)
- [Queerplatonic relationship](#) – Non-romantic intimate partnerships

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External links

- [The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society](http://www.glbthistory.org) (<http://www.glbthistory.org>)

Retrieved from "<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Queer&oldid=1325934096>"



Transgender

A **transgender** (often shortened to **trans**) person has a gender identity different from that typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth.^[2] The opposite of *transgender* is *cisgender*, which describes persons whose gender identity matches their assigned sex.^[3]

Many transgender people desire medical assistance to medically transition from one sex to another; those who do may identify as *transsexual*.^{[4][5]} *Transgender* does not have a universally accepted definition, including among researchers;^[6] it can function as an umbrella term. The definition given above includes binary *trans men* and *trans women* and may also include people who are *non-binary* or *genderqueer*.^{[7][8]} Other related groups include *third-gender* people, *cross-dressers*, and *drag queens* and *drag kings*; some definitions include these groups as well.^{[7][9]}

Being transgender is distinct from sexual orientation, and transgender people may identify as *heterosexual* (straight), *homosexual* (gay or lesbian), *bisexual*, *asexual*, or otherwise, or may decline to label their sexual orientation.^[10] Accurate statistics on the number of transgender people vary widely,^[11] in part due to different definitions of what constitutes being transgender.^[6] Some countries collect *census* data on transgender people. Canada was the first country to introduce collection of census data on its transgender and non-binary population in 2021.^{[12][13][14][15]} Generally, less than 1% of the worldwide population is transgender, with figures ranging from <0.1% to 0.6%.^{[16][17]}

Many transgender people experience *gender dysphoria*, and some seek medical treatments such as *hormone replacement therapy*, *gender-affirming surgery*, or *psychotherapy*. Not all transgender people desire these treatments,^[18] and some cannot undergo them for legal,^[19] financial,^[20] or medical^[21] reasons.

The legal status of transgender people varies by jurisdiction. Many transgender people experience *transphobia* (violence or discrimination against transgender people) in the workplace,^[22] in accessing public accommodations,^[23] and in healthcare.^[24] In many places, they are not legally protected from

Transgender



Transgender flag

Classification Gender modality^[1] · Gender identity

Abbreviations TG · trans

Subcategories Trans woman · Trans man · Non-binary and genderqueer^[1] · Gender nonconformity^[1] · Third gender^[1]

Symbol



Other terms

Associated terms Transsexual

i. By some definitions

discrimination.^[25] Several cultural events are held to celebrate the awareness of transgender people, including [Transgender Day of Remembrance](#) and [International Transgender Day of Visibility](#),^{[26][27]} and the [transgender flag](#) is a common transgender pride symbol.^[28]

Terminology

Before the mid-20th century, various terms were used within and beyond Western medical and psychological sciences to identify persons and identities labeled *transsexual*, and later *transgender* from mid-century onward.^[29] Imported from the German and ultimately modeled after German *Transsexualismus* (coined in 1923),^[30] the English term *transsexual* has enjoyed international acceptability, though *transgender* has been increasingly preferred over *transsexual*.^[31] The word *transgender* acquired its modern umbrella term meaning in the 1990s.^[32]

Health-practitioner manuals, professional journalistic style guides, and LGBT advocacy groups advise the adoption by others of the name and pronouns identified by the person in question, including present references to the transgender person's past.^{[33][34]}



Display on gender identity, Bell Gallery,
Elmer L. Andersen Library, University of
Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN

Transgender

Although the term *transgenderism* was once considered acceptable, it has come to be viewed as pejorative, according to GLAAD.^[35] Psychiatrist John F. Oliven of Columbia University used the term *transgenderism* in his 1965 reference work *Sexual Hygiene and Pathology*, writing that the term which had previously been used, *transsexualism*, "is misleading; actually, *transgenderism* is meant, because sexuality is not a major factor in primary transvestism".^{[4] [36]} The term *transgender* was then popularized with varying definitions by transgender, transsexual, and transvestite people, including Christine Jorgensen^[37] and Virginia Prince,^[4] who used *transgenderal* in the December 1969 issue of *Transvestia*,^[38] a national magazine for cross-dressers she founded.^[39] By the mid-1970s both *transgender* and *trans people* were in use as umbrella terms, while *transgenderist* and *transgenderal* were used to refer to people who wanted to live their lives as cross-gendered individuals without gender-affirming surgery.^[40] *Transgenderist* was sometimes abbreviated as *TG* in educational and community resources; this abbreviation developed by the 1980s.^[41] In 2020, the *International Journal of Transgenderism* changed its name to the *International Journal of Transgender Health* "to reflect a change toward more appropriate and acceptable use of language in our field."^[42]

By 1984, the concept of a "transgender community" had developed, in which *transgender* was used as an umbrella term.^[43] In 1985, Richard Ekins established the "Trans-Gender Archive" at the University of Ulster.^[39] By 1992, the International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy defined *transgender* as an expansive umbrella term including "transsexuals, transgenderists, cross dressers", and anyone transitioning.^[44] Leslie Feinberg's pamphlet, "Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time has Come", circulated in 1992, identified *transgender* as a term to unify all forms of gender nonconformity; in this way *transgender* has become synonymous with *queer*.^[45] In 1994, gender theorist

Susan Stryker defined *transgender* as encompassing "all identities or practices that cross over, cut across, move between, or otherwise queer socially constructed sex/gender boundaries", including, but not limited to, "transsexuality, heterosexual transvestism, gay drag, butch lesbianism, and such non-European identities as the Native American berdache or the Indian Hijra".^[46]

Transgender can also refer specifically to a person whose gender identity is *opposite* (rather than *different from*) the sex the person had or was identified as having at birth.^[47] In contrast, people whose sense of personal identity corresponds to the sex and gender assigned to them at birth – that is, those who are neither transgender nor non-binary or genderqueer – are called *cisgender*.^[48]

Transsexual

Inspired by Magnus Hirschfeld's 1923 term *seelischer Transsexualismus*,^[49] the term *transsexual* was introduced to English in 1949 by David Oliver Cauldwell and popularized by Harry Benjamin in 1966, around the same time *transgender* was coined and began to be popularized.^[4] Since the 1990s, *transsexual* has generally been used to refer to the subset of transgender people^{[4][50][51]} who desire to transition permanently to the gender with which they identify and who seek medical assistance (for example, sex reassignment surgery) with this.

Distinctions between the terms *transgender* and *transsexual* are commonly based on distinctions between gender and sex.^{[52][53]} Transsexuality may be said to deal more with physical aspects of one's sex, while transgender considerations deal more with one's psychological gender disposition or predisposition, as well as the related social expectations that may accompany a given gender role.^[54] Many transgender people reject the term *transsexual*.^{[5][55][56]} Christine Jorgensen publicly rejected *transsexual* in 1979 and instead identified herself in newsprint as *trans-gender*, saying, "gender doesn't have to do with bed partners, it has to do with identity."^{[57][58]} Some have objected to the term *transsexual* on the basis that it describes a condition related to gender identity rather than sexuality.^[59] Some people who identify as transsexual people object to being included in the *transgender* umbrella.^{[60][61][62]}

In his 2007 book *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category*, anthropologist David Valentine asserts that *transgender* was coined and used by activists to include many people who do not necessarily identify with the term and states that people who do not identify with the term *transgender* should not be included in the transgender spectrum.^[60] Leslie Feinberg likewise asserts that *transgender* is not a self-identifier (for some people) but a category imposed by observers to understand other people.^[61] According to the Transgender Health Program (THP) at Fenway Health in Boston, there are no universally-accepted definitions, and confusion is common because terms that were popular at the turn of the 21st century may have since been deemed offensive. The THP recommends that clinicians ask clients what terminology they prefer, and avoid the term *transsexual* unless they are sure that a client is comfortable with it.^[59]

Harry Benjamin invented a classification system for transsexuals and transvestites, called the Sex Orientation Scale (SOS), in which he assigned transsexuals and transvestites to one of six categories based on their reasons for cross-dressing and the relative urgency of their need (if any) for sex reassignment surgery.^[63] Contemporary views on gender identity and classification differ markedly from Harry Benjamin's original opinions.^[64] Sexual orientation is no longer regarded as a criterion for

diagnosis, or for distinction between transsexuality, transvestism and other forms of gender-variant behavior and expression. Benjamin's scale was designed for use with heterosexual trans women, and trans men's identities do not align with its categories.^[65]

Other terms

- *Transfeminine* (commonly abbreviated to both *transfem* and *transfemme*) refers to a person, binary or non-binary, who was assigned male at birth and has a predominantly feminine gender identity or presentation.^[66]
- *Transmasculine* (commonly abbreviated to *transmasc*) refers to a person, binary or non-binary, who was assigned female at birth and has a predominantly masculine gender identity or presentation.^[66]
- *Transgendered* is a common term in older literature. Many within the transgender community deprecate it on the basis that *transgender* is an adjective, not a verb.^[67] Organizations such as GLAAD and The Guardian also state that *transgender* should never be used as a noun in English (e.g., "Max is *transgender*" or "Max is a *transgender man*", not "Max is a *transgender*").^{[68][69]} *Transgender* is also a noun for the broader topic of transgender identity and experience.^[70]
- *Assigned Female At Birth (AFAB)*, *Assigned Male At Birth (AMAB)*, *Designated Female At Birth (DFAB)*, and *Designated Male At Birth (DMAB)* are terms used to represent a person's sex assigned at birth; they are considered to be more gender-inclusive than the related terms *biological male* or *biological female*.^[71]
- The term *trans** (with an asterisk) emerged in the 1990s as an inclusive term used to encompass a wide range of non-cisgender identities. The asterisk represents a wildcard, indicating the inclusion of various identities, beyond just transgender and transsexual, such as gender-fluid or agender, within the transgender umbrella. The use of the asterisk in "*trans***" has been debated; some argue that it adds unnecessary complexity, while others say that it enhances inclusivity by explicitly recognizing non-normative gender identities.^{[72][73]}

Shift in use of terms

Between the mid-1990s and the early 2000s, the primary terms used under the transgender umbrella were "female to male" (FtM) for men who transitioned from female to male, and "male to female" (MtF) for women who transitioned from male to female. These terms have been superseded by "trans man" and "trans woman", respectively. This shift in preference from terms highlighting biological sex ("transsexual", "FtM") to terms highlighting gender identity and expression ("transgender", "trans man") reflects a broader shift in the understanding of transgender people's sense of self and the increasing recognition of those who decline medical reassignment as part of the transgender community.^[74]

In place of transgenderism, terms such as transness,^[75] transgendersness, or transidentity,^[76] have been suggested,^[77] corresponding to their cisgender counterparts, such as cisness, cisgendersness and cisidentity.^{[78][79]}

Sexual orientation

Gender, gender identity, and being transgender are distinct concepts from sexual orientation.^[80] Sexual orientation is an individual's enduring pattern of attraction, or lack thereof, to others (being straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, etc.), whereas gender identity is a person's innate knowledge of their own gender (being a man, woman, non-binary, etc.). Transgender people can have any orientation, and generally use labels corresponding to their gender, rather than assigned sex at birth. For example, trans women who are exclusively attracted to other women commonly identify as lesbians, and trans men exclusively attracted to women would identify as straight.^[81] Many trans people describe their sexual orientation as *queer*, in addition to or instead of, other terms.^{[82][83][74]}

For much of the 20th century, transgender identity was conflated with homosexuality and transvestism.^{[84][85]} In earlier academic literature, sexologists used the labels homosexual and heterosexual transsexual to categorize transgender individuals' sexual orientation based on their birth sex.^[86] Critics consider these terms "heterosexist",^[87] "archaic",^[88] and demeaning.^[89] Newer literature often uses terms such as attracted to men (androphilic), attracted to women (gynephilic), attracted to both (bisexual), or attracted to neither (asexual) to describe a person's sexual orientation without reference to their gender identity.^[90] Therapists are coming to understand the necessity of using terms with respect to their clients' gender identities and preferences.^[91]

The 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey reported that of the 27,715 transgender and non-binary respondents, 21% said *queer* best described their sexual orientation, 18% said pansexual, 16% said gay, lesbian, or same-gender-loving, 15% said straight, 14% said bisexual, and 10% said asexual.^[83] A 2019 Canadian survey of 2,873 trans and non-binary people found that 51% described their sexual orientation as *queer*, 13% as *asexual*, 28% as *bisexual*, 13% as *gay*, 15% as *lesbian*, 31% as *pansexual*, 8% as *straight* or *heterosexual*, 4% as *two-spirit*, and 9% as *unsure or questioning*.^[74] A 2009 study in Spain found that 90% of trans women patients reported being *androphilic* and 94% of trans men patients reported being *gynephilic*.^[92]

Related identities and practices

Non-binary identity

Some non-binary (or genderqueer) people identify as transgender. These identities are not specifically male or female. They can be agender, androgynous, bigender, pangender, or genderfluid,^[93] and exist outside of cisnormativity.^{[94][95]} Bigender and androgynous are overlapping categories; bigender individuals may identify as moving between male and female roles (genderfluid) or as being both masculine and feminine simultaneously (androgynous), and androgynes may similarly identify as beyond gender or genderless (agender), between genders (intergender), moving across genders (genderfluid), or simultaneously exhibiting multiple genders (pangender).^[96] Non-binary gender identities are independent of sexual orientation.^{[97][98]}

Transvestism and cross-dressing

A transvestite is a person who cross-dresses, or dresses in clothes typically associated with the gender opposite the one they were assigned at birth.^{[99][100]} The term *transvestite* is used as a synonym for the term *cross-dresser*,^{[101][102]} although *cross-dresser* is generally considered the preferred term.^{[102][103]} The term *cross-dresser* is not exactly defined in the relevant literature. Michael A. Gilbert, professor at the Department of Philosophy, York University, Toronto, offers this definition: "[A cross-dresser] is a person who has an apparent gender identification with one sex, and who has and certainly has been birth-designated as belonging to [that] sex, but who wears the clothing of the opposite sex because it is that of the opposite sex."^[104] This definition excludes people "who wear opposite sex clothing for other reasons", such as "those female impersonators who look upon dressing as solely connected to their livelihood, actors undertaking roles, individual males and females enjoying a masquerade, and so on. These individuals are cross dressing but are not cross dressers."^[105] Cross-dressers may not identify with, want to be, or adopt the behaviors or practices of the opposite gender and generally do not want to change their bodies medically or surgically. The majority of cross-dressers identify as heterosexual.^[106]

The term *transvestite* and the associated outdated term *transvestism* are conceptually different from the term *transvestic fetishism*, as *transvestic fetishist* refers to those who intermittently use clothing of the opposite gender for fetishistic purposes.^{[107][108]} In medical terms, *transvestic fetishism* is differentiated from cross-dressing by use of the separate codes 302.3 in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*^[108] and F65.1 in the *ICD*.^[107]

Drag

Drag is clothing and makeup worn on special occasions for performing or entertaining, unlike those who are transgender or who cross-dress for other reasons.^[109] Drag performance includes overall presentation and behavior in addition to clothing and makeup. Drag can be theatrical, comedic, or grotesque. Drag queens have been considered caricatures of women by second-wave feminism. Drag artists have a long tradition in LGBTQ culture.

Generally the term *drag queen* covers men doing female drag, *drag king* covers women doing male drag, and *faux queen* covers women doing female drag.^{[110][111]} Nevertheless, there are drag artists of all genders and sexualities who perform for various reasons. Drag performers are not inherently considered transgender. However, for some trans people, drag communities have been "a safe and fun arena for exploring gender identity".^[112] Some drag performers such as Carmen Carrera have later come out as transgender.^[113] Drag historian Devin Antheus stated there were overlaps in the past, such as in the 1960s and 1970s: "for a lot of the girls, both queens who currently now identify as trans and those who don't, back in the day, there weren't such precise divisions when people were in internal spaces ... they all rolled together."^[114]



A drag queen performer. Drag performers are not inherently transgender.

Some drag performers, transvestites, and people in the gay community have embraced the pornographically derived term *tranny* for drag queens or people who engage in transvestism or cross-dressing; this term is widely considered an offensive *slur* if applied to transgender people.

History

A precise history of the global occurrence of transgender people is difficult to assess because the modern concept of being transgender, and of gender in general in relation to transgender identity, did not develop until the mid-1900s. Historical depictions, records and understandings are inherently filtered through modern principles, and were largely viewed through a medical and (often outsider) anthropological lens until the late 1900s.^{[115][116]}

Some historians consider the Roman emperor Elagabalus to have been transgender. Elagabalus was reported to have dressed in a feminine manner, preferred to be called "Lady" instead of "Lord" and may have even sought a primitive form of gender-affirming surgery.^{[117][118][119][120][121]}

Worldwide, a number of societies have had traditional third gender roles, some of which continue in some form into the present day.^[122] The Hippocratic Corpus (interpreting the writing of Herodotus) describes the "disease of the Scythians" (regarding the Enaree), which it attributes to impotency due to riding on a horse without stirrups. This reference was well discussed by medical writings of the 1500s–1700s. Pierre Petit writing in 1596 viewed the "Scythian disease" as natural variation, but by the 1700s writers viewed it as a "melancholy", or "hysterical" psychiatric disease. By the early 1800s, being transgender separate from Hippocrates' idea of it was claimed to be widely known, but remained poorly documented. Both trans women and trans men were cited in European insane asylums of the early 1800s. One of the earliest recorded gender nonconforming people in America was Thomas(ine) Hall, a seventeenth century colonial servant.^[123] The most complete account of the time came from the life of the Chevalier d'Éon (1728–1810), a French diplomat. As cross-dressing became more widespread in the late 1800s, discussion of transgender people increased greatly and writers attempted to explain the origins of being transgender. Much study came out of Germany, and was exported to other Western audiences. Cross-dressing was seen in a pragmatic light until the late 1800s; it had previously served a satirical or disguising purpose. But in the latter half of the 1800s, cross-dressing and being transgender became viewed as an increasing societal danger.^[115]

William A. Hammond wrote an 1882 account of transgender Pueblo "shamans" [*sic*] (*mujerados*), comparing them to the Scythian disease. Other writers of the late 1700s and 1800s (including Hammond's associates in the American Neurological Association) had noted the widespread nature of transgender cultural practices among native peoples. Explanations varied, but authors generally did not ascribe native transgender practices to psychiatric causes, instead condemning the practices in a religious and moral sense. Native groups provided much study on the subject, and perhaps the majority of all study until after WWII.^[115]

Critical studies first began to emerge in the late 1800s in Germany, with the works of Magnus Hirschfeld. Hirschfeld coined the term "Transvestit" in 1910, borrowed from 19th-century French word travesti with the same meaning,^[124] as the scope of transgender study grew, and it was translated to English as "transvestite". His work would lead to the 1919 founding of the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft in Berlin. Though Hirschfeld's legacy is disputed, he revolutionized the field of study. The Institut was destroyed when the Nazis seized power in 1933, and its research was infamously burned in the May 1933 Nazi

book burnings.^[125] Transgender issues went largely out of the public eye until after World War II. Even when they re-emerged, they reflected a forensic psychology approach, unlike the more sexological that had been employed in the lost German research.^{[115][126]}

Healthcare

Mental healthcare

People who experience discord between their gender and the expectations of others or whose gender identity conflicts with their body may benefit by talking through their feelings in depth. While individuals may find counseling or psychotherapy helpful, it is no longer recommended as a prerequisite for further transition steps.^[128] Research on gender identity with regard to psychology, and scientific understanding of the phenomenon and its related issues has existed for decades.^[129] The term *gender incongruence* is listed in the ICD by the WHO. In the American Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (*DSM*), the term *gender dysphoria* is listed under code F64.0 for adolescents and adults, and F64.2 for children.^[130]

France removed gender identity disorder as a diagnosis by decree in 2010,^{[131][132]} but according to French trans rights organizations, beyond the impact of the announcement itself, nothing changed.^[133] In 2017, the Danish parliament abolished the F64 Gender identity disorders. The DSM-5 refers to the topic as *gender dysphoria* (GD) while reinforcing the idea that being transgender is not considered a mental illness.^[134]

Transgender people may meet the criteria for a diagnosis of gender dysphoria "only if [being transgender] causes distress or disability."^[135] This distress may manifest as depression or inability to work and form healthy relationships with others. This diagnosis is often misinterpreted as implying that all transgender people suffer from GD, which has confused transgender people and those who seek to either criticize or affirm them. Transgender people who are comfortable with their gender and whose gender is not directly causing inner frustration or impairing their functioning do not suffer from GD. Moreover, GD is not necessarily permanent and is often resolved through therapy or transitioning. Feeling oppressed by the negative attitudes and behaviours of such others as legal entities does not indicate GD. GD does not imply an opinion of immorality; the psychological establishment holds that people with any kind of mental or emotional problem should not receive stigma. The solution for GD is whatever will alleviate suffering and restore functionality; this solution often, but not always, consists of undergoing a gender transition.^[129]

Clinical training lacks relevant information needed in order to adequately help transgender clients, which results in a large number of practitioners who are not prepared to sufficiently work with this population of individuals.^[136] Many mental healthcare providers know little about transgender issues. Those who seek help from these professionals often educate the professional without receiving help.^[129] This solution usually is good for transsexual people but is not the solution for other transgender people, particularly



1879 photograph of Edward de Lacy Evans, upon his admittance into Kew Lunatic Asylum. Evans identified as a man for the majority of his life, later becoming known in Melbourne as the "Wonderful Male Impersonator".^[127]

non-binary people who lack an exclusively male or female identity. Instead, therapists can support their clients in whatever steps they choose to take to transition or can support their decision not to transition while also addressing their clients' sense of congruence between gender identity and appearance.^[137]

Research on the specific problems faced by the transgender community in mental health has focused on diagnosis and clinicians' experiences instead of transgender clients' experiences.^[138] Therapy was not always sought by transgender people due to mental health needs. Prior to the seventh version of the Standards of Care (SOC), an individual had to be diagnosed with gender identity disorder in order to proceed with hormone treatments or sexual reassignment surgery. The new version decreased the focus on diagnosis and instead emphasized the importance of flexibility in order to meet the diverse health care needs of transsexual, transgender, and all gender-nonconforming people.^[139]

The reasons for seeking mental health services vary according to the individual. A transgender person seeking treatment does not necessarily mean their gender identity is problematic. The emotional strain of dealing with stigma and experiencing transphobia pushes many transgender people to seek treatment to improve their quality of life. As one trans woman reflected, "Transgendered individuals are going to come to a therapist and most of their issues have nothing to do, specifically, with being transgendered. It has to do because they've had to hide, they've had to lie, and they've felt all of this guilt and shame, unfortunately usually for years!"^[138] Many transgender people also seek mental health treatment for depression and anxiety caused by the stigma attached to being transgender, and some transgender people have stressed the importance of acknowledging their gender identity with a therapist in order to discuss other quality-of-life issues.^[138] Rarely, some choose to detransition.^[140]

Problems still remain surrounding misinformation about transgender issues that hurt transgender people's mental health experiences. One trans man who was enrolled as a student in a psychology graduate program highlighted the main concerns with modern clinical training: "Most people probably are familiar with the term transgender, but maybe that's it. I don't think I've had any formal training just going through [clinical] programs ... I don't think most [therapists] know. Most therapists – Master's degree, PhD level – they've had ... one diversity class on GLBT issues. One class out of the huge diversity training. One class. And it was probably mostly about gay lifestyle."^[138] Many health insurance policies do not cover treatment associated with gender transition, and numerous people are under- or uninsured, which raises concerns about the insufficient training most therapists receive prior to working with transgender clients, potentially increasing financial strain on clients without providing the treatment they need.^[138] Many clinicians who work with transgender clients only receive mediocre training on gender identity, but introductory training on interacting with transgender people has recently been made available to health care professionals to help remove barriers and increase the level of service for the transgender population.^[141] In May 2009, France became the first country in the world to remove transgender identity from the list of mental diseases.^{[142][143]}

A 2014 study carried out by the Williams Institute (a UCLA think tank) found that 41% of transgender people had attempted suicide, with the rate being higher among people who experienced discrimination in access to housing or healthcare, harassment, physical or sexual assault, or rejection by family.^[144] A 2019 follow-up study found that transgender people who wanted and received gender-affirming medical care had significantly lower rates of suicidal thoughts and attempts.^[145] Another study on the impact of parental support on trans youth found that among trans children with supportive parents, only 4% attempted suicide, a 93% decrease.^[146]

Suicidal thoughts and attempts by gender affirmation milestones^[145]

Intervention Category	Suicidal Thoughts (Past 12 Months)	Suicidal Attempts (Past 12 Months)	Lifetime Suicidal Thoughts	Lifetime Suicidal Attempts
Want hormones and have not had them	57.9	8.9	84.4	41.1
Want hormones and have had them	42.9	6.5	81.9	42.4
Want reassignment surgery, have not had	54.8	8.5	83.9	41.5
Want reassignment surgery, have had	38.2	5.1	79.0	39.5
Have not "de-transitioned"	44.2	6.7	81.6	41.8
Have "de-transitioned"	57.3	11.8	86.0	52.5

Autism is more common in people who are gender dysphoric. It is not known whether there is a biological basis. This may be due to the fact that people on the autism spectrum are less concerned with societal disapproval, and feel less fear or inhibition about coming out as trans than others.^[147]

Physical healthcare

Medical and surgical procedures exist for transsexual and some transgender people, though most categories of transgender people as described above are not known for seeking the following treatments. Hormone replacement therapy for trans men induces beard growth and masculinizes skin, hair, voice, and fat distribution. Hormone replacement therapy for trans women feminizes fat distribution and breasts, as well as diminishes muscle mass and strength. Laser hair removal or electrolysis removes excess hair for trans women. Surgical procedures for trans women feminize the voice, skin, face, Adam's apple, breasts, waist, buttocks, and genitals. Surgical procedures for trans men masculinize the chest and genitals and remove the womb, ovaries, and fallopian tubes. The acronyms "Gender-affirming surgery (GAS)" and "sex reassignment surgery" (SRS) refer to genital surgery. The term "sex reassignment therapy" (SRT) is used as an umbrella term for physical procedures required for transition. Use of the term "sex change" has been criticized for its emphasis on surgery, and the term "transition" is preferred.^{[148][149]} Availability of these procedures depends on degree of gender dysphoria, presence or absence of gender identity disorder,^[150] and standards of care in the relevant jurisdiction.

Health risks among transgender people largely align with those of cisgender people with the same hormonal makeup, and the same routine cancer screenings are generally recommended as for cisgender people with the same organs.^[151] It has been suggested that trans men who have not had a hysterectomy and who take testosterone may be at increased risk for endometrial cancer due to the presence of external estrogen, but this theoretical risk has not been proven in a clinical setting, and providers do not recommend any additional preventive measures or routine screening.^[152]

Detransition

Detransition refers to the cessation or reversal of a sex reassignment surgery or gender transition. Formal studies of detransition have been few in number,^[153] of disputed quality,^[154] and politically controversial.^[155] Estimates of the rate at which detransitioning occurs vary from less than 1% to as high as 13%.^[156] Those who undergo sex reassignment surgery have very low rates of detransition or regret.^{[140][157][158][159]}

The 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, with responses from 27,715 individuals who identified as "transgender, trans, genderqueer, [or] non-binary", found that 8% of respondents reported some kind of detransition. "Most of those who de-transitioned did so only temporarily: 62% of those who had de-transitioned reported that they were currently living full time in a gender different than the gender they were thought to be at birth."^[83] Detransition was associated with assigned male sex at birth, nonbinary gender identity, and bisexual orientation, among other cohorts.^[158] Only 5% of detransitioners (or 0.4% of total respondents) reported doing so because gender transition was "not for them"; 82% cited external reason(s), including pressure from others, the difficulties of transition, and discrimination. "The most common reason cited for de-transitioning was pressure from a parent (36%)."^{[160][161][83]}

Legality

Legal procedures exist in some jurisdictions which allow individuals to change their legal gender or name to reflect their gender identity. Requirements for these procedures vary from an explicit formal diagnosis of transsexualism, to a diagnosis of gender identity disorder, to a letter from a physician that attests the individual's gender transition or having established a different gender role.^[162] In 1994, the DSM IV entry was changed from "Transsexual" to "Gender Identity Disorder". In 2013, the DSM V removed "Gender Identity Disorder" and published "Gender Dysphoria" in its place.^[163] In many places, transgender people are not legally protected from discrimination in the workplace or in public accommodations.^[25] A report released in February 2011 found that 90% of transgender Americans faced discrimination at work and were unemployed at double the rate of the general population, and over half had been harassed or turned away when attempting to access public services.^[23] Members of the transgender community also encounter high levels of discrimination in health care.^[164]



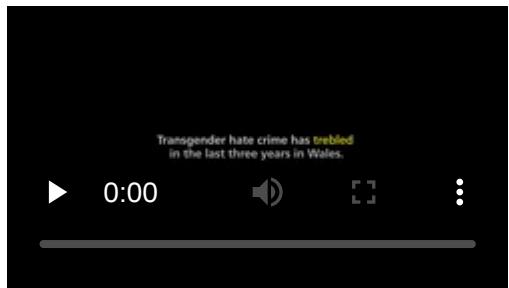
Camille Cabral, a French transgender activist at a demonstration for transgender people in Paris, October 1, 2005

Europe

As of 2017, 36 countries in Europe require a mental health diagnosis for legal gender recognition and 20 countries require sterilisation.^[165] In April 2017, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that requiring sterilisation for legal gender recognition violates human rights.^[166]

Canada

Jurisdiction over legal classification of sex in Canada is assigned to the provinces and territories. This includes legal change of gender classification. On June 19, 2017, Bill C-16, having passed the legislative process in the House of Commons of Canada and the Senate of Canada, became law upon receiving Royal Assent, which put it into immediate force.^{[167][168]} The law updated the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code to include "gender identity and gender expression" as protected grounds from discrimination, hate publications and advocating transgender genocide. The bill also added "gender identity and expression" to the list of aggravating factors in sentencing, where the accused commits a criminal offence against an individual because of those personal characteristics. Similar transgender laws also exist in all the provinces and territories.^[169]



A Welsh Government advisory video on transgender hate crimes

United States

In the United States, transgender people are protected from employment discrimination by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Exceptions apply to certain types of employers, for example, employers with fewer than 15 employees and religious organizations.^[170] In 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed that Title VII prohibits discrimination against transgender people in the case R.G. & G.R. Harris Funeral Homes Inc. v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.^[171]

In 2016, the United States Department of Education and Department of Justice issued guidance directing public schools to allow transgender students to use bathrooms that match their gender identities.^[172] The same year, the United States Department of Defense removed the ban that prohibited transgender people from openly serving in the US military.^[173] After back-and-forth reversals by presidents Donald Trump, Joe Biden,^{[174][175]} and Trump again, and various stays and reversals in the federal courts, a ban is again in effect as of May 2025.^{[176][177]}

The topic of trans rights in the United States has often been contentious and has become a deeply partisan wedge issue in recent years;^[178] many pieces of legislation have been passed, and more proposed, that seek to limit the rights of transgender individuals, especially minors.^[179]

India

In April 2014, the Supreme Court of India declared transgender to be a 'third gender' in Indian law.^{[180][181][182]} The transgender community in India (made up of Hijras and others) has a long history in India and in Hindu mythology.^{[183][184]} Justice KS Radhakrishnan noted in his decision that, "Seldom, our society realizes or cares to realize the trauma, agony and pain which the members of Transgender community undergo, nor appreciates the innate feelings of the members of the Transgender community, especially of those whose mind and body disown their biological sex".^[185] Hijras have faced structural discrimination including not being able to obtain driving licenses, and being prohibited from accessing various social benefits. It is also common for them to be banished from communities.^[186]

Sociocultural relationships

LGBTQ community

Despite the distinction between sexual orientation and gender, throughout history gay, lesbian and bisexual subcultures were often the only places where gender-variant people were socially accepted in the gender role they felt they belonged to; especially during the time when legal or medical transitioning was almost impossible. This acceptance has had a complex history. Like the wider world, the gay community in Western societies did not generally distinguish between sex and gender identity until the 1970s, and the role of the transgender community in the history of LGBTQ rights is often overlooked.^[187]

Transgender individuals have been part of various LGBTQ movements throughout history, with significant contributions dating back to the early days of the gay liberation movement.^[188]

The LGBTQ community is not a monolithic group, and there are different modes of thought on who is a part of this diverse community. The changes that came with the Gay Liberation Movement and Civil Rights movement saw many gay, lesbian, and bisexual people making headway within the public sphere, and gaining support from the wider public, throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. The trans community only experienced a similar surge in activism during the start of the twenty-first century.^[188] Due to the many different groups that make up the broader LGBTQ movement, there are those within the larger community who do not believe that the trans community has a place within the LGBTQ space.^[189]

Religion

Feminism

Feminist views on transgender women have changed over time, but have generally become more positive. Second-wave feminism saw numerous clashes opposed to transgender women, since they were not seen as "true" women, and as invading women-only spaces.^{[190][191]} Though second-wave feminism argued for the sex and gender distinction, some feminists believed there was a conflict between transgender identity and the feminist cause; e.g., they believed that male-to-female transition abandoned or devalued female identity and that transgender people embraced traditional gender roles and stereotypes.^[192] By the emergence of third-wave feminism (around 1990), opinions had shifted to being more inclusive of both trans and gay identities.^{[193][194]} Fourth-wave feminism (starting around 2012) has been widely trans-



Jogappa is a transgender community in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. They are traditional folk singers and dancers.



A rainbow flag held by a transgender person.

inclusive, but trans-exclusive groups and ideas remain as a minority, though one that is especially prominent in the UK.^{[195][193][196]} Feminists who do not accept that trans women are women have been labeled "trans-exclusionary radical feminists" (TERFs) or gender-critical feminists by opponents.^{[197][198]}

Discrimination and support

Transgender individuals experience significant rates of employment discrimination. According to a 2011 aggregation of several studies, approximately 90% of transgender Americans had encountered some form of harassment or mistreatment in their workplace. 47% had experienced some form of adverse employment outcome due to being transgender; of this figure, 44% were passed over for a job, 23% were denied a promotion, and 26% were terminated on the grounds that they were transgender.^[199]

Studies in several cultures have found that cisgender women are more likely to be accepting of trans people than cisgender men.^{[200][201][202][203]}

The start of the twenty-first century saw the rise in transgender activism and with it an increase in support.^[188] Within the United States, groups such as the [Trevor Project](#) have been serving the wider LGBT community including people who identify with the term transgender. The group offers support in the form of educational resources including research, advocacy, and crisis services.^{[204][205]} The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) also often represents members of the trans community.^{[206][207]}

Other groups within the United States specifically advocate for transgender rights. One of these groups directly related to transgender support is the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE), which is committed to advocating for policy changes that protect transgender people and promote equality. Through their research, education, and advocacy efforts, the NCTE works to address issues such as healthcare access, employment discrimination, and legal recognition for transgender individuals.^{[208][209]} One prominent organization within Europe is Transgender Europe (TGEU), a network of organizations and individuals committed to promoting equality and human rights for transgender people within European borders. TGEU works to challenge discrimination, improve transgender healthcare access, advocate for legal recognition of gender identity, and support the well-being of transgender communities.^{[210][211]}

Demographics

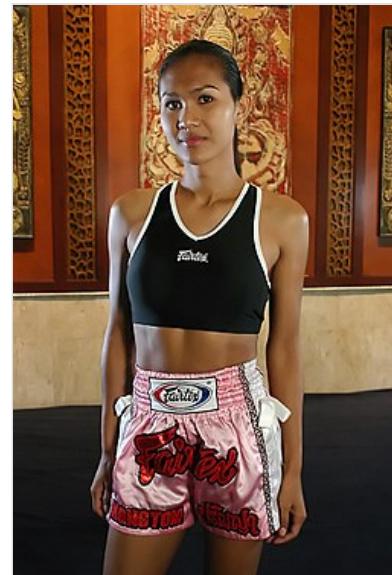
Little is known about the prevalence of transgender people in the general population and reported prevalence estimates are greatly affected by variable definitions of transgender.^[212] According to a recent systematic review, an estimated 9.2 out of every 100,000 people have received or requested gender affirmation surgery or transgender hormone therapy; 6.8 out of every 100,000 people have received a transgender-specific diagnoses; and 355 out of every 100,000 people self-identify as transgender.^[212] These findings underscore the value of using consistent terminology related to studying the experience of transgender, as studies that explore surgical or hormonal gender affirmation therapy may or may not be connected with others that follow a diagnosis of "transsexualism", "gender identity disorder", or "gender dysphoria", none of which may relate with those that assess self-reported identity.^[212] Common terminology across studies does not yet exist, so population numbers may be inconsistent, depending on how they are being counted.

A study in 2020 found that, since 1990, of those seeking sex hormone therapy for gender dysphoria there has been a steady increase in the percentage of trans men, such that they equal the number of trans women seeking this treatment.^[213]

Asia

In Thailand and Laos,^[214] the term *kathoey* is used to refer to male-to-female transgender people^[215] and effeminate gay men.^[216] However, many transgender people in Thailand do not identify as kathoey.^[217] Transgender people have also been documented in Iran,^[218] Japan,^[219] Nepal,^[220] Indonesia,^[221] Vietnam,^[222] South Korea,^[223] Jordan,^[224] Singapore,^[225] and the greater Chinese region, including Hong Kong,^{[226][227]} Taiwan,^[228] and the People's Republic of China.^{[229][230]}

The cultures of the Indian subcontinent include a third gender, referred to as *hijra* in Hindi. In India, the Supreme Court on April 15, 2014, recognized a third gender that is neither male nor female, stating "Recognition of transgenders as a third gender is not a social or medical issue but a human rights issue."^[231] In 1998, Shabnam Mausi became the first transgender person to be elected in India, in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh.^[232]



Nong Tum, a Kathoey internationally recognized for her portrayal in the film *Beautiful Boxer*

Europe

According to Amnesty International, 1.5 million transgender people lived in the European Union as of 2017, making up 0.3% of the population.^[16] A 2011 survey conducted by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in the UK found that of 10,026 respondents, 1.4% would be classified into a gender minority group. The survey also showed that 1% had gone through any part of a gender reassignment process (including thoughts or actions).^[233]

North America

The 2021 Canadian census released by Statistics Canada found that 59,460 Canadians (0.19% of the population) identified as transgender.^[13] According to the Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces by Statistics Canada in 2018, 0.24% of the Canadian population identified as transgender men, women or non-binary individuals.^[234]

In the United States, over 2.8 million persons identify as transgender, as of 2025.^{[235][236]} It's the case for 1% of adults (about 2.1 million persons) and 3.3% of youth (about 724,000 persons aged 13 to 17).^{[235][236]} Among adults, 32.7% (698,500) are transgender women, 34.2% (730,500) transgender men, and 33.1% (707,100) non-binary.^{[235][236]}

The Social Security Administration has tracked the sex of US citizens since 1936.^[237] A 1968 estimate, by Ira B. Pauly, estimated that about 2,500 transsexual people were living in the United States, with four times as many trans women as trans men.^[238] One effort to quantify the modern population in 2011 gave

a "rough estimate" that 0.3% of adults in the US are transgender.^{[239][240]} In 2016, studies estimated the proportion of Americans who identify as transgender at 0.5 to 0.6%.^{[241][242][243][244]}

In the United States and Canada, some Native American and First Nations cultures traditionally recognize the existence of more than two genders,^[245] such as the Zuni male-bodied *lhamana*,^[246] the Lakota male-bodied *winkte*,^[247] and the Mohave male-bodied *alyhaa* and female-bodied *hwamee*.^[248] These traditional people, along with those from other North American Indigenous cultures, are sometimes part of the contemporary, pan-Indian two-spirit community.^[247] Historically, in most cultures who have alternate gender roles, if the spouse of a third gender person is not otherwise gender variant, they have not generally been regarded as other-gendered themselves, simply for being in a same-sex relationship.^[248] In Mexico, the Zapotec culture includes a third gender in the form of the Muxe.^[249] Mahu is a traditional third gender in Hawai'i and Tahiti. Mahu are valued as teachers, caretakers of culture, and healers, such as Kapaemahu. Diné (Navajo) have Nádleehi.^[122]

Latin America

In Latin American cultures, a travesti is an individual who has been assigned male at birth and who has a feminine, transfeminine, or "femme" gender identity. Travestis generally undergo hormonal treatment, use female gender expression including new names and pronouns from the masculine ones they were given when assigned a sex, and might use breast implants, but they are not offered or do not desire sex-reassignment surgery. Travesti might be regarded as a gender in itself (a "third gender"), a mix between man and woman ("intergender/androgynes"), or the presence of both masculine and feminine identities in a single person ("bigender"); they are framed as something entirely separate from transgender women.^[250]

Other transgender identities are becoming more widely known, as a result of contact with other cultures of the Western world.^[251] These newer identities, sometimes known under the umbrella use of the term "genderqueer",^[251] along with the older *travesti* term, are known as non-binary and go along with binary transgender identities (those traditionally diagnosed under the obsolete label of "transsexualism") under the single umbrella of *transgender*, but are distinguished from cross-dressers and drag queens and kings, that are held as nonconforming gender expressions rather than transgender gender identities when a distinction is made.^[252]

Oceania

The 2021 Australian Census released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated that 178,900 Australians (0.9% of the population) aged 16 years and over reported a gender that is different to their sex recorded at birth. They estimated that 67,100 people reported are trans men, 52,500 are trans women and 58,500 are non-binary people. People aged 16–24 years were more likely than any other age group to be trans and gender diverse (1.8%).^[253]

On the 2023 New Zealand Census, 26,097 people self-identified as transgender, defined by Stats NZ as someone whose gender identity does not match their sex recorded at birth. This is 0.7 percent of all census-takers who were 15 years of age and older and usually residents of the country.^[254]

Culture

Coming out

Coming out is the process of sharing one's identity with others, and can include sharing new pronouns and a new name.^[255] Individuals who have come out are known as *out*.^[256] The experience of coming out can change depending on whether the transgender individual is perceived as the gender with which they identify, which is known as *passing*.^[255] In certain environments, some passing transgender individuals can choose to be *stealth*, which means to deliberately avoid coming out, often to avoid transphobia; these individuals are often out in other environments.^[255] The decision for transgender people to come out to current or potential romantic or sexual partners can be especially difficult.^[255]

The decision to come out is based on navigating others' gender expectations, reactions, and the threat of violence. Coming out is not a 'one-and-done' decision; rather, individuals make ongoing strategic decisions about their gender enactment and identity disclosure based on social contexts.^[257]

The age at which transgender people come out can vary; some transgender individuals will know about and share their identities at a young age, while for others, the process is longer or more complicated.^[258] Different transgender individuals choose to come out at different times during the transition process and to different people.^[255] Some transgender individuals will choose to come out as bisexual, lesbian, or gay before recognizing their gender identity or choosing to come out as transgender.^[258] Although there are some similarities, coming out as transgender is different than coming out as a sexual minority, such as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.^[255] This is partly due to the relatively lower level of information that people have about transgender people compared to people who are sexual minorities.^[255] Some come out in an online identity first, providing an opportunity to go through experiences virtually and safely before risking social implications in the real world.^[259]

It may take time for people to understand and respond when a transgender person comes out.^[255] Most transgender people feel healthier and happier when they come out and their gender identity is validated by others.^[255]

Some transgender people choose not to come out at all.^[255] For some, this decision can be because of stigma, lack of knowledge (by whom?) or fear of rejection by friends and family.^[258] Upon coming out, transgender people can face discrimination, rejection, and violence.^[255] These risks are heightened when transgender individuals are members of other marginalized communities.^[255]

Visibility

In 2014, the United States reached a "transgender tipping point", according to *Time*.^{[260][261]} At this time, the media visibility of transgender people reached a level higher than seen before. Since then, the number of transgender portrayals across TV platforms has stayed elevated.^[262]

Annual marches, protests or gatherings take place around the world for transgender issues, often taking place during the time of local Pride parades for LGBTQ people. These events are frequently organised by trans communities to build community, address human rights struggles, and create visibility.^{[263][264][265][266]} International Transgender Day of Visibility is an annual holiday occurring on



Actress Laverne Cox, who is trans, in July 2014

March 31^[267] dedicated to celebrating transgender people and raising awareness of discrimination faced by transgender people worldwide. The holiday was founded by Michigan-based transgender activist^[268] Rachel Crandall Crocker in 2009.^[269]



Trans March "Existrans" 2017

Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDOR) is held every year on November 20 in honor of Rita Hester, who was killed on November 28, 1998. Her murder remains unsolved, but was described in 2022 as "a result of transphobia and anti-trans violence" by the Office of the Mayor of Boston, Michelle Wu.^[26] TDOR memorializes victims of hate crimes and prejudice and raises awareness of hate crimes committed upon living transgender people.^[270] Transgender Awareness Week is a one-week celebration leading up to TDOR, dedicated to educating about transgender and gender non-conforming people and the issues associated with their transition or identity.^[271] Several trans marches occur in cities around the world, including Paris, San Francisco, and Toronto, in order to raise awareness of the transgender community.^{[272][273]}

There are also significant portrayals of transgender people in the media. Transgender literature includes literature portraying transgender people, as well as memoirs or novels by transgender people, who often discuss elements of the transgender experience.^[274] Several films and television shows feature transgender characters in the storyline, and several fictional works also have notable transgender characters.^[275]

Pride symbols

A common symbol for the transgender community is the Transgender Pride Flag, which was designed by the American transgender woman Monica Helms in 1999, and was first shown at a pride parade in Phoenix, Arizona, in 2000. The flag consists of five horizontal stripes: light blue, pink, white, pink, and light blue.^[28] Other transgender symbols include the butterfly (symbolizing transformation or metamorphosis)^[276] and a pink/light blue yin and yang symbol.^[277] Several gender symbols have been used to represent transgender people, including ♀ and ♂.^{[278][279]}



A pedestrian traffic light in Trafalgar Square, London with the ♀ symbol, installed for the 2016 Pride in London

See also



- [List of fictional trans characters](#)
- [List of transgender people](#)
- [List of transgender publications](#)
- [List of transgender-rights organizations](#)
- [List of people killed for being transgender](#)
- [Outline of transgender topics](#)
- [Transgender culture of New York City](#)
- [Transgender history](#)

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3. Blank 2014.
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5. Polly & Nicole 2011, p. 57. "The use of terminology by transsexual individuals to self-identify varies. As aforementioned, many transsexual individuals prefer the term transgender, or simply trans, as it is more inclusive and carries fewer stigmas. There are some transsexual individuals, however, who reject the term transgender; these individuals view transsexualism as a treatable congenital condition. Following medical and/or surgical transition, they live within the binary as either a man or a woman and may not disclose their transition history."
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8. GLAAD n.d.

- "An adjective to describe people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth" (¶ "Transgender").
- "Many nonbinary people also call themselves transgender and consider themselves part of the transgender community" (¶ "Nonbinary People").

9. Variously:

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22. Lombardi et al. 2008.

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26. Sudborough 2022.
27. CBC 2013.
28. Ford 2014.
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Portal:LGBTQ

Main page

WikiProjects & Things you can do



The Portal

LGBTQ+



Introduction



The Castro, a historic gay village in San Francisco

LGBTQ people are individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer. Many variants of the initialism are used, such as those incorporating questioning, intersex, asexual, romantic, agender, and other individuals. The group is generally conceived as broadly encompassing all individuals who are part of a sexual or gender minority. ([Full article...](#))



A six-band rainbow flag representing the LGBTQ community

Selected article -

Reel Affirmations (RA) is a non-profit, all-volunteer LGBT film festival in Washington, D.C. Founded in 1991 and held every year in mid-October, as of 2011 Reel Affirmations was one of the largest LGBT film festivals (in terms of attendance) in the United States. Baltimore's Gay Life newspaper called it "one of the top three films festivals for the entire LGBT community." A 2007 guidebook claims it was one of the largest LGBT film festivals in the world. A listing of LGBT film festivals claims it is the largest all-volunteer film festival in the world. ([Full article...](#))

List of selected articles

[First homosexual movement](#) · [Stonewall riots](#) ·
[LGBTQ themes in comics](#) · [Queer Eye \(2003 TV series\)](#)

This month's birthdays

- 1 – Matthew Shepard (1976–1998), American student
- 1 – Takeda Shingen (1521–1573), Japanese *daimyō* and Buddhist monk
- 2 – Gianni Versace (1946–1997), Italian fashion designer
- 2 – Jason Collins (1978–), American basketball player
- 4 – Cornell Woolrich (1903–1968), American crime writer
- 5 – Margaret Cho (1968–), American comedian, actress, and author



Margaret Cho

series) · Lieblingminne und Freundesliebe in der Weltliteratur · Will & Grace · Gay bar · Lesbian · Homosexuality in China · Black Cat Bar · Fun Home · Blue discharge · But I'm a Cheerleader · White Night riots · Boy Scouts of America membership controversies · And the Band Played On · The Puppy Episode · LGBTQ themes in speculative fiction · Gay Power, Gay Politics · Washington Blade · Janet Jackson as a gay icon · Save Our Children · Cowboys Are Frequently, Secretly Fond of Each Other · Same-sex marriage in the Republic of Ireland · Latter Days · Trembling Before G-d · Homer's Phobia · The Well of Loneliness · Same-sex marriage in Spain · Strawberry Panic! · Die BIF · A Gay Girl In Damascus · Tel Aviv gay centre shooting · Gay bath house · Russian gay propaganda law · Quinceañera (film) · Vagina (album) · Gay pride · Women's March on Portland · LGBTQ rights by country or territory · Pride parade · Same-sex marriage · HIV and men who have sex with men · LGBTQ culture in San Francisco · LGBTQ culture · Bisexuality · Transgender · Transgender rights · Compton's Cafeteria riot · LGBTQ community · Gay anthem · Anti-LGBTQ rhetoric · Rainbow flag (LGBTQ) · Gay panic defense · Gay literature · Pink triangle · LGBTQ social movements · Homosexuality · Dykes on Bikes · Healthcare and the LGBTQ community · LGBTQ rights at the United Nations · Persecution of homosexuals in Nazi Germany · Röhm scandal · Recognition of same-sex unions in Japan · LGBTQ rights in Canada

Selected biography -



John at the 2024 BFI London Film Festival

Sir Elton Hercules John (born **Reginald Kenneth Dwight**; 25 March 1947) is a British singer, songwriter and pianist. His music and showmanship have had a significant, lasting effect on the music

- 6 – Tom Hulce (1953–), American actor and theater producer
- 6 – Agnes Moorehead (1900–1974), American actress
- 6 – William II of the Netherlands (1792–1849), Dutch monarch
- 7 – Willa Cather (1873–1947), American writer
- 7 – Hurd Hatfield (1917–1998), American actor
- 7 – Jane Castor (1960–), American politician and former police chief, Mayor of Tampa, Florida
- 8 – Brendan Burke (1988–2010), Canadian hockey player
- 8 – Norman Douglas (1868–1952), British writer
- 9 – Elvira Kurt (1961–), Canadian comedian
- 10 – Emily Dickinson (1830–1886), American poet
- 10 – Tommy Kirk (1941–), American actor and businessman
- 10 – Raven-Symoné (1985–), American actress and singer
- 10 – Mark Takano (1960–), American Democratic congressman (California)
- 11 – Jean Marais (1913–1998), French actor
- 12 – Brandon Teena (1972–1993), American trans man, subject of the Academy Award-winning 1999 film *Boys Don't Cry*
- 13 – Anton Hysén (1990–), Swedish soccer player
- 14 – Jobriath (1946–1983), American rock musician and actor
- 14 – Amini Fonua (1989–), Tongan swimmer
- 15 – Nero (37–68), Roman emperor, 54–68AD
- 16 – Noël Coward (1899–1973), English playwright, composer, actor, and singer
- 16 – Kanako Otsuji (1974–), Japanese LGBT rights activist and politician
- 17 – Deborah Sampson (1760–1827), American soldier who fought in the American Revolutionary War disguised as a man
- 17 – Paul Cadmus (1904–1999), American painter
- 17 – Jacqueline Wilson (1945–), English children's literature novelist
- 17 – Sarah Paulson (1975–), American actress
- 18 – Christina, Queen of Sweden (1626–1689), Swedish monarch
- 18 – Brian Orser (1961–), Canadian figure skater and coach, 1987 World Champion

industry, and his songwriting partnership with the lyricist Bernie Taupin is one of the most successful in history. John was the 19th EGOT winner in history. He has sold over 300 million records worldwide, making him one of the best-selling music artists of all time.

John learnt to play piano at an early age, winning a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music. In the 1960s he formed the blues band Bluesology, wrote songs for other artists alongside Taupin, and worked as a session musician, before releasing his debut album, Empty Sky (1969). Throughout the next six decades, John cemented his status as a cultural icon with 32 studio albums, including Honky Château (1972), Goodbye Yellow Brick Road (1973), Rock of the Westies (1975), Sleeping with the Past (1989), The One (1992), Songs from the West Coast (2001), The Diving Board (2013) and The Lockdown Sessions (2021). His catalogue of hit singles includes "Your Song", "Tiny Dancer", "Rocket Man", "Crocodile Rock", "Bennie and the Jets", "Don't Go Breaking My Heart", "I'm Still Standing", "Sacrifice", "Can You Feel the Love Tonight" and "Cold Heart". He has also had success in musical films and theatre, composing music for The Lion King (1994), Aida (2000), and Billy Elliot the Musical (2005). John's final tour, Farewell Yellow Brick Road (2018–2023), became the highest-grossing tour ever at the time. His life and career were dramatised in the 2019 biographical film Rocketman. ([Full article...](#))

List of selected biographies

Quentin Crisp · Joan Baez · James Robert Baker · Alan G. Rogers · Camille Paglia · Candy Darling · Julian Eltinge · Ian McKellen · Alan Turing · Harvey Milk · Larry Kramer · John Inman · Natalie Clifford Barney · Romaine Brooks · Oscar Wilde · Stephen Fry · Matt Lucas · Heinz Heger · Federico García Lorca · Ann Bannon · RuPaul · Neil Patrick Harris · Tim Cook · Lily Tomlin · Bayard Rustin · Anderson Cooper · Ellen DeGeneres · Jodie Foster · Alvin Ailey · Leisha Hailey · Clay Aiken · Nicole Dennis-Benn · Billie Joe Armstrong · Melissa Etheridge · Rob Halford · Amandla Stenberg · Freddie Mercury · Martina Navratilova · Michael Stipe · Charles J. O'Byrne · David Sedaris · Anna Sharyhina · Pablo Picasso · Andy Warhol · Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir · Shinjiro Atae · Billie Eilish · Edgars Rinkēvičs

- 19 – Jean Genet (1910–1986), French novelist, playwright, and political activist
- 20 – Elsie de Wolfe (1865–1950), American actress, interior decorator, and author
- 20 – Prince George, Duke of Kent (1902–1942), British royalty
- 21 – Michael Tilson Thomas (1944–), American conductor, pianist, and composer
- 22 – Marc Allégret (1900–1973), French screenwriter and film director
- 24 – Galba (3 BC-69 AD), Roman emperor, first in the Year of Four Emperors
- 24 – Brenda Howard (1946–2005), American LGBT activist
- 25 – Albert Cashier (1843-1915), Irish-American trans Union Army soldier
- 25 – Quentin Crisp (1908–1999), English writer, raconteur, and gay icon
- 25 – Ismail Merchant (1936–2005), Indian-born film producer and director
- 26 – David Sedaris (1956–), American humorist, comedian, author, and radio contributor
- 27 – Marlene Dietrich (1901–1992), German actress and singer
- 27 – Guido Westerwelle (1961–2016), German politician and former Vice Chancellor of Germany
- 28 – Lili Elbe (1882-1931), Danish artist, subject of The Danish Girl novel/film
- 29 – Elsa Gidlow (1898–1986), Canadian-American poet, writer of first openly lesbian love poetry published in North America
- 29 – Billy Tipton (1914-1989), American jazz musician, bandleader, and talent broker
- 29 – Katherine Moennig (1977–), American actress
- 29 – Lilly Wachowski (1967–), American film director, screenwriter & producer
- 30 – Titus (31-81), Roman emperor, 79-81 AD.
- 30 – Paul Bowles (1910–1999), American expatriate composer, author, and translator
- 31 – Orry-Kelly (1897–1964), Australian costume designer
- 31 – Jennifer Higdon (1962–), American composer
- 31 – Diana Sacayán (1975–2015), Argentinian transgender activist

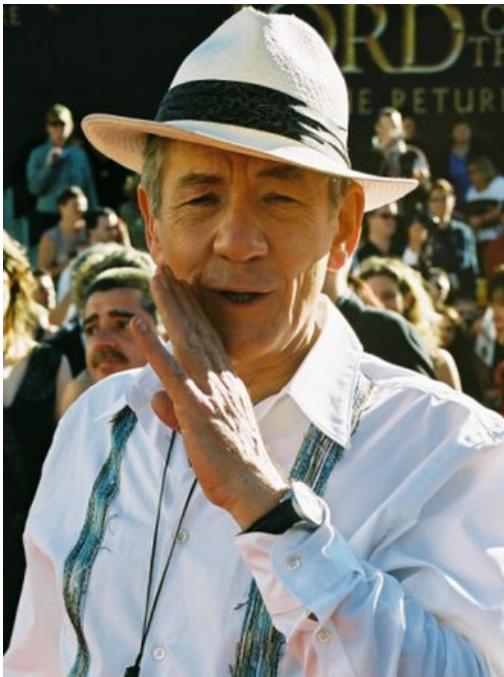
Selected quote -

“ I am as gay as a daffodil, my dear! ”

Current events

- [23 January 2025: A law allowing same-sex marriages come into effect on January 23, 2025, in Thailand.](#)
- [1 January 2025: A law allowing same-sex marriages come into effect on January 1, 2025, in Liechtenstein.](#)
- [28 June 2024: On the campaign trail in the USA, May 2024](#)
- [16 February 2024: Same-sex marriages come into effect on 16 February 2024 in Greece.](#)
- [5 July 2023: Germany: Esslingen am Neckar hosts first Christopher Street Day](#)
- [27 June 2023: France: Quimper, Finistère hosts second pride festival](#)
- [22 June 2023: Estonian parliament passes legalization of same-sex marriage](#)
- [20 June 2023: Wikinews interviews Tom Pashby, leader of campaign group Include Mx](#)
- [12 June 2023: Tens of thousands march in 25th Tel Aviv Pride parade](#)

Selected image -



Ian McKellen, English stage and screen actor.
McKellen is gay and a prominent campaigner for LGBT rights.

Selected lists

- [Timeline of LGBTQ history](#)
- [List of LGBTQ events](#)
- [List of LGBTQ rights activists](#)
- [List of years in LGBTQ rights](#)
- [List of LGBTQ bookstores](#)
- [Lists of LGBTQ people](#)
- [List of African-American LGBTQ people](#)
- [List of LGBTQ writers](#)
- [List of LGBTQ artists](#)
- [List of drag queens](#)



Related portals

 [Human sexuality](#)

 [Society](#)

Did you know... -



- ... that The Pittsburgh Courier crusaded against the **blue discharge**, calling it "a vicious instrument that should not be perpetrated against the American Soldier"?
- ...that **Nireah Johnson** was murdered by Paul Moore after Moore discovered Johnson was transgender?
- ... that the **Harvey Milk LGBT Democratic Club** developed some of the earliest safe sex education material in the United States?
- ... that the success of **Gay Weddings** as counterprogramming to Super Bowl XXXVII led television network Bravo to develop additional LGBT-interest programming, including Queer Eye and Boy Meets Boy?
- ... that **Freeheld** is an Academy Award winning documentary by **Cynthia Wade** that follows a New Jersey detective fighting for the right to pass on her pension to her female domestic partner?

The following articles and lists have been identified as some of the best produced by the Wikipedia community:

Featured articles

- ★ [Mário de Andrade](#)
- ★ [Ann Bannon](#)
- ★ [Natalie Clifford Barney](#)
- ★ [But I'm a Cheerleader](#)
- ★ [Cleveland Street scandal](#)
- ★ [Dog Day Afternoon](#)
- ★ [Fun Home](#)
- ★ [Emma Goldman](#)

- ★ [H.D.](#)
- ★ [Homer's Phobia](#)
- ★ [Latter Days](#)
- ★ [Harvey Milk](#)
- ★ [Same-sex marriage in Spain](#)
- ★ [Stonewall riots](#)
- ★ [The Well of Loneliness](#)
- ★ [Trembling Before G-d](#)

Featured lists and topics

- ★ [GLAAD Media Award for Outstanding Comedy Series](#)
- ★ [GLAAD Media Award for Outstanding Comic Book](#)
- ★ [GLAAD Media Award for Outstanding Documentary](#)
- ★ [GLAAD Media Award for Outstanding Drama Series](#)
- ★ [GLAAD Media Award for Outstanding Film – Limited Release](#)
- ★ [GLAAD Media Award for Outstanding Film – Wide Release](#)
- ★ [GLAAD Media Award for Outstanding Kids and Family Programming](#)
- ★ [GLAAD Media Award for Outstanding Limited or Anthology Series](#)
- ★ [GLAAD Media Award for Outstanding Music Artist](#)
- ★ [GLAAD Media Award for Outstanding Video Game](#)
- ★ [List of gay, lesbian or bisexual people: A](#)
- ★ [List of gay, lesbian or bisexual people: R](#)

content

- ★ [List of gay, lesbian or bisexual people: Sa–Sc](#)
- ★ [List of gay, lesbian or bisexual people: Sd–Si](#)
- ★ [List of gay, lesbian or bisexual people: Sj–Sz](#)
- ★ [List of gay, lesbian or bisexual people: T–V](#)
- ★ [List of gay, lesbian or bisexual people: W–Z](#)
- ★ [Gaylactic Spectrum Awards](#)
- ★ [List of Gaylactic Spectrum Award winners and nominees for best novel](#)
- ★ [List of Gaylactic Spectrum Award winners and nominees for best other work](#)
- ★ [List of Gaylactic Spectrum Award winners and nominees for best short fiction](#)
- ★ [Lambda Literary Award for Speculative Fiction](#)
- ★ [Terminology of transgender anatomy](#)

Topics

Human sexuality: Homosexuality · Bisexuality · Pansexuality · Biology and sexual orientation · Homosexuality and psychology · Demographics of sexual orientation · Sexual orientation · Romantic orientation · Split attraction model

Sexual identity: Gay · Gay men · Lesbian · Queer · Bisexual · Bi-curious · Pansexual · Asexual · Aromantic

Transgender topics: Transgender · Transsexualism · Transvestism · Cross-dressing · Legal status of transgender people · Transgender in film and television · Transphobia · Transmisogyny

Society: Homosexuality in society

Law: LGBT rights by country or territory · List of LGBT rights articles by region · Adoption · Parenting · Police · Same-sex marriage · Rights movements · Sodomy law · Violence against LGBT people · Gay bashing

LGBTQ culture: Gay community · Bi community · Social movements · Queer nationalism · Pride · Symbols · Slang · Gay village · Gay bar · Gay icons · Gaydar · LGBTQ literature · Queer fashion · Camp (style)

LGBTQ history: Bisexual American history · Gay men in American history · Lesbian American history · Transgender American history · Timeline of LGBTQ history · Timeline of LGBT history in Britain · History of same-sex unions · Timeline of asexual history · History of homosexuality · Gay Liberation · Stonewall riots · History of lesbianism

LGBT and religion: Homosexuality and religion · Transgender and religion · Christianity · Christianity and homosexuality · Islam · Judaism

Social attitudes: LGBT rights opposition · Heterosexism · Homophobia · Lesbophobia · Discrimination against asexual people

Lists: LGBTQ people · LGB people · Bisexual people · Transgender people · LGBTQ scientists, engineers, and mathematicians · LGBT-related films · LGBT characters in comics · LGBT characters in film/radio/TV · LGBT community centers · LGBTQ events · LGBTQ holidays · Years in LGBT rights · full list at Category:LGBTQ-related lists

LGBTQ people (topic outline)

Academic fields · Discourse

LGBTQ topics in education · Gender studies · Lesbian feminism · Linguistics · Literature (gay · lesbian · transgender) · Psychology · Queer studies · Queer theory · Transfeminism

Community · Culture

Anthems · Awards (literary) · Bars (gay · lesbian) · Bisexual community · Businesses · Coming out · Community centers · Cross-dressing (drag king · drag queen) · Events (awareness periods) · Film festivals · Gay village · Gay-friendly · Icons · Literature · Music · Media (bury your gays · films · new queer cinema · periodicals · portrayal) · Organizations · People · Pets · Pride (Pride Month · pride parade) · Queerplatonic relationships · Religious groups · Rodeos · Same-sex relationships · Slang · Slogans · Sports (Pride Night) · Takatāpui · Theatre (companies) · Tourism

Symbols Black triangle · Gaysper · Labrys · Lambda · Pink triangle · Rainbow plaque

Pride flags Aromantic · Asexual · Bear · Bisexual · Gay flag of South Africa · Gay men · Intersex · Leather · Lesbian · Non-binary · Pansexual · Rainbow (rainbow crossing) · Transgender

Gender identities · Sexual identities · Sexual diversities

Gender identity Androgyny · Boi · Cisgender · Gender bender · Gender nonconformity · Khanith · Man · Non-binary / genderqueer · Queer heterosexuality · Theyby · Transgender (Akava'ine) · Trans man · Transsexual · Trans woman (mak nyah) · Woman · Womxn · Womyn · Xenogender

	Third sex / Third gender	Bakla · Balkan sworn virgins · Bissu · Fa'afafine · Fakaleiti · Femminiello · Hijra · Kathoey · Köçek · Māhū · Mukhannath · Muxe · Travesti · Two-spirit · Winkte
	Sexual orientations	Asexual · Bisexual · Homosexual
Sexual identities		Aromanticism · Asexuality (Gray asexuality · Demisexuality · Aegosexuality) · Attraction to transgender people · Banjee · Bi-curious · Fictosexuality · Gay · Gay men · Heteroflexible · Lesbian · Monosexual · Non-heterosexual · Pansexual · Queer · Questioning · Romantic orientation · Same gender loving · Sexual minority · Tom / Dee
Related		Acronyms (LGBTQ) · Detransition · Effeminacy · Erotic target location error · Ex-gay · Ex-ex-gay · Female · Gender and sexual diversity · Gender assignment · Gender binary · Gender essentialism · Gender expression · Gender modality · Gender neutrality · Gender roles · Gender transition · Health (organizations) · Hermaphrodite · Human female sexuality · Human male sexuality · Intersex (Androgynos · Tumtum) · Legal status of transgender people · Male · Men who have sex with men / Sexual practices between men · Sex–gender distinction · Sexuality and gender identity-based cultures · Social construction of gender · Straight ally · Tomboy · Transgender health care (misinformation) · Women who have sex with women / Sexual practices between women
History		
LGBTQ history		History of homosexuality · History of gay men in the United States · History of lesbianism · Transgender history (timeline) · Timeline of asexual history · LGBTQ history timeline · Migration · Social movements (students) · History of Christianity and homosexuality · History of same-sex unions · Pederasty · Category:LGBTQ history
Pre-modern era		Adelphopoiesis · Ancient Egypt · Ancient Greece · pre-Columbian Peru · Ancient Rome · Medieval Europe
16th to 19th century		Molly house · Section 377 · First homosexual movement
20th century		Dance of the Forty-One · Institut für Sexualwissenschaft · Persecution of homosexuals in Nazi Germany · Transgender people in Nazi Germany · Cadet scandal · Florida Legislative Investigation Committee · Sea queens · Compton's Cafeteria riot · Stonewall riots · Gay Liberation Front · Handkerchief code · Festival of Light action · White Night riots · Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire · Florida orange juice boycott · Operation Soap · Epidemiology of HIV/AIDS · ACT UP · Section 28 · Tasty nightclub raid · Bar Abanicos police raid
21st century		Timeline of same-sex marriage · Lawrence v. Texas · Russian anti-LGBTQ law · Anti-Homosexuality Act, 2014 · Rainbow wave · Rainbow Night · 2020s anti-LGBTQ movement in the United States · (Trump-era persecution of transgender people)
Rights and legal issues		
LGBTQ rights by country or territory		Africa · Americas · Asia · Europe · Oceania · List of LGBTQ rights articles by region
LGBTQ rights topics		Capital punishment for homosexuality · Censorship of LGBTQ issues · Civil unions and partnerships · Criminalization of homosexuality (decriminalization) · Hate crime laws · Intersex human rights · Military service · Same-sex parenting (adoption) · Assisted reproduction · Same-sex marriage (timeline) · Socialism · Legal status of transgender people · Transgender rights movement · V-coding · United Nations/Yogyakarta Principles · La Francophonie · Commonwealth of Nations
LGBTQ rights movements		Homophile · Gay liberation · LGBTQ rights groups · LGBTQ rights activists · Rainbow capitalism · Separatism (gay · lesbian)
Sexual orientation — Medicine, science and sexology		

[Autism and LGBTQ people](#) · [Biology](#) · [Birth order](#) · [Demographics](#) · [Disability and LGBTQ people](#) · [Environment](#) · [Homosexuality and psychology](#) · [Homosexuality in the DSM](#) · [Kinsey scale](#) · [Klein Grid](#) · [Life expectancy](#) · [Neuroscience](#) · [Prenatal hormones](#) · [Sexual inversion](#) · [Conversion therapy](#) · [Split attraction model](#) · [Sexual orientation identity](#) · [Timeline of sexual orientation and medicine](#)

Societal attitudes · Prejudice · Violence

Societal attitudes	Amatonormativity · Heteronormativity · Heteropatriarchy · Homonationalism · Pinkwashing · Gay panic defense · Opposition to LGBTQ rights · (anti-LGBTQ rhetoric) · LGBTQ stereotypes · Suicide among LGBTQ people (list) · Monuments and memorials · Queerbaiting · Homosexuality and religion · Transgender people and religion
Prejudice and discrimination	Arophobia · Acephobia · Anti-gender movement · AIDS stigma · Biphobia · Gayphobia · Grooming conspiracy theory · Heterosexism · Homophobia (liberal) · Discrimination against lesbians · Discrimination against non-binary people · Racism · Riddle scale · SPLC-designated list of anti-LGBTQ hate groups · Transmisogyny · Transphobia
Violence against LGBTQ people	Corrective rape · Capital punishment for homosexuality · Gay bashing · Violence against LGBTQ people (history (in the UK · in the US)) · transgender people (unlawful killings) · Persecution of homosexuals in Nazi Germany · Stop Murder Music

 [LGBTQ portal](#) ·  [Category](#)

Categories

Select [▶] to view subcategories



LGBTQ

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Wikimedians' recent activities



Ongoing events

Ongoing events: Events that start before but continue within the selected dates



Upcoming events

Upcoming events: Events that start within the selected dates

February 2025

15 [Centre LGBTQI+ 15 février 2025](#)

15 February 2025 – 15 February 2025

 In-person event

 France

 Other

 This event is open to all wikis.

 Society

 [Natacha LSP](#)

August 2025

27 [WMLGBT Community meeting - August 2025](#)

27 August 2025 – 27 August 2025

 Online event

 Meetup

 [Vic Sfriso \(WMLGBT\)](#)

October 2025

8 [WMLGBT QW25 Community Engagement](#)

8 October 2025 – 8 October 2025

 Online event

 Meetup

 [Vic Sfriso \(WMLGBT\)](#)

November 2025

12 [First steps in Wikidata for the Wikimedia LGBT Community](#)

12 November 2025 – 12 November 2025

 Online event

 Training / seminar, Workshop

 Wikidata

 [Vic Sfriso \(WMLGBT\)](#) and [Bisi Alimi \(WMLGBT\)](#)

[Explore more events and communities](#)

Associated Wikimedia

The following [Wikimedia Foundation](#) sister projects provide more on this subject:



[Commons](#)

Free media repository



[Wikidata](#)

Free knowledge base



[Wikiquote](#)

Collection of quotations



[Wikiversity](#)

Free learning tools



[Wikibooks](#)

Free textbooks and manuals



[Wikinews](#)

Free-content news



[Wikisource](#)

Free-content library



[Wiktionary](#)

Dictionary and thesaurus

DISCOVER WIKIPEDIA USING PORTALS



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Nonverbal communication

Nonverbal communication is the transmission of messages or signals through a nonverbal platform such as eye contact (oculesics), body language (kinesics), social distance (proxemics), touch (haptics), voice (prosody and paralanguage), physical environments/appearance, and use of objects. When communicating, nonverbal channels are utilized as means to convey different messages or signals, whereas others interpret these messages.^[1] The study of nonverbal communication started in 1872 with the publication of *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* by Charles Darwin. Darwin began to study nonverbal communication as he noticed the interactions between animals such as lions, tigers, dogs etc. and realized they also communicated by gestures and expressions.^[2] For the first time, nonverbal communication was studied and its relevance noted. Today, scholars argue that nonverbal communication can convey more meaning than verbal communication.^[3]



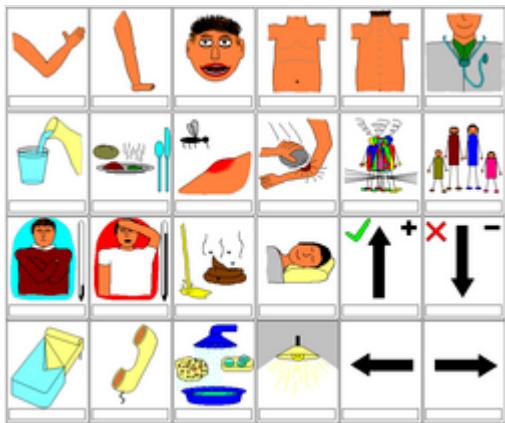
Understanding each other through hand and eye expression; seen in a street near the bell tower of Xi'an, China

In the same way that speech incorporates nonverbal components, collectively referred to as paralanguage and encompassing voice quality, rate, pitch, loudness, and speaking style, nonverbal communication also encompasses facets of one's voice. Elements such as tone, inflection, emphasis, and other vocal characteristics contribute significantly to nonverbal communication, adding layers of meaning and nuance to the conveyed message.^[4] However, much of the study of nonverbal communication has focused on interaction between individuals,^[5] where it can be classified into three principal areas: environmental conditions where communication takes place, physical characteristics of the communicators, and behaviors of communicators during interaction.

Nonverbal communication involves the conscious and unconscious processes of encoding and decoding. Encoding is defined as our ability to express emotions in a way that can be accurately interpreted by the receiver(s). Decoding is called "nonverbal sensitivity", defined as the ability to take this encoded emotion and interpret its meanings accurately to what the sender intended. Encoding is the act of generating information such as facial expressions, gestures, and postures. Encoding information utilizes signals which we may think to be universal. Decoding is the interpretation of information from received sensations given by the encoder. Culture plays an important role in nonverbal communication, and it is one aspect that helps to influence how we interact with each other. In many Indigenous American communities, nonverbal cues and silence hold immense importance in deciphering the meaning of messages. In such cultures, the context, relationship dynamics, and subtle nonverbal cues play a pivotal role in communication and interpretation, impacting how learning activities are organized and understood.

Importance

According to some authors, nonverbal communication represents two-thirds of all communications.^{[6][7][8]} Nonverbal communication can portray a message both vocally and with the correct body signals or gestures. Body signals comprise physical features, conscious and unconscious gestures and signals, and the mediation of personal space.^[6] The wrong message can also be established if the body language conveyed does not match a verbal message. Paying attention to both verbal and nonverbal communication may leave the listener with a feeling of being lost, due to not being able to breakdown both at the same time. However, ignoring nonverbal communication altogether would cause the listener to miss up to 60% of their communication, according to experts.



Symbol table for non-verbal communication with patients

Nonverbal communication strengthens a first impression in common situations like attracting a partner or in a business interview: impressions are on average formed within the first four seconds of contact.^[6] First encounters or interactions with another person strongly affect a person's perception.^[9] When the other person or group is absorbing the message, they are focused on the entire environment around them, meaning the other person uses all five senses in the interaction: 83% sight, 11% hearing, 3% smell, 2% touch and 1% taste.^[10]

Many indigenous cultures use nonverbal communication in the integration of children at a young age into their cultural practices. Children in these communities learn through observing and pitching in through which nonverbal communication is a key aspect of observation.

According to Judee K. Burgoon et al., further reasons for the importance of non-verbal communication are:

- "Non-verbal communication is omnipresent."^[11] They are included in every single communication act. To have total communication, all non-verbal channels such as the body, face, voice, appearance, touch, distance, timing, and other environmental forces must be engaged during face-to-face interaction. Written communication can also have non-verbal attributes. E-mails, web chats, and the social media have options to change text font colours, stationery, add emoticons, capitalization, and pictures in order to capture non-verbal cues into a verbal medium.^[12]
- "Non-verbal behaviours are multifunctional."^[13] Many different non-verbal channels are engaged at the same time in communication acts and allow the chance for simultaneous messages to be sent and received.
- "Non-verbal behaviours may form a universal language system."^[13] Smiling, crying, pointing, caressing, and glaring are non-verbal behaviours that are used and understood by people regardless of nationality. Such non-verbal signals allow the most basic form of communication when verbal communication is not effective due to language barriers.

Practical applications

Nonverbal communication encompasses a diverse range of signals that go beyond spoken language, such as gestures, facial expressions, body language, and vocal nuances like tone and rhythm. These cues carry subtle meanings critical to effective communication. For example, facial expressions are a powerful medium for conveying emotions, sometimes even through subtle microexpressions. These microexpressions are fleeting, involuntary facial movements that briefly reveal genuine feeling. They often occur in a fraction of a second, offering a brief insight into a person's genuine emotions, some of which may not be intentionally expressed and may diverge from their consciously stated feelings.^[14] While some cues might be universally understood, others hold culture-specific significance, necessitating careful interpretation to prevent misunderstandings. Understanding the tone, pitch, cultural connotations of touch, and environmental influences enriches nonverbal communication, shaping our interactions. Recognizing that cultural norms influence the appropriateness of tone and pitch is crucial, as outlined by display rules. This underscores the significance of being culturally sensitive when interpreting nonverbal cues. In the context of intercultural communication, a deeper understanding of context culture becomes essential. Context culture significantly shapes how individuals communicate emotions and convey meaning through nonverbal signals. Being aware of these cultural nuances is fundamental for facilitating successful cross-cultural interactions and ensuring the accurate interpretation of nonverbal expressions.^[15]

The understanding of tone, pitch, and cultural contexts in verbal communication complements nonverbal cues, offering a holistic grasp of interpersonal dynamics.^[16] The harmony or discrepancy between verbal and nonverbal signals significantly impacts message clarity. In cultures where nonverbal cues are pivotal, incongruence between verbal and nonverbal elements can create confusion, while in cultures emphasizing explicit verbal communication, alignment between the two is essential for effective understanding.

Mastery of nonverbal signals extends beyond mere word comprehension, promoting cultural awareness and smoother interactions across diverse settings.^[16] Proficiency in interpreting these cues not only aids in accurate understanding but also bolsters cross-cultural connections, enabling more profound exchanges. Adeptness in nonverbal communication is crucial for navigating social situations, decoding nuanced human behaviors, and establishing meaningful connections in various contexts, underlining the interconnectedness and importance of both verbal and nonverbal forms of communication.

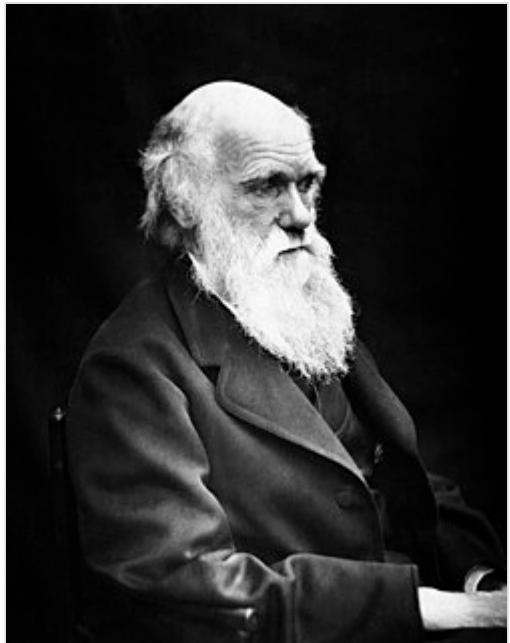
An understanding of nonverbal communication's role in information effects between the sender and receiver also contributes context for research of interpersonal communication.^[17] Understanding emotion thoroughly through observation of both parties' emotional reactions from all senses is an important application to research by emphasizing interpersonal dynamics. Using observed studies on animals and their functional and evolutionary nonverbal communications, understanding effects on both sides informs approaches taken when studying nonverbal communication and how it is used by humans in the broader aspect such as its uses to portray emotions and its study of said portrayal.

History of research

Scientific research on nonverbal communication and behavior was started in 1872 with the publication of Charles Darwin's book, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*.^[10] In the book, Darwin argued that all mammals, both humans and animals, showed emotion through facial expressions. He posed questions such as: "Why do our facial expressions of emotions take the particular forms they do?"

and "Why do we wrinkle our nose when we are disgusted and bare our teeth when we are enraged?"^[18] Darwin attributed these facial expressions to serviceable associated habits, which are behaviors that earlier in our evolutionary history had specific and direct functions.^[18] For example, a species that attacked by biting, baring the teeth was a necessary act before an assault and wrinkling the nose reduced the inhalation of foul odors. In response to the question asking why facial expressions persist even when they no longer serve their original purposes, Darwin's predecessors have developed a highly valued explanation. According to Darwin, humans continue to make facial expressions because they have acquired communicative value throughout evolutionary history.^[18] In other words, humans utilize facial expressions as external evidence of their internal state. Although *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* was not one of Darwin's most successful books in terms of its quality and overall impact in the field, his initial ideas started the abundance of research on the types, effects, and expressions of nonverbal communication and behavior.^[19]

Charles Darwin was also a renowned British naturalist and biologist best known for developing the theory of evolution through natural selection^[20]



Charles Darwin wrote *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* in 1872.

Despite the introduction of nonverbal communication in the 1800s, the emergence of behaviorism in the 1920s paused further research on nonverbal communication.^[19] Behaviorism is defined as the theory of learning that describes people's behavior as acquired through conditioning.^[21] Behaviorists such as B.F. Skinner trained pigeons to engage in various behaviors to demonstrate how animals engage in behaviors with rewards.^[21]

While most psychology researchers were exploring behaviorism, the study of nonverbal communication as recorded on film began in 1955–56 at the Center for Advanced Study in Behavioral Sciences through a project which came to be called the *Natural History of an Interview*. The initial participants included two psychiatrists, Frieda Fromm-Reichman and Henry Brosin, two linguists, Norman A. McQuown and Charles Hockett, and also two anthropologists, Clyde Kluckhohn and David M. Schneider (these last two withdrew by the end of 1955, and did not participate in the major group project). In their place, two other anthropologists, Ray Birdwhistell, already then known as the founder of kinesics, the study of body motion communication,^[22] and Gregory Bateson, known more generally as a human communication theorist, both joined the team in 1956. Albert Scheflen and Adam Kendon were among those who joined one of the small research teams continuing research once the year at CASBS ended. The project analyzed a film made by Bateson, using an analytic method called at the time *natural history*, and later, mostly by Scheflen, *context analysis*. The result remained unpublished, as it was enormous and unwieldy, but it was available on microfilm by 1971.^[23] The method involves transcribing filmed or videotaped behavior in excruciating detail, and was later used in studying the sequence and structure of human greetings, social behaviors at parties, and the function of posture during interpersonal interaction.^{[24][25][26][27]}

Research on nonverbal communication rocketed during the mid-1960s by a number of psychologists and researchers. Michael Argyle and Janet Dean Fodor, for example, studied the relationship between eye contact and conversational distance. Ralph V. Exline examined patterns of looking while speaking and looking while listening.^[19] Eckhard Hess produced several studies pertaining to pupil dilation that were published in *Scientific American*. Robert Sommer studied the relationship between personal space and the environment.^[19] Robert Rosenthal discovered that expectations made by teachers and researchers can influence their outcomes, and that subtle, nonverbal cues may play an important role in this process.^[19] Albert Mehrabian studied the nonverbal cues of liking and immediacy. By the 1970s, a number of scholarly volumes in psychology summarized the growing body of research, such as Shirley Weitz's *Nonverbal Communication* and Marianne LaFrance and Clara Mayo's *Moving Bodies*.^[19] Popular books included *Body Language* (Fast, 1970), which focused on how to use nonverbal communication to attract other people, and *How to Read a Person Like a Book* (Nierenberg & Calero, 1971) which examined nonverbal behavior in negotiation situations.^[19] The journal *Environmental Psychology and Nonverbal Behavior* was founded in 1976.^[28]

In 1970, Argyle hypothesized that although spoken language is used for communicating the meaning about events external to the person communicating, the nonverbal codes are used to create and strengthen interpersonal relationships.^[29] When someone wishes to avoid conflicting or embarrassing events during communication, it is considered proper and correct by the hypothesis to communicate attitudes towards others non-verbally instead of verbally.^[30] Along with this philosophy, Michael Argyle also found and concluded in 1988 that there are five main functions of nonverbal body behavior and gestures in human communications: self-presentation of one's whole personality, rituals and cultural greetings, expressing interpersonal attitudes, expressing emotions, and to accompany speech in managing the cues set in the interactions between the speaker and the listener.^[29]

First impression

It takes just one-tenth of a second for someone to judge and make their first impression. According to a study from Princeton University, this short amount of time is enough for a person to determine several attributes about an individual. These attributes included "attractiveness, likeability, trustworthiness, competence, and aggressiveness." A first impression is a lasting non-verbal communicator. The way a person portrays themselves on the first encounter is non-verbal statement to the observer. Presentation can include clothing and other visible attributes such as facial expressions or facial traits in general. Negative impressions can also be based on presentation and on personal prejudice. First impressions, although sometimes misleading, can in many situations be an accurate depiction of others.^[31]

In terms of culture, collectivists have a harder time changing their first impressions because they emphasize a lot more context and need additional time when faced with new clues as each view may be correct in some contexts.^[32] Moreover, Fang et al., acknowledged that first impression is less likely to change in Asian culture because they value cohesiveness and consensus, thus will not destroy their group cohesiveness at the expense of changing their first impression when they reached a consensus.

Posture

Posture is a nonverbal cue that is associated with positioning. Posture and positioning are sources of information about individual's characteristics, attitudes, and feelings about themselves and other people.^[33] There are many different types of body positioning to portray certain postures, including slouching, towering, legs spread, jaw thrust, shoulders forward, and arm crossing. The posture or bodily stance an individual exhibits communicates a variety of messages. A study, for instance, identified around 200 postures that are related to maladjustment and withholding of information.^[33]

Posture can be used to determine a participant's degree of attention or involvement, the difference in status between communicators, and the level of fondness a person has for the other communicator, depending on body "openness".^{[34]:9} It can also be effectively used as a way for an individual to convey a desire to increase, limit, or avoid interaction with another person.^[35] Studies investigating the impact of posture on interpersonal relationships suggest that mirror-image congruent postures, where one person's left side is parallel to the other person's right side, leads to favorable perception of communicators and positive speech; a person who displays a forward lean or decreases a backward lean also signifies positive sentiment during communication.^[36]

People will change their posture relative to the situation they are in.^[37] This can be demonstrated in the case of relaxed posture when an individual is within a nonthreatening situation and the way one's body tightens or become rigid when under stress.^[38]

Clothing

Clothing is one of the most common forms of non-verbal communication. The study of clothing and other objects as a means of non-verbal communication is known as *artifacts*^[39] or *objectics*.^[40] The types of clothing that an individual wears convey nonverbal cues about their personality, background and financial status, and how others will respond to them.^[10] An individual's clothing style can demonstrate their culture, mood, level of confidence, interests, age, authority, and values/beliefs.^[41] For instance, Jewish men may wear a yarmulke to outwardly communicate their religious belief. Similarly, clothing can communicate what nationality a person or group is; for example, in traditional festivities Scottish men often wear kilts to specify their culture.

Aside from communicating a person's beliefs and nationality, clothing can be used as a nonverbal cue to attract others. Men and women may shower themselves with accessories and high-end fashion to attract partners interested. In this case, clothing is a form of self-expression where people can flaunt their power, wealth, sex appeal, or creativity.^[41] A study of the clothing worn by women attending discothèques, carried out in Vienna, Austria. It showed that in certain groups of women (especially women who were without their partners), motivation for sex and levels of sexual hormones were correlated with aspects of their clothing, especially the amount of skin displayed and the presence of sheer clothing.^[42]

The way one chooses to dress tells a lot about one's personality. The University of North Carolina studied how undergraduate women chose to dress and their personality types. The study showed that women dressed "primarily for comfort and practicality were more self-controlled, dependable, and socially well adjusted."^[43] Women who did not like to stand out in a crowd typically had more conservative and

traditional views and beliefs. Clothing, although non-verbal, tells people what the individual's personality is. The way a person dresses is typically rooted in deeper internal motivations such as emotions, experiences, and culture.^[44] Clothing expresses who they are or who they want to be that day. It shows other people who they want to be associated with and where they fit in. Clothing can start relationships because they clue other people into the wearer.^{[43][44]}

When it comes to the clothing that they wear, nonverbal communication with gangs is very common. Gang members typically wear 2–3 colors to signify that they are representing a particular neighborhood. Baseball caps and hats with specific gang names and initials, worn backwards, tilted, in certain colors, etc. bandanas worn around the head, shoulders, arms, or legs. Gang members frequently dress in hip-hop-inspired fashions, such as oversized pants worn below the waist (also known as "sagging"). Colored belts, colored shoes, and colored bandanas are all utilized as identifiers. Group colors and clothing are commonly used to represent affiliation.

Gestures

Gestures may be made with the hands, arms or body, and also include movements of the head, face and eyes, such as winking, nodding, or rolling one's eyes. Although the study of gesture is still in its infancy, some broad categories of gestures have been identified by researchers. The most familiar are the so-called emblems or quotable gestures. These are conventional, culture-specific gestures that can be used as replacement for words, such as the hand wave used in western cultures for "hello" and "goodbye". A single emblematic gesture can have a very different significance in different cultural contexts, ranging from complimentary to highly offensive.^[45] For a list of emblematic gestures, see List of gestures. There are some universal gestures like the shoulder shrug.^[10]



Policeman directing traffic by gesture

Gestures can also be categorized as either speech independent or speech related. Speech-independent gestures are dependent upon culturally accepted interpretation and have a direct verbal translation.^{[34]:9} A wave or a peace sign are examples of speech-independent gestures. Speech-related gestures are used in parallel with verbal speech; this form of nonverbal communication is used to emphasize the message that is being communicated. Speech-related gestures are intended to provide supplemental information to a verbal message such as pointing to an object of discussion.

Gestures are not just for the audience but can also help the speaker elaborate their thoughts, and process their ideas more fluently.^[46] As an example: giving directions for a place and pointing directionally to remind oneself of the correct route. This is not only to help the listener, but also to help the speaker visualize the route as though they were moving through it.

Facial expressions, more than anything, serve as a practical means of communication. With all the various muscles that precisely control mouth, lips, eyes, nose, forehead, and jaw, human faces are estimated to be capable of more than ten thousand different expressions. This versatility makes non-verbals of the face

extremely efficient and honest, unless deliberately manipulated. In addition, many of these emotions, including happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, disgust, shame, anguish and interest are universally recognized.^[47]

Displays of emotions can generally be categorized into two groups: negative and positive. Negative emotions usually manifest as increased tension in various muscle groups: tightening of jaw muscles, furrowing of forehead, squinting eyes, or lip occlusion (when the lips seemingly disappear). In contrast, positive emotions are revealed by the loosening of the furrowed lines on the forehead, relaxation of the muscles around the mouth, and widening of the eye area. When individuals are truly relaxed and at ease, the head will also tilt to the side, exposing our most vulnerable area, the neck. This is a high-comfort display, often seen during courtship, that is nearly impossible to mimic when tense or suspicious.^[48]

Gestures can be subdivided into three groups:

Adapters

Some hand movements are not considered to be gestures. They consist of manipulations either of the person or some object (e.g. clothing, pencils, eyeglasses)—the kinds of scratching, fidgeting, rubbing, tapping, and touching that people often do with their hands. These behaviors can show that a person is experiencing anxiety or feeling of discomfort, typical when the individual is not the one in control of the conversation or situation and therefore expresses this uneasiness subconsciously. Such behaviors are referred to as adapters. They may not be perceived as meaningfully related to the speech in which they accompany, but may serve as the basis for dispositional inferences of the speaker's emotion (nervous, uncomfortable, bored.) These types of movements are believed to express the unconscious thoughts and feelings of a person, or those thoughts and emotions one is trying to consciously hide.

Symbolic

Other hand movements are gestures. They are movements with specific, conventionalized meanings called symbolic gestures. They are the exact opposite of adaptors, since their meanings are intended to be communicated and they have a specific meaning for the person who gives the gesture and the person to receive it. Familiar symbolic gestures include the "raised fist," "bye-bye," and "thumbs up." In contrast to adapters, symbolic gestures are used intentionally and serve a clear communicative function. Sign languages are highly developed systems of symbolic gesture. Some educators that work with deaf learners use a combination of cued speech and lip speaking and reading that helps deaf and hard hearing individuals (DHH) to code and decode words based on their phonetics.^[49] In addition to the supplementary aspect of the cues like location and movement, every culture has their own set of gestures, some of which are unique only to a specific culture. For example, the phonological and lexical repository of DHH individuals is highly dependent on their social background and richness of language.^[49] Very similar gestures can have very different meanings across cultures. Symbolic gestures are usually used in the absence of speech but can also accompany speech.

Conversational

The middle ground between adapters and symbolic gestures is occupied by conversational gestures. These gestures do not refer to actions or words but do accompany speech. Conversational gestures are hand movements that accompany speech and are related to the speech they accompany. Though they do

accompany speech, conversational gestures are not seen in the absence of speech and are only made by the person who is speaking.

There are a few types of conversational gestures, specifically motor and lexical movements. Motor movements are those which are rhythmical and repetitive, do not have to be accompanied by anything spoken due to their simple meaning, and the speaker's hand usually sticks to one position. When paired with verbal communication, they can be used to stress certain syllables. An example of this would be pointing someone in the direction of an individual and saying, "That way." In this case, the "That" in the sentence would be stressed by the movements. Lexical movements are more complex, not rhythmic, or repetitive, but rather lengthy and varied. An example of this would be something like giving elaborate directions to somewhere and pairing that with various hands movements to signal the various turns to take.

Distance

According to Edward T. Hall, the amount of space we maintain between ourselves and the persons with whom we are communicating shows the importance of the science of proxemics. In this process, it is seen how we feel towards the others at that particular time.^[50] Within American culture Hall defines four primary distance zones: (i) intimate (touching to eighteen inches [0–46 centimetres]) distance, (ii) personal (eighteen inches to four feet, [0.46–1.22 metres]) distance, (iii) social (four to twelve feet [1.22–3.66 metres]) distance, and (iv) public (more than twelve feet [3.66 metres]) distance. Intimate distance is considered appropriate for familiar relationships and indicates closeness and trust. Personal distance is still close but keeps another "at arm's length" and is considered the most comfortable distance for most of our interpersonal contact, while social distance is used for the kind of communication that occurs in business relationships and, sometimes, in the classroom. Public distance occurs in situations where two-way communication is not desirable or possible.^[50]

Proxemics plays a crucial role in getting to know someone.^[51] Imagine two individuals sitting at a small dinner table. One person, motivated by romantic interest, begins to lean in, lightly touching the other's arm and shifting their chair closer. They are operating within the intimate zone, expecting closeness. However, the other person, who does not share the same romantic feelings, perceives this behavior as a breach of social norms. They expected the interaction to remain within personal distance, a more appropriate zone for acquaintances or casual dates. As a result, they may respond by pulling away, crossing their arms, or showing visible discomfort signals of a desire to re-establish that personal boundary.

In addition, to social expectations, cultural can play a role in proxemics. People from different cultures have different comfort zones when it comes to personal space (Chen & Starosta, 2005)^[52]. In everyday conversations, people from places like North Africa, and parts of the Middle East usually feel fine standing closer to others. On the other hand, people from Japan and China often prefer more space between themselves and others. Not understanding these differences can make cross-cultural interactions feel awkward or uncomfortable.^[53] For example, someone from a culture that's used to standing close might keep moving forward if the other person keep stepping back. Meanwhile, someone who's used to more space might feel uneasy or confused if someone stands too close.

Eye contact

Eye contact is the instance when two people look at each other's eyes at the same time; it is the primary nonverbal way of indicating engagement, interest, attention and involvement. Nonverbal communication involves the conscious and unconscious processes of *encoding* and *decoding*. Encoding is defined as our ability to express emotions in a way that the receiver(s). Decoding is called "*nonverbal sensitivity*", defined as the ability to take this encoded emotion and interpret its meanings accurately to what the sender intended. Encoding is the act of generating information such as facial expressions, gestures, and postures. Some studies have demonstrated that people use their eyes to indicate interest. This includes frequently recognized actions of winking and movements of the eyebrows.^[54] Disinterest is highly noticeable when little or no eye contact is made in a social setting. When an individual is interested, however, the pupils will dilate.

According to Eckman, "Eye contact (also called mutual gaze) is another major channel of nonverbal communication. The duration of eye contact is its most meaningful aspect."^[55] Generally speaking, the longer there is established eye contact between two people, the greater the intimacy levels.^[6] Gaze comprises the actions of looking while talking and listening. The length of a gaze, the frequency of glances, patterns of fixation, pupil dilation, and blink rate are all important cues in nonverbal communication.^[56] According to Descroix et al., the context of conversations does not produce long blinks between the emitter and the recipient. "Liking generally increases as mutual gazing increases."^[6]

Along with the detection of disinterest, deceit can also be observed in a person. Hogan states "when someone is being deceptive their eyes tend to blink a lot more. Eyes act as leading indicator of truth or deception."^[6] Both nonverbal and verbal cues are useful when detecting deception. It is typical for people who are detecting lies to rely consistently on verbal cues but this can hinder how well they detect deception. Those who are lying and those who are telling the truth possess different forms of nonverbal and verbal cues. Understanding the cultural background of a person will influence how easily deception is detectable because nonverbal cues may differ depending on the culture. In addition to eye contact these nonverbal cues can consist of physiological aspects including pulse rate as well as levels of perspiration.^[21] In addition eye aversion can be predictive of deception. Eye aversion is the avoidance of eye contact. Eye contact and facial expressions provide important social and emotional information. Overall, as Pease states, "Give the amount of eye contact that makes everyone feel comfortable. Unless looking at others is a cultural no-no, lookers gain more credibility than non-lookers"^[10]



"THE TIMID PUPIL" J.-A. MESANGER, Paris (about 1800)

Information about the relationship and affect of these two skaters is communicated by their body posture, eye gaze and physical contact.

In concealing deception, nonverbal communication makes it easier to lie without being revealed. This is the conclusion of a study where people watched made-up interviews of persons accused of having stolen a wallet. The interviewees lied in about 50% of the cases. People had access to either written transcript of the interviews, or audio tape recordings, or video recordings. The more clues that were available to those watching, the larger was the trend that interviewees who actually lied were judged to be truthful. That is, people that are clever at lying can use tone of voice and facial expressions to give the impression that they are truthful.^[57] Contrary to popular belief, a liar does not always avoid eye contact. In an attempt to be more convincing, liars deliberately made more eye contact with interviewers than those that were telling the truth.^{[58][59]} However, there are many cited examples of cues to deceit, delivered via nonverbal (paraverbal and visual) communication channels, through which deceivers supposedly unwittingly provide clues to their concealed knowledge or actual opinions.^[60] Most studies examining the nonverbal cues to deceit rely upon human coding of video footage (c.f. Vrij, 2008^[61]), although a recent study also demonstrated bodily movement differences between truth-tellers and liars using an automated body motion capture system.^[62]

Scent

Olfactory communication is a channel of nonverbal communication referring to the various ways people and animals communicate and engage in social interaction through their sense of smell. Our human olfactory sense is one of the most phylogenetically primitive^[63] and emotionally intimate^[64] of the five senses; the sensation of smell is thought to be the most matured and developed human sense.

Human ancestors essentially depended on their sense of smell to alert themselves of danger such as poisonous food and to locate potent mating partners. Using the sense of smell as an instrument paved a way for smell to become a platform of nonverbal communication. Smell also has a significant influence on social interactions. Through their branch of olfaction research, the National Science Foundation recorded that over 70 percent of American adults believe a person's body odor has a significant effect on how interested they will be when conversing with people of a different sex.^[65] This process is possible with olfactory bulbs, the part of the brain that discriminates and enhances certain odors. Typically, women will prefer men whose natural odor is similar to their own, while heterosexual men are attracted to females with high estrogen levels and strong menstrual secretions.^[66] An entire industry has been developed to provide people with personal smell-masking products, such as perfume, cologne, deodorant, and scented lotions. When a person covers their natural body odor with a pleasant smell, they are communicating their desire to be attractive either emotionally, sexually, or romantically.^[65]



Sharing the sense of smell

Vocalics

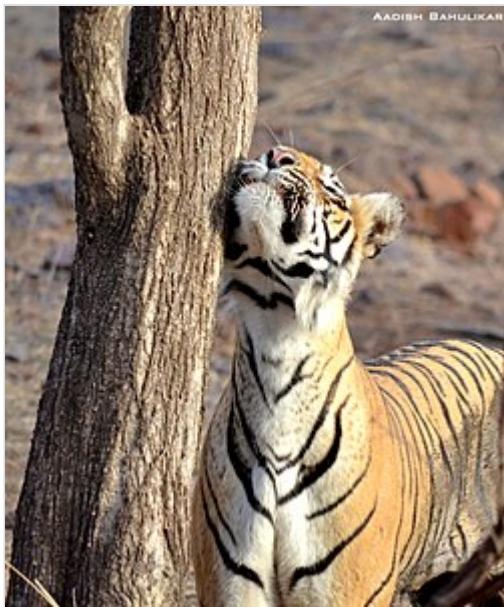
Nonverbal communication stands in contrast to communication through words, but includes other aspects of the speech signal. In particular, prosody, and in particular vocalics, plays a very important part in nonverbal communication. Prosodic properties such as tempo, volume, inflection, pauses, and pitch can combine to communicate emotion and attitude without using specific words. Vocalics also includes

emblems, or sounds with specific meanings, such as vocalizing "brrr" when cold, and mental-state indicators, like "hmm" when thinking about something, and other nonlexical but meaningful sounds.^{[67][68]} These sounds are often accompanied by other nonverbal cues.

Infants heavily rely on nonverbal vocalics to communicate their needs. As caregivers talk with their baby, the baby can pick up intonation as well start to mimic and use it themselves.^[67] As they go on, babies can pick up more and learn how to develop their own voices and vocalics.

Furthermore, in a study highlighted by Pearce and Conklin, they found that changing the vocalics of an audio recording of the same speech gave different results of liking. When the speaker gave his speech as more conversational instead of dynamic, he was deemed more trust worthy.^[69]

Vocalics can heavily influence communication through its many different cues.



A tigress rubbing her head on a tree

Online

Online nonverbal communication is nonverbal communication done through an online medium, such as text messaging and video calling. Whilst it may differ from face-to-face communication and cues, it retains similar importance when it comes to relaying information between individuals. Elements such as Emojis and GIFs provide crucial information of context or emotion to aid in understanding despite the physical barrier when text messaging.^[70] Within video, cues like gestures, facial expressions, and body language are observed to be displayed stronger than usual to properly articulate emotion and meaning.^[71] Nonverbal cues being used through online mediums have been observed enhancing social presence, or the showcasing of personal characteristics within an online community, by giving personal or emotional information and contributing to engagement in online environments.^[72]

Across cultures

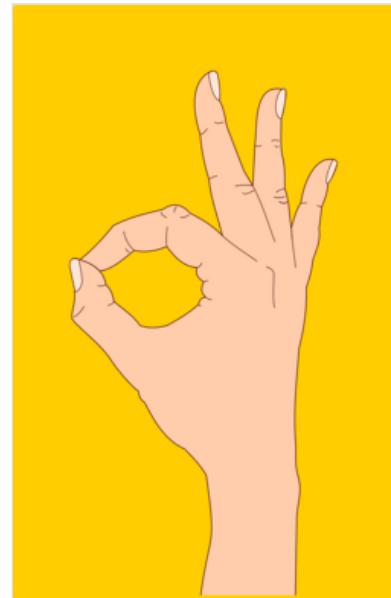
Overview

While not traditionally thought of as "talk," nonverbal communication has been found to contain highly precise and symbolic meanings, similar to verbal speech. However the meanings in nonverbal communication are conveyed through the use of gesture, posture changes, and timing.^[73] Nuances across different aspects of nonverbal communication can be found in cultures all around the world. These differences can often lead to miscommunication between people of different cultures, who usually do not mean to offend. Differences can be based in preferences for mode of communication, like the Chinese, who prefer silence over verbal communication.^{[74]:69} Differences can even be based on how cultures perceive the passage of time. Chronemics, how people handle time, can be categorized in two ways: polychronic which is when people do many activities at once and is common in Italy and Spain, or

monochronic which is when people do one thing at a time which is common in America.^{[75]:422} Because nonverbal communication can vary across many axes—gestures, gaze, clothing, posture, direction, or even environmental cues like lighting—there is a lot of room for cultural differences.^{[76]:8} In Japan, a country which prides itself on the best customer service, workers tend to use wide arm gestures to give clear directions to strangers—accompanied by the ever-present bow to indicate respect. One of the main factors that differentiates nonverbal communication in cultures is high and low-context. Context relates to certain events and the meaning that is ultimately derived from it.^[77] "High-context" cultures rely mostly on nonverbal cues and gestures, using elements such as the closeness of the kind of the relationships they have with others, strict social hierarchies and classes and deep cultural tradition and widely known beliefs and rules. In contrast, "low-context" cultures depend largely on words and verbal communication, where communications are direct and social hierarchies are way less tense and more loose.

Gestures

Gestures vary widely across cultures in how they are used and what they mean. A common example is pointing. In the United States, pointing is the gesture of a finger or hand to indicate or "come here please" when beckoning a dog. But pointing with one finger is also considered to be rude by some cultures. Those from Asian cultures typically use their entire hand to point to something.^[78] Other examples include, sticking one's tongue out. In Western countries, it can be seen as mockery, but in Polynesia it serves as a greeting and a sign of reverence.^{[75]:417} Clapping is a North American way of applauding, but in Spain is used to summon a waiter at a restaurant. Differences in nodding and shaking the head to indicate agreement and disagreement also exist. Northern Europeans nodding their heads up and down to say "yes", and shaking their head from side to side to say "no". But the Greeks have for at least three thousand years used the upward nod for disagreement and the downward nod for agreement.^{[75]:417} There are many ways of waving goodbye: Americans face the palm outward and move the hand side to side, Italians face the palm inward and move the fingers facing the other person, French and Germans face the hand horizontal and move the fingers toward the person leaving.^{[75]:417} Gestures are used in more informal settings and more often by children.^{[75]:417} People in the United States commonly use the "OK" hand gesture^[77] to give permission and allow an action. In Japan, however, the same sign means "money". It refers to "zero" or "nothing" in several cultures besides these two (Argentina, Belgium, French and the Portuguese). To Eastern European cultures that same "OK" sign is considered a vulgar swearing gesture. In certain Commonwealth cultures, the index and middle fingers only extended with the palm pointing outwards can be an insulting gesture, while in others it simply means the number "two" or the "V for Victory" sign, while the same sign with the palm pointing inwards means "peace" in some cultures.



This gesture is accepted by Dutch people as meaning "brilliant", but varies greatly in other cultures around the world, and is ubiquitous in emoji culture.

Speech-independent gestures

Speech-independent gestures are nonverbal cues that communicate a word or an expression, most commonly a dictionary definition.^[79] Though differences in this area exist between cultures, speech-independent gestures must have a common understanding among people affiliated with that culture or subculture.^[79] As most people use gestures to better clarify their speech, speech-independent gestures do not rely on speech for their meaning. Usually they transpire into a single gesture.^[79]

There are several such gestures that could be performed through the face. For example, a nose wrinkle could universally mean disapproval or disgust.^[79] Depending on the culture,^[80] a nod or head bobble can indicate understanding while the speaker is talking. Even though speech-independent gestures are independent of speech, it may still require context to fully interpret.^[79] Gestures with the middle finger may be used within different contexts, comical or derogatory: the only way to know is if one analyzes the other behaviors surrounding it and depending on who the speaker is and who the speaker is addressing.^[79]

Displays of emotion

Emotions are a key factor in nonverbal communication. Just as gestures and other hand movements vary across cultures, so does the way people display their emotions. For example, "In many cultures, such as the Arab and Iranian cultures, people express grief openly. They mourn out loud, while in Asian cultures, the general belief is that it is unacceptable to show emotion openly."^[81] For people in Westernized countries, laughter is a sign of amusement, but in some parts of Africa it is a sign of wonder or embarrassment.^{[75]:417} Emotional expression varies with culture.^[82] Native Americans tend to be more reserved and less expressive with emotions.^{[83]:44} Frequent touches are common for Chinese people; however, such actions like touching, patting, hugging or kissing in America are less frequent and not often publicly displayed.^{[74]:68} According to Rebecca Bernstein (from Point Park University) "*Winking is a facial expression particularly varied in meaning.*" According to Latin culture, a wink was a display or invitation of romantic pursuit. The Yoruba (Nigeria) have taught their children to follow certain nonverbal commands, such as winking, which tells them it is time to leave the room. To the Chinese it comes off as an offensive gesture.^[77]

Emotional expression as touch between different levels of relationships can vary upon culture as well. Within Japanese culture, touch is something that is uncommon when speaking to another person, particularly friends or acquaintances.^[84] By contrast, within South American and South European cultures, frequent contact between people, even if they have just met, is commonplace and showcases a differing emphasis on physical contact as hospitality. In the United States, there are varying degrees of people's perception of appropriate physical contact. Some will not want physical contact at all, even from acquaintances, but others may only want physical contact with those who they are close to, like greeting a longtime friend with a hug. This relates to Edward T. Hall's foundational models of cultures that are high-and low-contact when it comes to emotional expression through proxemics.^[85] This cultural difference in how emotions are expressed through nonverbal communication comes from perceptions and expectations, particularly in public. For example, within the Japanese culture, crowding is common and people who are close show it through physical proximity. By contrast, in Middle Eastern culture, space between individuals, is held more sacred and commonplace.

Nonverbal actions

According to Matsumoto and Juang, the nonverbal motions of different people indicate important channels of communication. Nonverbal actions should match and harmonize with the message being portrayed, otherwise confusion will occur.^[19] For instance, an individual would normally not be seen smiling and gesturing broadly when saying a sad message. The author states that nonverbal communication is very important to be aware of, especially if comparing gestures, gaze, and tone of voice amongst different cultures. As Latin American cultures embrace big speech gestures, Middle Eastern cultures are relatively more modest in public and are not expressive. Within cultures, different rules are made about staring or gazing. Women may especially avoid eye contact with men because it can be taken as a sign of sexual interest.^[78] In some cultures, gaze can be seen as a sign of respect. In Western culture, eye contact is interpreted as attentiveness and honesty. In Hispanic, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Native American cultures, eye contact is thought to be disrespectful or rude, and lack of eye contact does not mean that a person is not paying attention. Voice is a category that changes within cultures. Depending on whether or not the cultures is expressive or non-expressive, many variants of the voice can depict different reactions.^[86]

The acceptable physical distance is another major difference in the nonverbal communication between cultures. In Latin America and the Middle East the acceptable distance is much shorter than what most Europeans and Americans feel comfortable with. This is why an American or a European might wonder why the other person is invading their personal space by standing so close, while the other person might wonder why the American/European is standing so far from them.^[87] In addition, for Latin Americans, the French, Italians, and Arabs the distance between people is much closer than the distance for Americans; in general for these close distance groups, 1 foot of distance is for lovers, 1.5–4 feet of distance is for family and friends, and 4–12 feet is for strangers.^{[75]:421} In the opposite way, most Native Americans value distance to protect themselves.^{[83]:43}

Children's learning in indigenous American communities

Nonverbal communication is commonly used to facilitate learning in indigenous American communities. Nonverbal communication is pivotal for collaborative participation in shared activities, as children from indigenous American communities will learn how to interact using nonverbal communication by intently observing adults.^[73] Nonverbal communication allows for continuous keen observation and signals to the learner when participation is needed. Culture plays an important role in nonverbal communication, and it is one aspect that helps to influence how learning activities are organized. In many Indigenous American Communities, for example, there is often an emphasis on nonverbal communication, which acts as a valued means by which children learn.^[88] In a study on Children from both US Mexican (with presumed indigenous backgrounds) and European American heritages who watched a video of children working together without speaking found that the Mexican-heritage children were far more likely to describe the children's actions as collaborative, saying that the children in the video were "talking with their hands and with their eyes."^[89]

A key characteristic of this type of nonverbal learning is that children have the opportunity to observe and interact with all parts of an activity.^[90] Many Indigenous American children are in close contact with adults and other children who are performing the activities that they will eventually master. Objects and materials become familiar to the child as the activities are a normal part of everyday life. Learning is done in an extremely contextualized environment rather than one specifically tailored to be instructional.^[90] For example, the direct involvement that Mazahua children take in the marketplace is

used as a type of interactional organization for learning without explicit verbal instruction. Children learn how to run a market stall, take part in caregiving, and also learn other basic responsibilities through non-structured activities, cooperating voluntarily within a motivational context to participate. Not explicitly instructing or guiding the children teaches them how to integrate into small coordinated groups to solve a problem through consensus and shared space.^[90] These Mazahua separate-but-together practices have shown that participation in everyday interaction and later learning activities establishes enculturation that is rooted in nonverbal social experience.^[90] As the children participate in everyday interactions, they are simultaneously learning the cultural meanings behind these interactions. Children's experience with nonverbally organized social interaction helps constitute the process of enculturation.^[90]

In some Indigenous communities of the Americas, children reported one of their main reasons for working in their home was to build unity within the family, the same way they desire to build solidarity within their own communities.^[91] Most indigenous children learn the importance of putting in this work in the form of nonverbal communication. Evidence of this can be observed in a case study where children are guided through the task of folding a paper figure by observing the posture and gaze of those who guide them through it.^[92] This is projected onto homes and communities, as children wait for certain cues from others to initiative cooperate and collaborate.

One aspect of nonverbal communication that aids in conveying these precise and symbolic meanings is "context-embeddedness." The idea that many children in Indigenous American Communities are closely involved in community endeavors, both spatially and relationally, which help to promote nonverbal communication, given that words are not always necessary. When children are closely related to the context of the endeavor as active participants, coordination is based on a shared reference, which helps to allow, maintain, and promote nonverbal communication.^[93] The idea of "context-embeddedness" allows nonverbal communication to be a means of learning within Native American Alaskan Athabaskans and Cherokee communities. By observing various family and community social interactions, social engagement is dominated through nonverbal communication. For example, when children elicit thoughts or words verbally to their elders, they are expected to structure their speech carefully. This demonstrates cultural humility and respect as excessive acts of speech when conversational genre shifts reveal weakness and disrespect. This careful self-censorship exemplifies traditional social interaction of Athapaskin and Cherokee Native Americans who are mostly dependent on nonverbal communication.^[94]

Nonverbal cues are used by most children in the Warm Springs Indian Reservation community within the parameters of their academic learning environments. This includes referencing Native American religion through stylized hand gestures in colloquial communication, verbal and nonverbal emotional self-containment, and less movement of the lower face to structure attention on the eyes during face-to-face engagement. Therefore, children's approach to social situations within a reservation classroom, for example, may act as a barrier to a predominantly verbal learning environment. Most Warm Springs children benefit from a learning model that suits a nonverbal communicative structure of collaboration, traditional gesture, observational learning and shared references.^[95]

While nonverbal communication is more prevalent in Indigenous American Communities, verbal communication is also used. Preferably, verbal communication does not substitute one's involvement in an activity, but instead acts as additional guidance or support towards the completion of an activity.^[73]

Disadvantages of purely verbal communication across cultures

As much of human communication is nonverbal, learning a language without learning its corresponding pragmatics can lead to miscommunication.^[96] "This can lead to intercultural conflict (according to Marianna Pogosyan Ph.D.), misunderstandings and ambiguities in communication, despite language fluency."^[96] Nonverbal communication makes the difference between bringing cultures together in understanding one another, appearing authentic. Or it can push people farther away due to misunderstandings in how different groups see certain nonverbal cues or gestures. From birth, children in various cultures are taught the gestures and cues their culture defines as universal which is not the case for others, but some movements are universal.^[97] Evidence suggests that smiling when happy, and frowning in response to something upsetting or bad, are culturally universal.^[97]

Biology and physical appearance

"In our study of nonverbal communications, the limbic brain is where the action is...because it is the part of the brain that reacts to the world around us reflexively and instantaneously, in real time, and without thought." Certain physical reactions triggered by the limbic system are biological survival responses, are involuntary, and "honest".^[48]

Some cues are culturally learned and become habitual, others are hereditary. These nature versus nurture questions are still debated.^[10]

Along with gestures, physical traits can also convey certain messages in nonverbal communication, for instance, eye color, hair color and height. Research into height has generally found that taller people are perceived as being more impressive. Melamed and Bozionelos (1992) studied a sample of managers in the United Kingdom and found that height was a key factor in who was promoted. Height can have benefits and drawbacks too: "While tall people often command more respect than short people, height can also be detrimental to some aspects of one-to-one communication, for instance, where you need to 'talk on the same level' or have an 'eye-to-eye' discussion with another person and do not want to be perceived as too big for your boots."^[10]

Chronemics

Chronemics is the way time is used. Our use of time can communicate and send messages, nonverbally. The way we use time and give or do not give our time to others can communicate different messages. Chronemics can send messages to others about what we value and also send messages about power. "When you go to see someone who is in a position of power over you, such as your supervisor, it is not uncommon to be kept waiting. However, you would probably consider it bad form to make a more powerful person wait for you. Indeed, the rule seems to be that the time of powerful people is more valuable than the time of less powerful people."^[98]

Essential components

Nonverbal communication plays a crucial role in effectively transmitting messages. Beginning from birth and persisting throughout one's life, it undergoes a developmental progression encompassing three phases, ranging from initial dyadic exchanges to the integration of both verbal and nonverbal cues. With

diverse functions, nonverbal communication acts as a substitute for verbal interaction in situations where verbalization is unnecessary or impossible. It adds clarity to communication by unveiling emotional states and articulating specific feelings. This is achieved through various nonverbal elements such as emblems, illustrators, regulators, adaptors, and vocalics. This system is shaped by component including paralinguistics, kinesics, tactile communication, and proxemics, influencing social, academic, and professional contexts.^[99] Despite frequently being overlooked, nonverbal cues possess the potential to convey up to 80% of a message, especially holding significance in interactions involving prelinguistic infants and individuals who have severe disabilities.^[99] The cultural nuances of these cues underscore the necessity for interpretation, emphasizing the contextual, signaling, and interpretative dimensions.

Movement and body position

Kinesics

Kinesics is defined as movements, more specifically the study of our movements involving our hands, body, and face. The term was coined by Ray Birdwhistell, who considered the term body language inaccurate and instead opted to explain it as nonverbal behaviors stemming from body movement. Research around this behavior provides some examples, such as someone casually smiling and leaning forward, as well as maintaining eye contact to radiate a non-dominating and intimate demeanor. In contrast, someone leaning back, a stoic facial expression, and no to little eye contact could emit an unfriendly and dominating demeanor.^[100]

Additional research expresses that eye contact is an important part of nonverbal communication involved in kinesics, as longer and appropriate levels of eye contact give an individual credibility. The opposite is said for those who do not maintain eye contact, as they are likely to be deemed distrustful. More eye contact was also found to be related to higher levels of likability and believability from those people interacted with. A real-life example of this is through service workers, in a study it was found that those workers who welcomed customers with smiles seemed like warmer individuals than those who did not smile. Customers reported that those without smiles and open body movements, such as waving or handshaking, were lacking warmth and deemed less friendly.^[100]

Haptics: touching in communication

Haptics is the study of touching as nonverbal communication, and haptic communication refers to how people and other animals communicate via touching.

Touches among humans that can be defined as communication include handshakes, holding hands, kissing (cheek, lips, hand), back slapping, high fives, a pat on the shoulder, and brushing an arm. Touching of oneself may include licking, picking, holding, and scratching.^{[34]:9} These behaviors are referred to as "adapters" or "tells" and may send messages that reveal the intentions or feelings of a communicator and a listener. The meaning conveyed from touch is highly dependent upon the culture, the context of the situation, the relationship between communicators, and the manner of touch.^{[34]:10}

Touch is an extremely important sense for humans; as well as providing information about surfaces and textures it is a component of nonverbal communication in interpersonal relationships, and vital in conveying physical intimacy. It can be both sexual (such as kissing) and platonic (such as hugging or

tickling).

Touch is the earliest sense to develop in the fetus. Human babies have been observed to have enormous difficulty surviving if they do not possess a sense of touch, even if they retain sight and hearing.^[101] Babies who can perceive through touch, even without sight and hearing, tend to fare much better.

In chimpanzees, the sense of touch is highly developed. As newborns, they see and hear poorly but cling strongly to their mothers. Harry Harlow conducted a controversial study involving rhesus monkeys and observed that monkeys reared with a "terry cloth mother," a wire feeding apparatus wrapped in soft terry cloth that provided a level of tactile stimulation and comfort, the monkey who had the real parent were considerably more emotionally stable as adults than those with a mere wire mother (Harlow, 1958).

Touching is treated differently from one country to another and socially acceptable levels of touching vary from one culture to another (Remland, 2009). In Thai culture, for example, touching someone's head may be thought rude.

Remland and Jones (1995) studied groups of people communicating and found that touching was rare among the English (8%), the French (5%) and the Dutch (4%) compared to Italians (14%) and Greeks (12.5%).^[102] Striking, pushing, pulling, pinching, kicking, strangling and hand-to-hand fighting are forms of touch in the context of physical abuse. In the *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, McDaniel et al. assessed touch as a form of communication among people from different nations under the lens of culture, relationships, and a number of body areas touched. Latin Americans are known to have a high degree of tactile activity in contrast to Asians who are considered a no-contact culture as they often steer away from public display of affection (PDA).

Proxemics

Proxemics is the use of space as a form of communication, and includes how far or near participants position themselves from each other. It can be influenced by culture, race/ethnicity, gender, and age. Edward T. Hall invented the term when he realized that culture influences how people use space in communication while working with diplomats, and published his findings on proxemics in 1959 as *The Silent Language*.^[50] Proxemics also play a big role in business as research shows that gender and invasion of customers' privacy without previous ties negatively affect the outcome of deals.^[103] Besides, in high contact cultures, people are generally more comfortable in closer proximity, whereas individuals in low contact cultures feel more comfortable with a greater amount of personal space. Hall concluded that proxemics could cause misunderstandings between cultures as cultures use of proxemics varies and what is customary in one culture may range from being confusing to being offensive to members of a different culture.^[104]



A high five is an example of communicative touch.

According to Hall, the amount of space we maintain between ourselves and the persons we communicate with shows the importance of the science of proxemics. In this process, it is seen how we feel towards others at that particular time. This resonates with proxemics and viewing it through the cultural lens, people use their space differently because of the meaning behind it as in a spectrum of cultures, ideologies differ.^[105] Within American culture, Hall defines four primary distance zones: (i) intimate (touching to eighteen inches) distance, (ii) personal (eighteen inches to four feet) distance, (iii) social (four to twelve feet) distance, and (iv) public (more than twelve feet) distance.

Intimate space is any distance less than 18 inches, and is most commonly used by individuals when they are engaging with someone with whom they feel very comfortable, such as a spouse, partner, friend, child, or parent. Personal space is a distance of 18 inches to 4 feet and is usually used when individuals are interacting with friends. Social distance is the most common type of proximity as it is used when communicating with colleagues, classmates, acquaintances, or strangers. Public distance creates the greatest gap between the individual and the audience and is categorized as distances greater than 12 feet in distance and is often used for speeches, lectures, or formal occasions.^[106]

In relation to verbal communication

Differentiating which parts of a face-to-face conversation are communicated verbally versus non-verbally is not straightforward.^[107] Other studies done on the same subject have concluded that in more relaxed and natural settings of communication, verbal and non-verbal signals and cues can contribute in surprisingly similar ways.^[108]

Argyle,^[29] using video tapes shown to the subjects, analysed the communication of submissive/dominant attitude, (high and low context, high context resorting to more strict social classes and take a more short and quick response route to portray dominance, low context being the opposite by taking time to explain everything and putting a lot of importance on communication and building trust and respect with others in a submissive and relaxed manner),^[109] and found that non-verbal cues had 4.3 times the effect of verbal cues. The most important effect was that body posture communicated superior status (specific to culture and context said person grew up in) in a very efficient way.

On the other hand, a study by Hsee et al.^[110] had subjects judge a person on the happy/sad dimension and found that words spoken with minimal variation in intonation had an impact about 4 times larger than face expressions seen in a film without sound. Therefore, when considering certain non-verbal mannerisms such as facial expressions and physical cues, they can conflict in meaning when compared to spoken language and emotions. Different setups and scenarios would yield different responses and meanings when using both types of communication. In other ways they can complement each other, provided they are used together wisely during a conversation.^[29]

Mindfulness is one technique that can help improve one's awareness of nonverbal communication. Those mindful and present to how their body moves can learn to better control their external nonverbal communication, which results in more effective communication.^[111]

Interaction

During communication, nonverbal messages can interact with verbal messages in six ways: repeating, conflicting, complementing, substituting, regulating and accenting/moderating.

Conflicting

Conflicting verbal and nonverbal messages within the same interaction can sometimes send opposing or conflicting messages. A person verbally expressing a statement of truth while simultaneously fidgeting or avoiding eye contact may convey a mixed message to the receiver in the interaction. Conflicting messages may occur for a variety of reasons often stemming from feelings of uncertainty, ambivalence, or frustration. When mixed messages occur, nonverbal communication becomes the primary tool people use to attain additional information to clarify the situation; great attention is placed on bodily movements and positioning when people perceive mixed messages during interactions. Definitions of nonverbal communication creates a limited picture in our minds but there are ways to create a clearer one. There are different dimensions of verbal and nonverbal communication that have been discovered. They are (1) structure versus non-structure, (2) linguistic versus non-linguistic, (3) continuous versus discontinuous, (4) learned versus innate, and (5) left versus right hemispheric processing.^{[112]:7}

Complementing

Accurate interpretation of messages is made easier when nonverbal and verbal communication complement each other. Nonverbal cues can be used to elaborate on verbal messages to reinforce the information sent when trying to achieve communicative goals; messages have been shown to be remembered better when nonverbal signals affirm the verbal exchange.^{[34]:14}

Substituting

Nonverbal behavior is sometimes used as the sole channel for communication of a message. People learn to identify facial expressions, body movements, and body positioning as corresponding with specific feelings and intentions. Nonverbal signals can be used without verbal communication to convey messages; when nonverbal behavior does not effectively communicate a message, verbal methods are used to enhance understanding.^{[34]:16}

Structure versus non-structure

Verbal communication is a highly structured form of communication with set rules of grammar. The rules of verbal communication help to understand and make sense of what other people are saying. For example, foreigners learning a new language can have a hard time making themselves understood. On the other hand, nonverbal communication has no formal structure when it comes to communicating. Nonverbal communication occurs without even thinking about it. The same behavior can mean different things, such as crying of sadness or of joy. Therefore, these cues need to be interpreted carefully to get their correct meaning.^{[112]:7-8}

Linguistic versus non-linguistic

There are only a few assigned symbols in the system of nonverbal communication. Nodding the head is one symbol that indicates agreement in some cultures, but in others, it means disagreement. On the other hand, verbal communication has a system of symbols that have specific meanings to them.^{[112]:8}

Continuous and discontinuous

Verbal communication is based on discontinuous units whereas nonverbal communication is continuous. Communicating nonverbally cannot be stopped unless one would leave the room, but even then, the intrapersonal processes still take place (individuals communicating with themselves). Without the presence of someone else, the body still manages to undergo nonverbal communication. For example, there are no other words being spoken after a heated debate, but there are still angry faces and cold stares being distributed. This is an example of how nonverbal communication is continuous.[\[112\]:8](#)

Learned versus innate

Learned non-verbal cues require a community or culture for their reinforcement. For example, table manners are not innate capabilities upon birth. Dress code is a non-verbal cue that must be established by society. Hand symbols, whose interpretation can vary from culture to culture, are not innate nonverbal cues. Learned cues must be gradually reinforced by admonition or positive feedback.

Innate non-verbal cues are "built-in" features of human behavior. Generally, these innate cues are universally prevalent and regardless of culture. For example, smiling, crying, and laughing do not require teaching. Similarly, some body positions, such as the fetal position, are universally associated with weakness. Due to their universality, the ability to comprehend these cues is not limited to individual cultures.[\[112\]:9](#)

Left versus right-hemispheric processing

This type of processing involves the neurophysiological approach to nonverbal communication. It explains that the right hemisphere processes nonverbal stimuli such as those involving spatial, pictorial, and gestalt tasks while the left hemisphere involves the verbal stimuli involving analytical and reasoning tasks. It is possible that individuals may not use the correct hemisphere at appropriate times when it comes to interpreting a message or meaning.[\[112\]:9](#)

Clinical studies

Principles

From 1977 to 2004, the influence of disease and drugs on receptivity of nonverbal communication was studied by teams at three separate medical schools using a similar paradigm.[\[113\]](#) Researchers at the University of Pittsburgh, Yale University and Ohio State University had subjects observe gamblers at a slot machine awaiting payoffs. The amount of this payoff was read by nonverbal transmission prior to reinforcement. This technique was developed by and the studies directed by psychologist Robert E. Miller and psychiatrist A. James Giannini. These groups reported diminished receptive ability in heroin addicts[\[114\]](#) and phencyclidine abusers,[\[115\]](#) contrasted with increased receptivity in cocaine addicts. Men with major depression[\[116\]](#) manifested significantly decreased ability to read nonverbal cues when compared with euthymic men.

In some subjects tested for ability to read nonverbal cues, intuitive paradigms were apparently employed while in others a cause and effect approach was used.[\[117\]](#) Subjects in the former group answered quickly and before reinforcement occurred. They could not give a rationale for their particular responses. Subjects

in the latter category delayed their response and could offer reasons for their choice. The level of accuracy between the two groups did not vary nor did handedness.^[118]

Obese women^[119] and women with premenstrual syndrome^[120] were found to also possess diminished abilities to read these cues. In contradistinction, men with bipolar disorder possessed increased abilities.^[121] A woman with total paralysis of the nerves of facial expression was found unable to transmit or receive any nonverbal facial cues whatsoever.^[122] Because of the changes in levels of accuracy on the levels of nonverbal receptivity, the members of the research team hypothesized a level of involvement of neurotransmitters when interpreting nonverbal cues. Users of certain drugs had an enhanced ability while users of other drugs had a diminished ability. Based on the available data, however, the primary cause and primary effect could not be sorted out on the basis of the paradigm employed. The authors also hypothesized that it is possible that, for example, cocaine abusers do so because their pre-existing abilities helped them to conceal their drug abuse.^{[123][124]}

Child comprehension

An increased emphasis on gestures exists when intonations or facial expression are used. "Speakers often anticipate how recipients will interpret their utterances. If they wish some other, less obvious interpretation, they may "mark" their utterance (e.g. with special intonations or facial expressions)."^[125] This specific emphasis known as 'marking' can be spotted as a learned form of non-verbal communication in toddlers. A groundbreaking study from Carpenter et al. in the *Journal of Child Language* has concluded that the act of marking a gesture is recognized by three-year-olds but not by two-year-olds.

In the study, two and three-year-old toddlers were tested on their recognition of markedness within gestures. The experiment was conducted in a room with an examiner and the test subjects, which for the first study were three-year-olds. The examiner sat across from each child individually, and allowed them to play with various objects including a purse with a sponge in it and a box with a sponge in it. After allowing the child to play with the objects for three minutes, the examiner told the child it was time to clean up and motioned by pointing to the objects. They measured the responses of the children by first pointing and not marking the gesture, to see the child's reaction to the request and if they reached for the objects to clean them up. After observing the child's response, the examiner then asked and pointed again, marking the gesture with facial expression, as to lead the child to believe the objects were supposed to be cleaned up. The results showed that three-year-old children were able to recognize the markedness, by responding to the gesture and cleaning the objects up as opposed to when the gesture was presented without being marked.

In the second study in which the same experiment was performed on two-year-olds, the results were different. For the most part, the children did not recognize the difference between the marked and unmarked gesture by not responding more prevalently to the marked gesture, unlike the results of the three-year-olds. This shows that this sort of nonverbal communication is learned at a young age, and is better recognized in three-year-old children than two-year-old children, making it easier for us to interpret that the ability to recognize markedness is learned in the early stages of development, somewhere between three and four years of age.

Boone and Cunningham conducted a study^[126] to determine at which age children begin to recognize emotional meaning (happiness, sadness, anger and fear) in expressive body movements. The study included 29 adults and 79 children divided into age groups of four-, five- and eight-year-olds. The children were shown two clips simultaneously and were asked to point to the one that was expressing the

target emotion. The results of the study revealed that of the four emotions being tested the 4-year-olds were only able to correctly identify sadness at a rate that was better than chance. The 5-year-olds performed better and were able to identify happiness, sadness and fear at better than chance levels. The 8-year-olds and adults could correctly identify all four emotions and there was very little difference between the scores of the two groups. Between the ages of 4 and 8, nonverbal communication and decoding skills improve dramatically.

A study was conducted to determine how nonverbal communication and play amongst children, particularly autistic children, affects language development.^[127] Mundy et. al. observed communication amongst groups of autistic children divided by diagnosed mental age from a sample of 16 children. The study had observations of how the children played between each other using an assortment of items provided, such as a spoon, doll, toy car, toy telephone, sponge, and more. Play development was measured using a checklist of observed “functional acts”, or using the toys for functional purposes like pushing a toy car, brushing hair, or feeding a doll with a spoon, and “symbolic acts”, or using objects and toys for different purposes aside from their expressed usage, such as using a sponge as play food or using a doll to “drive” the toy car. Language development was measured using the Reynell Developmental Language Scales to measure the extent of how the children interact between “social partners”, or members of the same studied play group, and the advancement of responding to interaction, initiating interaction, responding to attention being pointed to another object, initiating attention towards another object, responding to behavior regulation, and initiating behavior regulation.

The study concluded that there was little to no correlation between play and nonverbal communication, concluding in possible further psychological factors such as metacognitive awareness of pretending or delayed imitation within play being possible explanations for play development.^[127] Little significance with the results of language acquisition was found, opening up discussion and further research due to outliers within the results.

Comprehension of nonverbal facial cues

A byproduct of the work of the Pittsburgh/Yale/Ohio State team was an investigation of the role of nonverbal facial cues in heterosexual nondate rape. Males who were serial rapists of adult women were studied for nonverbal receptive abilities. Their scores were the highest of any subgroup.^[128] Rape victims were next tested. It was reported that women who had been raped on at least two occasions by different perpetrators had a highly significant impairment in their abilities to read these cues in either male or female senders.^[129] These results were troubling, indicating a predator-prey model. The authors did note that whatever the nature of these preliminary findings the responsibility of the rapist was in no manner or level diminished.

The final target of study for this group was the medical students they taught. Medical students at Ohio State University, Ohio University and Northeast Ohio Medical College were invited to serve as subjects. Students indicating a preference for the specialties of family practice, psychiatry, pediatrics and obstetrics-gynecology achieved significantly higher levels of accuracy than those students who planned to train as surgeons, radiologists, or pathologists. Internal medicine and plastic surgery candidates scored at levels near the mean.^[130]

See also

Theories and fields of study

- [Animal communication](#)
- [Behavioral communication](#)
- [Doctrine of mental reservation](#)
- [Regulatory focus theory](#)
- [Semiotics](#)
- [Unconscious communication](#)

Specific kinds of nonverbal cues

- [Chinese number gestures](#)
- [Microexpression](#)
- [Silent service code](#)

Notable people

- [Albert Mehrabian](#)
- [Desmond Morris](#)
- [Joe Navarro](#)

Communication skills or deficiencies

- [People skills](#)
- [Dyssemia](#)
- [Forgetfulness](#)
- [Intercultural competence](#)
- [Nonverbal autism](#)
- [Nunchi](#)

Other

- [Asemic writing](#)
- [Augmentative and alternative communication](#)
- [Ishin-denshin](#)
- [Meta-communication](#)
- [Neuro-linguistic programming](#)
- [Nonverbal influence](#)
- [Statement analysis](#)
- [Subtext](#)
- [Twilight language](#)
- [Unsaid](#)

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External links

- "Credibility, Respect, and Power: Sending the Right Nonverbal Signals" by Debra Stein (<http://web.archive.org/web/20100523060356/http://www.gcastrategies.com/booksandarticles/62/credibility-respect-and-power-sending-the-right-nonverbal-signals/>)
- Online Nonverbal Library (<http://www.linguaggiodelcorpo.it/biblio>) with more than 500 free available articles on this topic.
- *Center for Nonverbal Studies* (<http://center-for-nonverbal-studies.org/htdocs/1501.html>) by David B. Givens
- "Psychology Today Nonverbal Communication Blog posts" (<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/spycatcher>) by Joe Navarro
- "NVC Portal – A useful portal providing information on Nonverbal Communication" (<https://sites.google.com/site/nonverbalcommunicationportal/home>) Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20100523105554/http://sites.google.com/site/nonverbalcommunicationportal/home>) 23 May 2010 at the Wayback Machine
- "Breaking Trail Online: Using Body Language When Traveling" (<http://brktrail.com/bodylanguage/>) by Hank Martin
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Autism

Autism, also known as **autism spectrum disorder** (ASD),^[a] is a condition characterized by differences or difficulties in social communication and interaction, a need or strong preference for predictability and routine, sensory processing differences, focused interests, and repetitive behaviors.^[4] Characteristics of autism are present from early childhood and the condition typically persists throughout life.^{[5][6]} Autism is classified as a neurodevelopmental disorder,^[7] and a formal diagnosis requires professional assessment that these characteristics cause significant challenges in daily life beyond what would be expected given a person's age and social environment.^{[8][9][10][11]} Because autism is a spectrum disorder, presentations vary and support needs range from minimal to the person being non-speaking or needing 24-hour care.^{[12][8][9][13]}

Autism diagnoses have risen since the 1990s, largely because of broader diagnostic criteria, greater awareness, and wider access to assessment.^[2] Changing social demands may also play a role.^{[14][15]} The World Health Organization estimates that about 1 in 100 children were diagnosed between 2012 and 2021, noting an increasing trend.^{[b][2][3]} Surveillance studies suggest a similar share of the adult population would meet diagnostic criteria if formally assessed.^[16] Autism is highly heritable and involves many genes, while environmental factors appear to play a smaller,^[17] mainly prenatal role.^{[18][19][20]} Boys are diagnosed several times more often than girls,^{[2][21]} and conditions such as anxiety, depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), epilepsy, and intellectual disability are more common among autistic people.^{[22][23][24]}

There is no cure for autism.^[25] Several autism therapies aim to improve self-care, social, and language skills.^[26] Reducing environmental and social barriers helps autistic people participate more fully in education, employment, and other aspects of

Autism	
Other names	Autism spectrum disorder, ^[a] autism spectrum condition
Formerly: Kanner syndrome/autistic disorder/childhood autism, Asperger syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorder, pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified	
 	
 	
Autism has many presentations around the world.	
From top left: an autistic toddler stacking cans; an autistic figure skater competitor; a child using an abacus at school run by Autism Somalia Center; banker Donald Triplett, the first person to be diagnosed with autism.	
Specialty	Psychiatry (neuropsychiatry), clinical psychology, pediatrics, occupational medicine
Symptoms	Difficulties in <u>social interaction</u> , verbal and <u>nonverbal communication</u> ; inflexible routines; <u>focused</u>

life.^{[27][28][29]} No medication addresses the core features of autism, but some are used to help manage commonly co-occurring conditions, such as anxiety, depression, irritability, ADHD, and epilepsy.^{[30][31]}

Autistic people are found in every demographic group and, with appropriate supports that promote independence and self-determination, can participate fully in their communities and lead meaningful, productive lives.^{[32][33]} The idea of autism as a disorder has been challenged by the neurodiversity framework, which frames autistic traits as a healthy variation of the human condition.^[34] This perspective, promoted by the autism rights movement, has attracted increasing research attention,^[35] but remains a subject of debate and controversy among autistic people, advocacy groups, healthcare providers, and charities.^{[36][37]}

Signs and characteristics

Autism is primarily characterized by differences and difficulties in social interaction and communication, alongside restricted or repetitive patterns of interests, activities, or behaviors (stimming), and, in many cases, distinctive reactions to sensory input. The specific presentation varies widely.^{[38][39]} Clinicians often consider assessment for autism when these characteristics are present, especially if they are associated with difficulty obtaining or sustaining employment or education, difficulty initiating or maintaining social relationships, involvement with mental health or learning disability services, or a history of neurodevelopmental conditions (including learning disabilities and ADHD) or mental health conditions.^{[40][41]} In most cases, signs of autism are first observable in infancy or early childhood and remain throughout life.^[42] Autistic people may be significantly disabled in some respects, but average—or, in some cases, superior—in others.^{[43][44][45]}

Social and communication skills

Autistic people may have differences in social communication and interaction, which can lead to challenges in environments structured around non-

interests; repetitive body movements; unusual sensory responses

Complications

Social isolation, educational and employment problems, anxiety, stress, bullying, depression, self-harm, suicidality

Onset

Early childhood

Duration

Lifelong

Causes

Multifactorial, with many uncertain factors

Risk factors

Family history, certain genetic conditions, having older parents, certain prescribed drugs, perinatal and neonatal health issues

Diagnostic method

Based on a combination of clinical observation of behavior and development and comprehensive diagnostic testing completed by a team of qualified professionals. For adults, the use of a patient's written and oral history of autistic traits becomes more important

Differential diagnosis

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, intellectual disability, language disorders, social (pragmatic) communication disorder, selective mutism, stereotypic movement disorder, Rett syndrome, anxiety disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, schizophrenia, personality disorders^[1]

Management

Applied behavior analysis, cognitive behavioral therapy, occupational therapy, speech-language pathology

Frequency

One in 100 people (1%) worldwide^{[2][3]}

autistic norms. Current diagnostic criteria for autism require difficulties across three social domains: social-emotional reciprocity, nonverbal communication, and developing and maintaining relationships.^[1]

Social-emotional reciprocity

Common early signs of autism include little or no babbling in infancy.^[38] Difficulties may also be apparent in traditional forms of reciprocal social interaction, such as games like peek-a-boo^[38] or pat-a-cake,^[46] as well as in shared attention to objects of interest.^[38] Historically, autistic children were said to be delayed in developing a theory of mind, and the empathizing–systemizing theory proposed that while autistic people may have compassion (affective empathy) for others with similar autistic traits, they often have limited, though not necessarily absent, cognitive empathy.^[47] This may present as social naïvety,^[48] lower-than-average intuitive perception of the meaning or utility of body language, social reciprocity,^[49] or social expectations, including the habitus, social cues, and certain aspects of sarcasm,^[50] which to some degree may be influenced by co-occurring alexithymia.^[51]

Recent research has increasingly questioned these earlier interpretations,^[52] as the double empathy problem theory (2012) proposes that misunderstandings arise mutually between autistic and non-autistic people, rather than solely from autistic deficits in empathy or social cognition.^{[53][54]} This perspective has contributed to a growing recognition that autistic behavior and communication may reflect different, rather than deficient, social behavior and communication styles.^{[52][54]} Autistic interests and conversational styles are often characterized by a strong focus on specific topics, a phenomenon known as monotropism.^{[55][56]}

Nonverbal communication

Autistic people often display atypical behaviors or differences in nonverbal communication. Some may make infrequent eye contact, even when called by name, or avoid it altogether because they find it uncomfortable, distracting, or overstimulating.^[57] They may recognize fewer emotions or interpret facial expressions differently, and may not respond with expressions expected by their non-autistic peers.^{[58][59]} They can also have difficulty inferring social context or subtext in conversation or text, resulting in different interpretations of meaning.^[60] Speech characteristics such as volume, rhythm, and intonation (prosody) can vary,^[61] and atypical prosody is estimated to occur in at least half of autistic children.^[61]

Developing and sustaining relationships

Signs of autism in childhood include less apparent interest in other children or caregivers, possibly with more interest in objects.^[38] Behaviors that may appear as indifference to non-autistic people often reflect autistic differences in recognizing others' personalities, perspectives, and interests.^[60] Most research has focused on interpersonal relationship difficulties between autistic and non-autistic people and on teaching social skills to address these gaps. But newer studies indicate that autistic people often form satisfying relationships with other autistic people, which can enhance quality of life.^[62]

Children on the autism spectrum are more likely than their non-autistic peers to be involved in bullying, most often as victims.^[63] Among autistic people who seek friendships, reduced friendship quantity and quality are often associated with increased loneliness.^[64] Autistic people also face greater challenges in developing romantic relationships than non-autistic people.^[65]

Over time, many autistic people learn to observe and form models of social patterns, and develop coping strategies, such as "masking".^[66] Masking is associated with poorer mental health outcomes as well as delayed diagnosis, which can limit access to appropriate supports.^[66]

Restricted and repetitive behaviors

The second core feature of autism is a pattern of restricted and repetitive behaviors, activities, and interests. To be diagnosed with autism under the DSM-5-TR, a person must exhibit at least two of the following behaviors:^{[1][67]}

- Repetitive behaviors: actions such as rocking, hand flapping, finger flicking, head banging, or repeating phrases or sounds (including echolalia^[46]).^[68] These behaviors may occur consistently or primarily when the person is stressed, anxious, or upset. They are also known as stimming. Other examples include playing with toys in ways others might consider limited or unusual^[38] (e.g., arranging toys in a row^[46]).
- Resistance to change: a strong preference for routine, such as performing daily tasks in a specific order or showing distress in response to changes others may consider minor.^[69] The person may become distressed if their routine changes or is disrupted.^[69]
- Focused interests: intense interest in a particular activity, topic, or hobby, often accompanied by sustained attention and deep knowledge; for example, a strong attachment to certain objects^[1] or frequent discussion of a specific topic.^[70]
- Sensory reactivity: atypical responses to certain sensory inputs, such as aversion to specific sounds or textures, fascination with lights or movement, or apparent indifference to pain or temperature.^[71]



A young autistic boy who has arranged his toys in a row



An autistic boy arranging brads on a cork coaster

It is increasingly argued that these characteristics should be accepted, which is supported by their recognized functions, such as self-regulation.^[72] Focused interests can also provide personal fulfillment and contribute to the development of specialized knowledge.^[73] A distinction should be made between these features and those of obsessive-compulsive disorder, which can co-occur with autism and involve compulsions or obsessions aimed at preventing feared outcomes.^[74]

Spoken communication skills

Differences in verbal communication often become noticeable in early childhood, as many autistic children develop language skills at an uneven pace. Speech may emerge later than is typical or not at all (non-speaking autism), while reading ability may be present before school age (hyperlexia).^[59] Reduced joint attention may distinguish autistic from non-autistic infants.^[75] Infants may show delayed onset of babbling, atypical gestures, lower responsiveness, or vocal patterns that are less synchronized with caregivers. During the second and third years, autistic children may produce less frequent and less varied

babbling, consonants, words, and word combinations, and may integrate gestures with speech less often. They are less likely to make requests or share experiences, and more likely to repeat others' words or phrases (echolalia).^[76] About 25–35% of autistic school-age children are non-speaking or minimally speaking.^[77] The age at which speech develops and the complexity of early language development are significant predictors of verbal communication abilities in later life.^[77]

Self-injury

Self-harm occurs about three times more often in autistic people than in non-autistic people.^[78] Behaviors can include head-banging, hand-biting, and skin-picking, and can lead to serious injury or, in rare cases, death.^[79] Several explanations have been proposed for why self-harm develops and persists among people with developmental conditions such as autism.^[80] Communication difficulties may lead some autistic people to use self-injury to express needs, distress, or other messages.^[79] Self-harm may also help regulate sensory input^[81] or modulate pain perception, particularly for those experiencing chronic discomfort or medical conditions.^[80] Neurological factors are also under investigation, with atypical basal ganglia connectivity suggested as a potential biological predisposition in some autistic people.^[80]

Fatigue, burnout, inertia, meltdown, shutdown

Several non-diagnostic models have been used to describe challenges that autistic people face in their daily lives.^[82] These concepts lack formal clinical criteria, but are widely described by autistic people themselves.^{[82][83]}

Autistic fatigue or burnout is a prolonged state of mental and physical exhaustion.^{[84][83][82][85]} It is described as distinct from, but similar to, occupational burnout, and is often linked to the pressure to camouflage or mask autistic traits in social interactions.^{[83][84]} The term "autistic burnout" was first used in 2008, with research into the phenomenon undertaken in the 2020s.^[84] Several researchers have proposed various characterizations of autistic burnout, but no consensus definition exists. Depression can be misattributed to autistic burnout, as they have several overlapping criteria. Reported coping strategies include reduced masking, increased stimming, engaging in special interests and familiar activities, and seeking stress relief. Some affected people temporarily withdraw from social contact as a recovery strategy; while providing relief, interpersonal withdrawal can also result in loneliness and worsening mental health. There is limited data on professional interventions.^[84]

Autistic inertia is a difficulty experienced among autistic people with initiating, transitioning between, or stopping activities or mental states.^[83] It may manifest as a feeling of being "stuck", where people find it challenging to begin a task, shift focus to a different activity, or disengage from an action, even when they want to.^[82]

A meltdown may occur if, upon processing large amounts of information, an autistic person experiences anxiety or feels overwhelmed.^[86] Triggers may be sensory or social, and often include unpredictability, unmet basic needs, and emotional situations, and often accumulate.^[86] A meltdown can be expressed audibly (e.g., screaming or crying) or physically.^[86] The person often shows signs of distress beforehand, such as pacing, asking repetitive questions, trembling, or sweating.^[86] An autistic shutdown is similar, but inward, and the autistic person is often unable to speak or withdraws completely.^[86] Meltdowns or

shutdowns may be prevented by eliminating the distressing factors.^[86] They may be ameliorated by avoiding further questions or pressure, showing the person that one is there to help, and allowing the person to calm down by leaving the situation or breathing slowly.^[86]

Other features

Autistic people may exhibit traits or characteristics that are not part of the formal diagnostic criteria but can nonetheless affect their personal well-being or family dynamics.^[87]

- An estimated 60–80% of autistic people have motor signs that include poor muscle tone, poor motor planning, and toe walking;^{[88][89]} difficulties in motor coordination appear common across the autism spectrum.^{[90][91]}
- Unusual or atypical eating behavior occurs in about 70% of children on the autism spectrum,^[92] to the extent that it was once considered a diagnostic indicator.^[87] Selectivity is the most common characteristic, although eating rituals and food refusal are also reported.^[92]
- Several studies report moderate correlations between autism, Internet addiction disorder, and video game addiction.^[93]

Skill profile

Autistic people often show a "spiky skills profile", with strong abilities in some areas and weaker abilities in others.^[94] Some autistic people show unusual or notable abilities, ranging from splinter skills (such as memorization of trivia) to rare talents in mathematics, music, or artistic reproduction, which in exceptional cases are considered a part of the savant syndrome.^{[95][96]} Some autistic people demonstrate strengths in perception and attention relative to the general population.^[97]

Caregivers

Families who care for an autistic child often experience greater stress.^[98] Parents may struggle to understand their child and to find appropriate care options. Affiliate stigma can also reduce quality of life, where negative attitudes toward the autistic child are extended to those close to them.^[99] Family members who are themselves autistic may be better able to understand the autistic child.^[62]

Causes

The exact causes of autism are unknown,^{[100][101][102][103]} with genetics likely being the largest contributing factor. It was long presumed a single cause at the genetic, cognitive, and neural levels underpinned the social and non-social features,^[104] but autism is increasingly thought to be a complex condition with distinct, often co-occurring, causes for its core aspects.^{[104][105]} It is unlikely that autism has a single cause;^[105] research has identified many factors as potential contributors,^[106] including genetics,^[67] prenatal and perinatal (shortly after birth) history,^[106] neuroanatomical anomalies, changing social demands in the workplace or in school,^[14] and environmental influences.^[106] It is possible to identify general factors but difficult to determine specific ones.^[107] Research into causes is complex due to challenges in identifying distinct biological subgroups in the autistic population.^[108]

Genetics

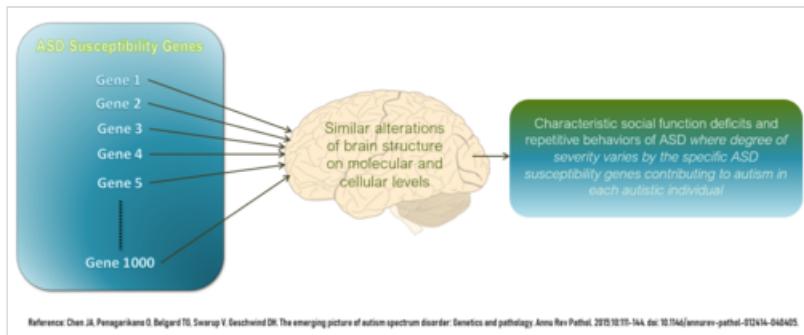
Autism has a strong genetic basis, but the genetics of autism are complex and it is unclear whether autism is explained more by rare mutations with major effects or by rare multi-gene interactions of common genetic variants.^{[109][110]} Twin studies indicate that autism is highly heritable, with genetic factors explaining most of the risk and shared environmental effects playing a minor role.^[17] Numerous genes have been found to be associated with autism,

with most loci individually explaining less than 1% of autism cases^[111] and having only small effects.^[109] While these genetic variants are associated with a higher likelihood of being autistic, they do not individually determine whether someone will be autistic.^[112] Complexity arises from interactions among multiple genes, the environment, and heritable epigenetic factors (which influence gene expression without changing DNA sequence).^[113]

Typically, autism is not traceable to a single-gene (Mendelian) mutation or chromosome anomaly, and no known genetic syndrome selectively causes autism.^[109] If autism is one characteristic of a broader medical condition, such as fragile X syndrome, it is called syndromic autism, as opposed to non-syndromic or idiopathic autism, which is typically polygenic without a known cause.^[114] Syndromic autism is present in approximately 25% of autistic people.^[115] Research has suggested that autistic people with intellectual disability tend to have rarer, more impactful, genetic mutations than those found in people diagnosed solely with autism.^[116] A number of genetic syndromes causing intellectual disability may also co-occur with autism, including fragile X, Down, Prader–Willi, Angelman, Williams syndrome,^[117] and SYNGAP1-related intellectual disability.^[118]

Research suggests that autism is associated with genes that influence neural development and connectivity. These are involved in key neuronal processes such as protein synthesis, synaptic activity, cell adhesion, and the formation and remodeling of synapses, as well as the regulation of excitatory and inhibitory neurotransmission. Studies have identified lower expression of genes linked to the inhibitory neurotransmitter gamma-aminobutyric acid, alongside higher expression of genes associated with glial (e.g., astrocytes) and immune (e.g., microglia) cells, correlating with higher numbers of these cells in post-mortem brain tissue. Genes associated with variation in the mTOR signaling pathway, which is involved in cell growth and survival, are also under investigation.^[119] Some hypotheses in evolutionary psychiatry suggest that autism-associated genes may persist because of proposed links to traits such as intelligence, systematizing abilities, or innovation.^[120]

If parents have one autistic child, the chance of having a second autistic child ranges from 7% to 20%.^[167] Though autism is highly heritable, many autistic people have only non-autistic family members. In some cases, this may be explained by de novo structural variations—such as deletions, duplications, or inversions—that arise spontaneously during meiosis and are not present in the parents' genomes.^{[121][122]}



Hundreds of different genes are implicated in the likelihood of being autistic, most of which influence the brain structure in a similar way.

The likelihood of being autistic is greater with older fathers than with older mothers; two potential explanations are the known increase in the number of mutations in older sperm and the hypothesis that men marry later if they carry a genetic predisposition and show some signs of autism.^[123]

Evolutionary perspectives

Research on the evolutionary advantages of autism and associated genes has suggested that autistic people may have contributed uniquely to human development, particularly in technological innovation (such as tool-making) and in detailed observation and analysis of the natural environment.^[124] Systematic reviews emphasize that these ideas remain speculative and that no single evolutionary explanation has been established.^[125]

Social factors

Social factors such as upbringing are not known to cause autism, but it is possible that increasing demands for flexibility and social interaction in education, or in one's personal and professional life, may cause people to exhibit pronounced difficulties that would not have led to diagnosis in a different setting.^{[14][15]}

Neurocognitive theories

Various theoretical frameworks attempt to integrate underlying genetic and environmental causes with observed neurobiological findings and behavioral traits. For instance, the **Intense World Theory** proposes that a higher neural responsiveness in autism leads to more intense sensory perception, attention, memory, and emotional responses, shaping the person's experience.^[126] The Enhanced Perceptual Functioning model of autism posits that superior and more independent functioning of auditory and visual perception is the root cause of the specific pattern of cognitive, behavioral, and neural performance observed in autistic people.^[28] The model asserts the importance of perception, arguing it is more central to the autistic phenotype than social or higher-order cognitive processes.^[28]

Beyond models of causation and brain function, cognitive theories have been developed to explain patterns of information processing common in autistic people, to better understand the autistic phenotype.^[127] This includes theories suggesting a tendency to focus on details over broader context (weak central coherence theory), and distinct cognitive styles related to analyzing systems versus empathizing with others (empathising–systemising theory).^[127] While these cognitive accounts describe how autistic traits may manifest, they are generally viewed as explanations of the behavioral and cognitive consequences of the underlying neurobiological development rather than primary causes themselves.^[127]

Early life and prenatal or perinatal factors

Certain factors during pregnancy and birth may increase the likelihood of autism,^[128] although no single factor is conclusive and study results are often inconsistent.^[129] These factors include advanced parental age,^{[130][131]} maternal health conditions (e.g., gestational diabetes, infections such as rubella,^[132] inflammation^[133]), exposure to certain medications (e.g., valproate^[129]), and some environmental

exposures like significant air pollution during pregnancy.^[134] While many environmental factors have been investigated, few have established links,^[129] and some prominent claims (e.g., vaccines or parenting styles) have been disproven.^[135]

Disproven refrigerator mother hypothesis

Work on autism in the mid-20th century proposed the "frigid mother" or refrigerator mother hypothesis, according to which poor parenting or lack of emotional support from parents leads to autism.^[136] When it was proposed, the hypothesis contributed to considerable media attention about autism, which had previously been mostly ignored.^[137] The hypothesis has since fallen out of favor, and has not garnered support when studied.^[136] But the blame placed on parents of children on the autism spectrum, especially mothers, has contributed to substantial stigma.^{[138][139]}

Early social experiences, such as caregiver interactions or deprivation, may shape the development of autism, potentially via gene–environment correlations, and are distinct from the discredited refrigerator mother hypothesis.^[20]

Disproven vaccines hypothesis

Parents may first become aware of autistic characteristics in their child around the time of a routine vaccination. This has led to theories – subsequently disproven – blaming vaccine "overload", the vaccine preservative thiomersal, or the MMR vaccine for causing autism.^[140] In 1998, British physician Andrew Wakefield led a fraudulent, litigation-funded study that suggested that the MMR vaccine may cause autism.^{[141][142][143][144][145]} His co-authors have since recanted the claims made in the study.^[146] Wakefield was struck off the British medical register for "serious professional misconduct" after determination that his involvement in the study amounted to fraud, leading to the loss of his right to practice medicine.^[147]

Two versions of the vaccine causation hypothesis were that autism results from brain damage caused by either the MMR vaccine itself,^[148] or by mercury used as a vaccine preservative.^[149] No convincing scientific evidence supports these claims.^[148] They are biologically implausible,^[140] and further evidence continues to refute them, including the observation that the rate of autism continues to climb despite elimination of thimerosal from most routine vaccines given to children from birth to 6 years of age.^{[149][150][151][152][153]}

A 2014 meta-analysis examined ten major studies on autism and vaccines involving 1.25 million children worldwide; it concluded that neither the vaccine preservative thimerosal (mercury), nor the MMR vaccine, which has never contained thimerosal,^[154] lead to autism.^[155] Despite this, misplaced parental concern has led to lower rates of childhood immunizations, outbreaks of previously controlled childhood diseases in some countries, and the preventable deaths of several children.^{[156][157]}

False claims about the absence of autism in the Amish population of North America due to their lower vaccination rates have been frequently spread by anti-vaccine activists. A 2010 study revealed that autism is present in 1 out of every 271 Amish children.^{[158][159][160][161]}

Diagnosis

Classification

The DSM-5 and ICD-11 are the two main frameworks for classification of mental disorders in use today. Autism spectrum disorder is classified in both as a neurodevelopmental disorder, with its definition encompassing a spectrum of highly varied presentations.^{[162][50]} The spectrum concept signals diversity rather than a simple range from mild to severe.^[163] Before the DSM-5 (2013) and ICD-11/ICD-11 CDDR (2019/2024),^{[162][164]} autism fell within a broader pervasive developmental disorder category that included labels such as Asperger syndrome and classic autism (also called childhood autism or Kanner syndrome). Because these diagnoses overlapped, the manuals unified them under "autism spectrum disorder" (ASD).^[165]

Since 1980, the committees behind both manuals have aimed for greater convergence, incorporating biological research while keeping behavior-based criteria.^{[166][167][168][169]} DSM-5 specifies three levels of support needs.^[170] ICD-11 instead records whether the person has co-occurring intellectual disability or language impairment.^[171]

Some researchers have questioned whether existing criteria capture the full phenomenon, prompting proposals for prototype descriptions, transdiagnostic biological markers, or distinctions between common behavioral traits and rarer genetic or environmental factors.^[172] Others have proposed alternatives to the disorder-focused spectrum model that deconstruct autism into separate phenomena: a non-pathological spectrum of behavioral traits in the general population,^[173] and rare genetic mutations or environmental factors influencing neurodevelopmental and psychological conditions.^[173] Clinical and policy guidance in Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom now promote neurodiversity-affirming language—for example, using "characteristics" instead of "symptoms" and avoiding words such as "cure".^{[174][175][176]}

DSM

The American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-5-TR), released in 2022, is the current version of the DSM.^[177] Its fifth edition—DSM-5, released in 2013—was the first to define ASD as a single diagnosis,^{[178][179]} combining the previously distinct diagnoses of classic autism, Asperger syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorder, and pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS).^{[179][180]} This is still the case in the DSM-5-TR.^[1]

The DSM-5 and DSM-5-TR adopt a dimensional approach, with one diagnostic category for disorders that fall under the autism spectrum umbrella. Within that category, the DSM-5 has a framework that differentiates individuals by dimensions of symptom severity and by associated features (i.e., the presence of other conditions or factors that may contribute to the symptoms, other neurodevelopmental or mental conditions, intellectual disability, or language impairment).^[1] The two core symptom domains are (a) social communication and (b) restricted, repetitive behaviors. Clinicians may specify separate severity levels for each domain based on the degree to which symptoms affect daily functioning, rather than providing a single overall severity rating.^[181]

Before the fifth edition, the DSM separated social deficits and communication deficits into two domains.^[182] The DSM-5 also revised the onset criteria to specify that symptoms appear in the early developmental period, noting that symptoms may manifest later when social demands exceed capabilities; the previous edition had required onset before age three.^[183] These revisions remain in the DSM-5-TR.^[1]

ICD

The World Health Organization's International Classification of Diseases (11th revision), ICD-11, was released in 2018 and came into full effect in 2022.^{[184][166]} It describes autism spectrum disorder (6A02 (<https://icd.who.int/browse/latest-release/mms/en#437815624>)) as follows:^[162]

Autism spectrum disorder is characterised by persistent deficits in the ability to initiate and to sustain reciprocal social interaction and social communication, and by a range of restricted, repetitive, and inflexible patterns of behaviour, interests or activities that are clearly atypical or excessive for the individual's age and sociocultural context. The onset of the disorder occurs during the developmental period, typically in early childhood, but symptoms may not become fully manifest until later, when social demands exceed limited capacities. Deficits are sufficiently severe to cause impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other important areas of functioning and are usually a pervasive feature of the individual's functioning observable in all settings, although they may vary according to social, educational, or other context. Individuals along the spectrum exhibit a full range of intellectual functioning and language abilities.

—ICD-11, chapter 6, section A02

Management

Currently, there is no cure for autism.^[25] From the perspective of neurodiversity, "curing" or otherwise treating autism may not be an appropriate goal.^{[175][185]}

Interventions targeting specific challenges or co-occurring conditions associated with autism are widely regarded as important.^[186] Perspectives on the goals of these interventions vary: the medical model of disability often focuses on addressing core characteristics such as social communication difficulties and restricted/repetitive behaviors.^[187] The neurodiversity movement supports interventions aimed at enhancing functional communication (spoken or non-spoken), managing related issues like anxiety or inertia, or addressing behaviors considered harmful, rather than seeking to alter core autistic features.^{[188][187]}

Studies of interventions have methodological problems that prevent definitive conclusions about efficacy,^[189] but the development of evidence-based interventions has advanced.^[190] Several therapies can help autistic children,^[191] and they are typically tailored to the child's needs.^[192] The main goals of therapy are to lessen associated difficulties and family distress, and to increase quality of life and functional independence. In general, higher IQs correlate with higher responsiveness to interventions and larger intervention outcomes.^{[193][190]} Behavioral, psychological, educational, and skill-building

interventions may be used to help autistic people learn skills for living independently, as well as other social, communication, and language skills.^[26] Therapy also aims to reduce behaviors perceived as inappropriate and to build upon strengths.^[194] Medications have not been found to reduce autism's core features, but may be used for associated difficulties, such as irritability or inattention.^[195]

Non-pharmacological interventions

Certain interventions, such as intensive, sustained special education, remedial education programs, and behavior therapy, are considered beneficial early in life for autistic children to acquire self-care, social, and job skills.^[196] Available approaches include applied behavior analysis, developmental models, structured teaching, speech and language therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy,^[197] social skills therapy, and occupational therapy.^[192] These interventions may either target autistic features comprehensively or focus on a specific area of difficulty.^[190]

Applied behavior analysis

Applied behavior analysis (ABA) is a behavioral therapy that aims to teach autistic children certain social and other behaviors by prompting using rewards and reinforcement learning. This includes learning fine and gross motor and language skills through play, expressive labeling, and requesting. It also seeks to reduce aggressive and self-injurious behavior by assessing its environmental causes and reinforcing replacement behaviors. Early, intensive ABA therapy has demonstrated effectiveness in enhancing preschool children's language skills, adaptive functioning, and intellectual performance.^{[198][199][200][201]} Another review reported a lack of adverse event monitoring, although such adverse effects may be common.^[202]



An autistic boy works with a behavioral therapist to identify different letters of the alphabet as part of a therapy program.

Interventions for early childhood may be based on different theoretical frameworks, such as ABA (with its structured and naturalistic approaches) and Developmental Social Pragmatic (DSP) models.^[190] Research indicates that in acquiring spoken language, autistic children with higher receptive language skills tend to make progress with fewer hours (2.5 to 20 per week) of a naturalistic approach, whereas those with lower receptive language skills tend to show more progress only with a greater intensity of intervention (25 hours per week) using discrete trial training, a structured form of ABA.^{[198][200]}

ABA has faced criticism.^{[203][204][205]} Sandoval-Norton et al. describe it as unethical and argue that it has unintended consequences, such as prompt dependency, susceptibility to psychological abuse, and overemphasis on compliance, which can create challenges in the transition to adulthood.^[203] Increasingly, ABA is also criticized for trying to reduce or eliminate autistic behaviors to make children appear less autistic, rather than respecting neurodiversity.^[206] A problem with unreported conflicts of interest in ABA research has been described, with potential effects on the quality of evidence.^[207] In response, some ABA advocates suggest that instead of discontinuing the therapy, efforts should focus on increasing protections and ethical compliance.^[208]

A related type of intervention is parent training models.^[190] These teach parents to implement various ABA and DSP techniques themselves. Several parent-mediated behavioral therapies target social communication difficulties, while their effect on restricted and repetitive behaviors (RRBs) is uncertain.^[209] Similarly, teacher-implemented interventions that combine naturalistic ABA with a developmental social pragmatic approach have been associated with effects on young children's social-communication behaviors, although there is limited evidence regarding effects on broader autistic characteristics.^[190]

Inclusion in education and the workplace

Inclusive education models strive to support autistic students in mainstream educational settings, moving away from segregated special education environments toward participation alongside their peers.^[210] Despite these efforts, autistic students can face significant barriers, sometimes leading to trauma or emotionally-based school non-attendance.^{[210][211]} This avoidance is often rooted in overwhelming sensory environments, social anxieties, communication breakdowns, bullying, or lack of adequate support and understanding, rather than defiance.^{[210][211]}

Central to successful inclusion is the application of frameworks like Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which proactively designs curricula and learning environments to be accessible and engaging for all students, including those who are autistic.^[212] UDL principles accommodate varied learning styles, sensory sensitivities, and communication preferences often present in autistic people.^[212]

The SPACE framework (sensory, predictability, acceptance, communication, empathy) developed by Doherty et al. primarily for healthcare settings offers a lens for identifying and addressing common environmental barriers that can contribute to distress and avoidance behaviors for autistic people.^[27] Accommodations may include providing quiet spaces as a retreat for people feeling overwhelmed.^[213] Autistic students may also need help initiating and maintaining social relationships with their peers if they wish to do so.^[210] Especially in higher education, some autistic students may need help with executive functioning, e.g., managing their own work, and the ability to initiate and complete tasks.^[214]

Transitioning to adulthood, autistic people often encounter substantial barriers to securing and maintaining meaningful employment, leading to high rates of unemployment and underemployment compared to the general population.^[29] Challenges can include navigating traditional interview processes,^[215] difficulties with unspoken social rules in the workplace, sensory sensitivities to office environments (e.g., lighting, noise), and needs for clear, direct communication and structured tasks.^{[29][216]} Effective workplace inclusion involves implementing reasonable adjustments such as flexible working hours or locations, providing noise-canceling headphones, staff training, and mentorship programs.^{[29][216]} Working from home can help to avoid overwhelming sensory or social situations, even if this means losing desirable social contact.^{[217][218]} Autism-friendly workplaces not only allow autistic employees to utilize their unique skills and perspectives but also benefit employers through increased innovation, problem-solving capabilities, and employee loyalty.^{[216][219]}

Pharmacological interventions

Autistic people may be prescribed medication to manage specific co-occurring conditions or behaviors, such as ADHD, anxiety, aggression, or self-injurious behaviors, particularly when non-pharmacological interventions alone have been insufficient.^{[220][221]} Medications are not routinely recommended for

autism's core features, such as social and communication difficulties or restricted and repetitive behaviors.^[222]

More than half of autistic children in the United States are prescribed psychoactive drugs or anticonvulsants.^[223] Commonly used drug classes include antidepressants, stimulants, and antipsychotics.^[223] Among antipsychotics, risperidone and aripiprazole are the only medications approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration specifically for reducing irritability, aggression, and self-injurious behaviors in autistic people.^{[195][224]} These drugs can have significant side effects and responses to them may vary.^[195] The UK's National Health Service cautions against the overprescription of antipsychotics and recommends their use only for specific indications, at the lowest effective dose and for the shortest duration necessary.^[225]

Some research suggests that risperidone and aripiprazole may also reduce restricted and repetitive behaviors, such as hand-flapping or body-rocking.^[222] The evidence supporting this use has limitations, including study size and scope, alongside concerns about adverse effects.^[226] A meta-analysis found no significant efficacy of these antipsychotics or SSRI antidepressants in reducing these behaviors.^[227] Stimulant medications like methylphenidate may reduce inattention or hyperactivity in some autistic children, particularly when ADHD is also present.^[192] But methylphenidate's efficacy is lower in autistic people with ADHD compared to non-autistic people with ADHD, and side effects are more common.^[228]

Alternative medicine

Alternative therapies have been researched and implemented, and many have resulted in harm to autistic people.^[192] For example, chelation therapy is not recommended as a treatment for autism, with risks outweighing potential benefits.^[229] Reports of death from botched chelation therapy as treatment for autism have been documented.^{[230][231]} Medical authorities have condemned bleach-based approaches, such as chlorine dioxide solutions marketed as Miracle Mineral Solution, as dangerous and ineffective.^[232] The British NHS also warns against CEASE therapy, which rejects vaccinations and recommends potentially harmful amounts of dietary supplements.^[233] There is also no evidence for the efficacy of hyperbaric oxygen therapy and its use is not recommended.^[234]

Although sometimes used for autistic people, no reliable evidence indicates a gluten- and casein-free diet as a standard intervention.^{[235][236][237]} Autistic children's preference for unconventional foods as well as gastrointestinal problems and lack of exercise can lead to reduction in bone cortical thickness, and this risk is greater in those on casein-free diets, as a consequence of the low intake of calcium and vitamin D.^[238]

Emerging evidence-based interventions

Interventions for autistic adults have limited evidence; cognitive behavioral approaches and mindfulness are considered promising.^[239] Music therapy for autistic people likely improves overall autism severity, global functioning, and quality of life, but evidence is unclear for social and communication skills.^[240] Animal-assisted activities and therapies show promise in improving social communication, irritability, hyperactivity, and word usage in autistic people.^[241]

Prognosis

With appropriate supports that promote independence and self-determination, autistic people can participate fully in their communities and lead meaningful, productive lives.^{[32][33]} Autism typically persists whether diagnosed in children or in adults, but those who no longer meet the criteria for diagnosis may have it removed.^[6] Some report that those with limited support needs are likely to have lessened autistic features over time,^[242] while others argue that this perception is likely due to masking; i.e., hiding autistic characteristics to avoid stigma.^[243] About 85% of autistic people need support with independent living in adulthood.^[244] Factors such as developing spoken language before age six, having an IQ above 50, and possessing marketable skills are associated with a higher likelihood of independent living in adulthood.^[245]

Suicide

Risk factors for self-harm and suicidality include circumstances that could affect anyone but are more common among autistic people, such as mental health problems (e.g., anxiety disorder) and social problems (e.g., unemployment and social isolation). In addition, there are autism-specific factors, such as exhausting attempts to behave like a non-autistic person to avoid stigma and negative reactions of society towards autistic people (masking).^[246] Autistic people are also at significantly increased risk of victimization, including bullying, sexual assault, and other forms of criminal abuse.^[247] A 2019 meta-analysis found autistic people to be four times more likely to have depression than non-autistic people.^[248]

Rates of suicidality vary significantly depending upon what is being measured.^[246] This is partly because questionnaires developed for non-autistic subjects are not always valid for autistic people.^[246] As of 2023, the Suicidal Behaviours Questionnaire–Autism Spectrum Conditions (SBQ-ASC) is the only test validated for autistic people.^[246] According to some estimates, about a quarter of autistic youth^[249] and a third of all autistic people^{[246][250]} have experienced suicidal ideation at some point. Autistic people are about three times as likely as non-autistic people to make a suicide attempt.^{[78][251]} Almost 10% of autistic youth^[249] and 15% to 25% of autistic adults^{[246][250]} have attempted suicide. Rates of suicide attempts and suicidal ideation are the same for people formally diagnosed with autism and people who have typical intelligence and are believed to be autistic but have not been diagnosed.^[246] The suicide risk is higher for autistic people who are not cisgender males and do not have intellectual disabilities.^{[246][251]}

Epidemiology

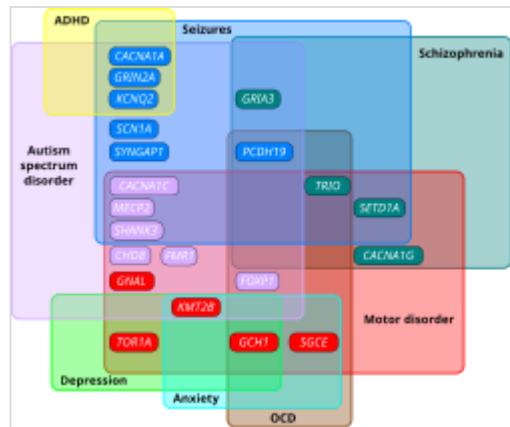
Autism occurs in every country and demographic group.^{[32][2][3]} Most professionals believe that race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background have limited effect on the occurrence of autism.^[252]

Research indicates that autistic people are significantly more likely to be LGBTQ than the general population.^[253] Autistic people are also significantly more likely to be non-theistic or non-religious.^[254]

Co-occurring conditions

Several conditions can co-occur with autism at a higher rate than in the rest of the population.^[255] This may be referred to as comorbidity, and may increase with age, causing difficulties for youth on the autism spectrum, and can make interventions and therapies more challenging. Features of autism and other diagnoses often overlap, and autism's characteristics can make traditional diagnostic procedures more difficult.^{[256][257]} This is sometimes known as diagnostic overshadowing.^[258] Common co-occurring conditions are:

- ADHD is seen in between 25% to 32% of autistic people.^[259] Characteristics similar to those of ADHD can be part of an autism diagnosis.^[260]
- Epilepsy occurs in about 10% of autistic people.^[261] The risk is higher for older autistic people and those with intellectual disability.^[262]
- Intellectual disabilities are some of the most common co-occurring conditions with autism (30% to 40%).^[263] As diagnosis is increasingly given to people with lower support needs, there is a tendency for the proportion with co-occurring intellectual disability to decrease over time.
- Various anxiety disorders can co-occur with autism, with overall co-occurring rates of 17% to 23%.^[259] Many anxiety disorders have characteristics better explained by autism itself, or are hard to distinguish from autism's features.^[264]
- Rates of co-occurring depression in autistic people range from 9% to 13%.^[259]
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) occurs in 7% to 10% of autistic people.^[259]
- Starting in adolescence, some autistic people fall under the criteria for the similar-looking schizoid personality disorder, which is characterized by a lack of interest in social relationships, a tendency toward a solitary or sheltered lifestyle, secretiveness, emotional coldness, detachment, and apathy.^[265]
- Genetic conditions: About 10% of autistic people are diagnosed with a rare genetic syndrome such as Prader–Willi, Angelman, Fragile X, or 16p11.2 deletion syndrome.^[266]
- Gastrointestinal problems are one of the most commonly co-occurring medical conditions in autistic people.^[267] These are linked to greater social difficulties, irritability, language difficulties, mood changes, distressed behavior, and sleep problems.^{[267][268]}
- Sleep problems affect about two-thirds of autistic people at some point in childhood. These most commonly include symptoms of insomnia, such as difficulty falling asleep, frequent nocturnal awakenings, and early-morning awakenings. Sleep problems are associated with difficult behaviors and family stress, and are often a focus of clinical attention over and above the autism diagnosis.^[269]
- Motor difficulties, including features of dyspraxia, are highly prevalent in autistic people,^[270] and there is a significantly higher rate of joint hypermobility/hypermobility spectrum disorders/Ehlers-Danlos syndrome in autistic people.^[271]
- There is tentative evidence that gender dysphoria occurs more frequently in autistic people.^{[272][273]}



Euler diagram showing overlapping clinical phenotypes in genes associated with monogenic forms of autism, epilepsy, schizophrenia, dystonia, and OCD:

- Genes associated with epilepsy
- Genes associated with schizophrenia
- Genes associated with autism
- Genes associated with dystonia

Prevalence

The World Health Organization estimates that about 1 in 100 children were autistic between 2012 and 2021 with a trend of increasing prevalence over time. This may reflect an underestimate of prevalence in low- and middle-income countries.^{[2][3]} Surveillance studies in community samples of adults suggest a similar share of the adult population would meet diagnostic criteria if formally assessed.^[16] The number of people diagnosed has increased since the 1990s, likely due to a combination of increased recognition of autism, better availability of diagnosis, and changes to the diagnostic criteria.^[2] The increase in autism is largely attributable to changes in diagnostic practices, referral patterns, availability of services, age at diagnosis, and public awareness,^{[274][275][276]} particularly among women,^[277] though other unidentified environmental factors may exist.^[278]

The Centers for Disease Control's Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network reported that approximately 1 in 31 children in the United States is diagnosed with autism, based on data collected in 2022.^[279] For 2016 data, the estimate was 1 in 54, compared to 1 in 68 in 2010 and 1 in 150 in 2000.^[279] Diagnostic criteria for autism have changed significantly since the 1980s; for example, U.S. special-education autism classification was introduced in 1994.^[280]

Sex ratio

Males are about three times more likely to be diagnosed with autism than females.^[21] Several theories about the higher prevalence in males have been investigated.^[281] Females, for example, are more likely to have associated cognitive disability, suggesting that less obvious forms of autism are likely being overlooked.^[282] Prevalence differences may also be a result of gender differences in expression of characteristics, with autistic women and girls showing less atypical behaviors and therefore being less likely to be diagnosed with autism.^[283]

History

Etymology

In 1911, Swiss psychiatrist Paul Eugen Bleuler coined the German term *Autismus* to characterize the social withdrawal he observed in people with schizophrenia.^[284] Rendered in English as *autism*, the term derives from the Greek word *autos* ("self").^[285] Bleuler used the term for a symptom of adult schizophrenia: a person's retreat from reality into their own subjective world. He also mentioned "autistic thinking" as a fleeting, illogical thought process everyone experiences. In the mid-1920s, German psychiatrist Fritz Künkel categorized over 100 schizophrenic patients into four groups, one of which he labeled "autistic", highlighting disturbances in emotional life. In 1926, building on his work and Bleuler's, Grunya Sukhareva published an article about six boys who were musically gifted and had a tendency toward abstract thinking. She called their affects "flattened" and their tendency to avoid other children an "autistic attitude".^[286] Scholars have credited Sukhareva with making observations that closely mirror ASD as described by the DSM-5 and ICD-11.^[287] Her work expanded on the definition throughout her career while making great strides in differentiating ASD and schizophrenia nearly 30 years before the establishment of separate classifications for these diagnoses with the 1980 publication of the DSM-III.^[288]

Society and culture

The autistic rights and neurodiversity movements argue autism should be accepted as a difference to be accommodated instead of cured,^{[290][291][292][293][294]} although a minority of autistic people might still accept a cure.^[295] Social-science scholars study autistic people in hopes of learning more about "autism as a culture, transcultural comparisons ... and research on social movements".^[294] Events related to autism include World Autism Awareness Day, Autism Sunday, Autistic Pride Day, Autreat, and others.^{[296][297][298][299]}

Focused interests are commonly found in autistic people and can include activism. Environmental activist Greta Thunberg has spoken favorably about her autism diagnosis, saying that autism can be a source of life purpose, as well as the basis of careers, hobbies, and friendships.^{[300][301][289]} Entrepreneur and co-founder of Microsoft Bill Gates has written, "If I were growing up today, I probably would be diagnosed on the autism spectrum."^[302]



In 2021, Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg likened her autism to a "superpower", crediting her success to her focused interests.^[289]

Legal implications of diagnosis

In some countries, people with an autism diagnosis are required to provide additional proof of suitability to apply for a driver's license^[303] or to handle firearms.^[304] They may face barriers to entering military service.^[305]

Discrimination

Autistic people may face discrimination of various kinds, both directly and indirectly, in a variety of settings, professional, educational, or clinical.^[306] Such discrimination is often initiated after other people identify the autistic person as different from themselves, which may occur very quickly.^[306] This discrimination sometimes leads to violence, assault, or social exclusion.^[306] Various legal limitations on people with an autism diagnosis have also been considered discriminatory.^{[303][304]}

Neurodiversity movement

Some autistic people and affiliated researchers^[307] have advocated a shift in attitudes toward the view that autism is a difference, rather than a disease that ought to be treated or cured.^{[308][309]} Critics have bemoaned the entrenchment of some of these groups' opinions, and that they speak to a select group of autistic people with limited difficulties.^{[292][310][294][311][312]}

The neurodiversity movement and the autism rights movement are social movements within the context of disability rights, emphasizing the concept of neurodiversity, which describes the autism spectrum as a result of healthy and valuable variations in the human brain rather than a disorder to be cured.^{[292][313]}

The autism rights movement advocates including greater acceptance of autistic behaviors, therapies that focus on coping skills rather than imitating the behaviors of non-autistic people,^[314] and the recognition of the autistic community as a minority group.^{[314][312]} Autism rights or neurodiversity advocates believe that the autism spectrum is genetic and should be accepted as a healthy variation in the human genome.^[292] These movements are not without detractors. A common argument against neurodiversity activists is that most have relatively low support needs, or are self-diagnosed, and do not represent the views of autistic people with higher support needs.^{[312][315][316]} The argument has been made that only autistic people with lower support needs should be included under the neurodiversity banner, as autism with high support needs "may rightfully be viewed as a disability".^[312] The concept of neurodiversity is contentious in autism advocacy and research groups and has led to infighting.^{[310][294]}



The neurodiversity movement has many symbols, but is often represented by the infinity symbol.

See also

- [Outline of autism](#)
- [Animal model of autism](#)
- [Autism and memory](#)
- [Autism in popular culture](#)
- [Autism in psychoanalysis](#)
- [Autistic art](#)
- [Controversies in autism](#)
- [Global perceptions of autism](#)
- [List of autistic fictional characters](#)
- [List of films about autism](#)
- [Mechanism of autism](#)
- [Violence and autism](#)
- [Empathy in autistic people](#)

Notes

- a. Medical diagnosis term. See [Classification](#).
- b. However, this figure may reflect an underestimate of prevalence in low- and middle-income countries.

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External links

- World Health Organization fact sheet on autism (<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/autism-spectrum-disorders>)

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Självmord

Självmord (fackspråkligt även **suicid**, av **nylatin**: *suicidium*, bokstavligen "självmord"),^[1] historiskt även **självspillan** med mera,^[2] är den medvetna handlingen att ta sitt eget liv.^{[3][4][5]} Självmord tenderar att förklaras av psykologin genom att härleda handlingen mer till personens irre liv, något som kompletteras av sociologins förkläringsmodeller, där man snarare tenderar att åberopa en låg grad av social integration, vilket har stöd i att grupper med högre social integration historiskt sett har haft lägre självmordsfrekvenser.^[6]

Det finns många olika riskfaktorer för de som väljer att begå självmord, exempel är: mental och/eller fysisk sjukdom, drogberoende, finanskriser, förlust av familj, ojämlighet, bieffekter av antidepressiva substanser, mobbning, skulder, socialt stigma, nihilistiska uppfattningar.^{[7][8][9][10][11][8][12][13][14]} Respektive på grund av arbete (se:karoshi).^{[15][16]} Ofta finns dock också en bakomliggande livskris, en känsla av, eller en reell hopplöshet, en brist på framtidstro, eller en låg värdering av det egna livet.^[17] Motiven kan också vara kamp med existentiella eller politiska grubblerier, eller rent religiöst betingad skuld.^{[18][19]} Självmord föregås ofta av en självmordskris.^[20]

Åren 2010–2020 var självmord den näst vanligaste dödsorsaken bland ungdomar.^{[21][22]} År 2012 uppskattades minst två procent av alla trafikolyckor också egentligen vara självmord.^[23] Globalt så tar någon livet av sig uppskattningsvis var fyrtionde sekund (2019).^[24] Ett självmordsförsök beräknas kosta samhället drygt tre miljoner kronor, medan ett självmord beräknas costa 18,7 miljoner kronor.^[25]

Enligt Världshälsoorganisationen (WHO) var självmord 2019 en av de ledande dödsorsakerna och under de föregående 45 åren ökade antalet självmord med cirka 60 procent.^{[26][27]} I Sverige var det 2013 fler män än kvinnor som begick självmord, däremot var självmordsförsök vanligare bland kvinnor än män.^[28] Självmord var 2018 en av de vanligaste dödsorsakerna bland yngre männskor^[29] (vid 40-årsåldern börjar andelen minska eftersom andra orsaker ökar kraftigt, däribland cancer och hjärtproblem), trots att det begås fler självmord än äldre.^{[28][30]} År 2018 tog ungefär fyra personer livet av sig i Sverige varje dag.^{[29][31]}



Enligt Matteusevangeliet 27:5 begick Judas självmord efter att ha förrått Jesus.

Etymologi

Begreppet **självmord** är relativt modernt och härrör från tyska: *selbstmord* (jämför danska: *selvmord*, isländska: *sjálfsmorð*, norska: *selvmord*, nynorska: *sjølvsmord*). Historiska begrepp är sällan standardiserade och kan skifta men just konstruktionen "själv- + ett ord för dråp" är mycket vanlig i germanskan och finns belagt redan på vikingatiden som anglosaxiska: *selfcwalu* ("självkval"). Ett äldre svenska begrepp som fanns redan på 1600-talet är **självspillan**^[2] och på isländska finns utöver *sjálfsmorð* även *sjálfsvíg* ("självvig") som bygger på ordet "vig", ett äldre ord för strid och dråp (jämför envige, "tvekamp till döden").

Den latinska begreppsfamiljen till **suicid** (nylatin: *suicidium*, engelska: *suicide*) är i sig relativt modern och bygger på samma princip som ovan, en nylatinsk sammansättning av *suī* ("själv") + *-cīdium* ("dråp"). Det är möjliga en engelsk skapelse från början och då en översättning av medelengelska: *seolf-cwale* ("självkval").

Historia

Under bland annat antiken kunde det vara ärofullt att begå självmord – eller låta sina kamrater ta ens liv – för att inte falla i fiendens händer. Den karthagiske fältherren Hannibal begick exempelvis självmord inför hotet att bli utlämnad till Rom. Efter det judiska upproret i Masada fann romarna bara två kvinnor och fem barn vid liv, 960 andra hade tagit sina liv.^[32] Ett annat känt exempel på en person som tagit sitt liv för att inte behöva möta fienden är när Adolf Hitler tog sitt liv under andra världskrigets slutskede.

Även politiska intriger har historiskt kunnat frambringa självmord: Den romerske politikern Marcus Antonius begick självmord när han fick höra ryktet att modern till några av hans barn, Egyptens drottning Kleopatra, begått självmord. I bakgrunden fanns en politisk fejd mellan Antonius och Kleopatra på sin sida och imperatorn Octavianus på den andra. Bara några dagar efter Antonius begick även Kleopatra självmord.

Under perioder har vissa samhällen även påvingat männskor självmord som en form av ärofullt dödsstraff. Den grekiske filosofen Sokrates fick välja mellan att förkasta allt han hade sade sig stå för eller döden. Han valde döden och verkställde domen själv genom att dricka gift. Under andra världskriget gjorde den tyske fältmarskalken Erwin Rommel samma val när han fick välja mellan antingen giftbägaren eller rättegång, förlorad ära (vilket skulle påverka hans familj) och saker avrättning.

I delar av det feodala Kina och i Japan har självmordet under vissa omständigheter kunnat ses som ett fullgott sätt att behålla hedern vid exempelvis ett personligt misslyckande (se Seppuku).

Terminologi

Självmordstankar

Den som har självmordstankar tänker på att ta sitt liv eller vill försöka. Dessa tankar kan variera, från att vara mycket vaga och diffusa till att vara mycket påträffande med detaljerade fantasier och ingående planläggning. Självmordstankar är relativt vanligt, omkring 50 procent av alla tänker någon gång allvarligt på att ta sitt liv. För de flesta går tankarna snabbt över. Långvariga och återkommande tankar kan vara ett tecken på depression.^[33]

Självmordsförsök

Många självmordsbenägna ger sig ofta in på aktiviteter som kan sluta med döden. Det kan vara mer eller mindre allvarligt menade. Den som försökt ta sitt liv löper större risk att till sist göra det. Av de som försökt ta sitt liv försöker 15 procent igen inom ett år, de flesta av dem inom tre månader. Svenska sjukhus tar emot omkring sex självmordsförsök för varje fullbordat självmord. Internationella beräkningar pekar på omkring från 8 till 25 självmordsförsök per självmord beroende på ålder och kön.^[34] 1 av 25 personer gör ett självmordsförsök.^[35]

Självmordssmitta

Många är rädda för att självmord ska smitta; ibland ser man hur flera individer i en umgängesgrupp eller familj begår självmord under en begränsad tid. Kändisars självmord kan till exempel ge impulser till andra självmordsbenägna.^[källa behövs] Det är undersökt att det är viktigt att sprida information om självmord på ett tydligt sätt och inte låta bli att rapportera om det bara för att det har varit självmord. WHO har tagit fram tydliga riktlinjer för hur media ska rapportera om självmord:

WHO:s råd för professionella inom media:^[36]

- Ta tillfället i akt att informera allmänheten om självmord
- Undvik sensationsspråk eller språk som normalisrar självmord eller presenterar det som en lösning på problem
- Undvik framträdande placering och undvik upprensning av berättelser om självmord
- Undvik att beskriva metoden som användes för ett fullbordat självmord eller för självmordsförsök
- Undvik att använda detaljerad information om platsen där självmordet eller självmordsförsöket genomfördes
- Försiktighet bör iakttas vid rubriksättning
- Använd foton och videobilder varsamt
- Var speciellt noggrann vid rapportering kring kända personers självmord
- Visa varsam respekt för de efterlevande och andra berörda
- Ge information om var hjälp finns
- Var uppmärksam på att även mediefolk själva kan vara direkt eller indirekt berörda och därmed mer eller mindre sårbara och påverkade av berättelser om självmord

Självmordsbrev

Minoriteten av de som tar sitt liv, mindre än 25 procent av vuxna och en ännu mindre andel av ungdomarna, lämnar efter sig någon form av meddelande som skulle kunna tolkas som ett avskedsbrev,^[37] där de försöker förklara sitt handlande eller lämna en sista hälsning; ibland innehåller det en ursäkt till de efterlevande eller en beskrivning över hur deras begravning ska genomföras. Ofta är det i form av ett vanligt brev, men ibland bara rudimentära anteckningar på något föremål i närheten.

Kollektivt självmord

En del sekter och andra tätt sammanhållna grupper begår ibland självmord av ideologiska skäl men det förekommer även mindre självordspakter som ingås för att de inblandade skall kunna stödja varandra i sitt gemensamma självmord. Båda fenomenen är mycket ovanliga även om det på senare tid^[när?] har blivit något vanligare att självmordsbenägna söker upp varandra och sluter pakter på Internet.

Mord följt av självmord

Det händer ibland att en gärningsman dödar andra för att sedan ta sitt eget liv. I fred brukar det för det mesta vara modern eller fadern som dödar sina barn, och eventuellt sin partner, för att sedan ta sitt liv (se Familjetragedi). Ett uppmärksammat fall utanför det rena familjelivet är Columbinemassakern i USA, där två elever gick bärskagång med skjutvapen och flera hemmagjorda bomber på en skola för att till slut ta sina egna liv. (se även Skolmassaker).

Självmordsattacker i krig

Terrorister har ofta med vetskapsen om att deras liv kommer att ta slut efter utfört attentat – till exempel anarkister och nihilister i Tsarryssland. Ett annat exempel är de moderna självmordsbombarna.

Under krig har det i alla tider skett självmordsattacker på anmodan av högre befäl eller spontant av enskilda stridande, oftast praktiserat av den svagare parten i en konflikt. Mest kända är de japanska kamikazeattackerna mot amerikanska örlogsfartyg med både mänskliga torpeder och bomber under andra världskriget, men självmordsbrigader har bildats i de flesta arméer under någon tidsperiod. Straffkompanier skickades ibland mot en sannolik död mot amnesti vid överlevnad eller så ställde grupper av fromma eller lojal soldater upp för att med sitt liv vända ett hopplöst läge. Efter den vapentekniska revolutionen som kom med Europas industrialisering kan man säga att många primitiva stammar begick självmord när de med spjut och pilbågar försökte strida mot moderna

gevärs, kulsprutor och ordentligt artilleri, knappast utan kunskap om deras effektivitet. Självmordsattack i den här användningen av ordet innehåller inte nödvändigtvis att deltagarna vill dö, bara att de sannolikt kommer att göra det samt är medvetna om att de förmöglichen kommer att göra det. Ett specialfall av militära självord är att kasta sig över en handgranat för att rädda sina kamrater.

Assisterat självord

En etiskt problematisk (man kan inte anta att motiven är sjuka och irrationella på samma sätt som hos de normala självorden) men socialt mindre tabubelagd anledning för att människor tar sina liv, är svåra hopplösa handikapp eller smärtsamma och långt framskridna sjukdomar som ändå slutar med döden. På många håll, till exempel i Brasilien och Japan är det olagligt att hjälpa någon att ta sitt liv. I Sverige är det däremot inte straffbart att hjälpa eller att förse en människa med medel att ta sitt liv, även om det görs av en läkare. Läkaren riskerar dock att förlora sin yrkeslegitimation.^[38] Eutanasi eller aktiv dödshjälp, där någon i enlighet med en människas vilja tar dennes liv, betraktas dock som dråp. Dråp ger dock ett straff på 6–10 år fängelse, dödshjälp av anhörig skulle mest troligt ge cirka 1 års fängelse på grund av förmildrande omständigheter.

Förebyggande

Olika preventiva åtgärder finns med syfte att förhindra självord. Inom sjukvården förekommer olika suicidriskbedömning, som ämnar att upptäcka de med risk att begå självord för att kunna sätta in åtgärder.^[39] Det finns kopplingar mellan självskadebeteende och självordsförslag, varför en del program syftar till att minska sådant beteende.^[40]



En skylt med ett självordsförebyggande budskap på Golden Gate-bron.

Inom skolan

I en SBU-rapport från 2015 fann man två skolbaserade program som kunde förhindra självord hos barn och unga.^[40] Dessa var: Good Behaviour Game (GBC) där man i lågstadiet ägnar ett antal timmar till att främja "positiva beteenden och attityder" mellan skolungdomar och lärare; samt Youth Awareness of Mental Health som försöker öka förståelsen om psykisk hälsa bland högstadieselever.^[40] Andra program än dessa två saknar vetenskapligt stöd, och det finns få studier som har tittat på möjliga negativa effekter av liknande program.^[40] En senare uppdatering av kunskapsläget^[41] kunde inte dra slutsatser för andra program.

Inom vården

Inom den psykiatriska vård genomförs ofta suicidriskbedömningar för kunna sätta in behandling eller andra förebyggande åtgärder vid behov.^[39] Ett antal olika instrument finns för att underlätta sådan bedömning, men det har dåligt stöd då de används på egen hand för att bedöma suicidrisk.^[39]

Psykisk livräddning är ett förstahjälpen-program som lär ut hur man hjälper en person i psykisk kris. Det finns kurser i psykisk livräddning precis som det finns kurser i hjärt-lungräddning.^[42]

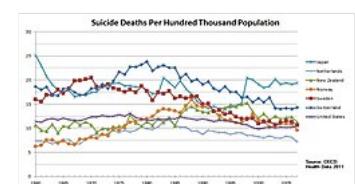
Inom jägarkåren

Svenska Jägareförbundet driver flera kampanjer kring psykisk ohälsa där jägare är överrepresenterade, vilket ökar risken för självord med jaktvapen. I Dalarna tar cirka 50 personer sitt liv varje år, och 14% av jägare använder jaktvapen för suicid.^{[43][44]} Även om sifforna varierar regionalt, är psykisk ohälsa generellt sett vanligare bland jägare än i befolkningen som helhet. För att möta detta problem samarbetar Jägareförbundet med psykiatrin i Värmland och Dalarna för att erbjuda stöd till jägare med självordskris. Dessa initiativ fokuserar på att skapa trygghet kring tillfällig vapenförvaring och öka kunskapen om psykisk ohälsa inom jägarkåren.^{[45][46]}

Förekomst

I självordsstatistiken har Sverige i ett europeiskt perspektiv en genomsnittlig självordsnivå^[48]. År 2010 tog 1 442 personer sitt liv vilket kan jämföras med 1980 års siffra som låg på 2237.^[49] Det begicks 18,4 självord per hundra tusen invånare 2010 och 6 gånger fler självordsförslag. Räddningsverket beräknade att samhällets kostnad för 2006 uppgick till 5,5 miljarder eller 0,2 procent av BNP. Av det var 61 procent kostnader i samband med självordsförslag. Men för de fullbordade självorden räknas inte förstört humankapital in, vilket beror på att det är svårt att beräkna. Det antas dock vara lönsamt för samhället att lägga ner upp till 18,6 miljoner kronor för att förhindra ett självord.^[25]

Sveriges regering införde en nollvision för självord 2008. Idén till en nollvision kom ursprungligen från Petter Sivler (M) och Jonas Grafström (M), i samband med en insändare under januari 2005 som fick stort genomslag runt om i Sverige.^[50] Norge som fört statistik från 1826 visar att självordsnivåerna tenderar att vara ganska stabila över tid.^[51]



Tidsdiagram för dödligheten i självord från 1960 till 2007 för Japan, Nederländerna, Nya Zeeland, Norge, Sverige, Schweiz och Förenta staterna.^[47]

Riskgrupper

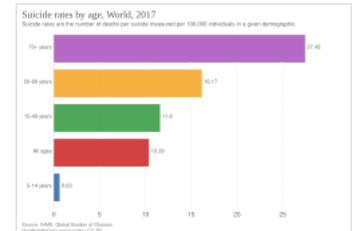
I Sverige och på många andra håll i världen är självord den vanligaste dödsorsaken i åldersgruppen 15–44 år,^[52] samtidigt som de flesta självord utförs av män som är över 45 år.^[49]

Män är i hela världen mycket överrepresenterade bland självmördarna i alla åldersgrupper förutom på den kinesiska landsbygden. I Sverige var i början av 1900-talet förhållandet hela fem självmördade män för varje kvinna, men från 1970 sjönk kvoten till runt 2,5 män för varje kvinna.^[53] Den genomsnittliga kvoten för Europa är fyra män för varje kvinna.^[54]

Personer med tidigare självmordsförsök är en av de mest uttalade riskgrupperna. I Sverige är det vanligare med självmordsförsök bland kvinnor än bland män. Det tros bero på att det är mer kulturellt accepterat bland kvinnor att söka uppmärksamhet genom självmordsförsök, till exempel genom tablettoverdos (något som är mycket farligt men sällan dödligt). Män kommunlicerar ofta inte sin psykiska ohälsa verbalt utan blir utåtriktade och aggressiva för att en dag ta livet av sig, och då med mer våldsamma och dödliga metoder så som att hänga eller skjuta sig.^[56]

Socialt utsatta

Andra grupper med förhöjd riskfaktor är ensamstående (särskilt nyblivet ensamstående som efter skilsmässa eller dödsfall) och mäniskor med dåligt socialt nätverk (till exempel arbetslösa eller mäniskor med social fobi). Bland en del invandrargrupper, i stora städer, samt på Gotland, i Värmland och Norrlands inland är självmordsfrekvensen högre än genomsnittet. Dock är Västerbotten det län i landet som har lägst självmordsfrekvens, sannolikt till följd av regionens starka folkkörelsetradition.^[57] I mindre tätorter där den sociala sammanhållningen är starkare är självord mindre förekommande. Andra riskfaktorer är mobbning bland vuxna och barn, posttraumatisk stress efter till exempel krig, en svår olycka eller annan chockartad upplevelse och allvarlig psykisk sjukdom. Vid behandling av depression med psykofarmaka brukar självmordsrisken öka initialt; en djupt deprimerad männska mår ofta så dåligt att hen inte orkar företa sig något sådant som att ta sitt liv.^[58]



Självmordsbenägenhet per åldersgrupp.^[55]

Missbruk

Mäniskor som dricker mer alkoholhaltiga drycker än vad de flesta gör tenderar oftare att begå självord.^{[11][59]} Hälften av alla självord i Sverige är alkoholrelaterade, sättlvida att alkohol har förekommit före självordet.^[60] Missbruk kan i sig driva en del att begå självord, ibland genom att missbrukaren hamnar i en situation som han eller hon inte tror kan lösas^[61] eller i plågsam abstinens.^[62]

Etnicitet

I USA har man observerat skillnader mellan självmordsfrekvens mellan den vita majoritetsbefolkningen och de svarta och spanskspråkiga minoriteterna. Vita löper 2,5 gånger högre risk att begå självord än någon i de två minoritetsgrupperna.

Ungdomar och självord

Självord bland barn och ungdomar ses internationellt som ett stort problem, självord är nämligen en ledande dödsorsak bland unga mäniskor.^[59] Men deras totala andel i förhållande till samtliga självord är ganska blygsam. I Sverige försökte 2 000 ungdomar mellan 15 och 24 år ta sitt liv år 2003, varav 118 fullfördes. Ibland kommer uppgifter om att självorden bland unga stiger; det ligger närmare sanningen att konstatera att antalet självord inte minskar i denna åldersgrupp som i de övriga.^[63] Men självmordsförsök och självskadebeteende har ökat, särskilt bland flickor.^[64]

I USA har självorden bland unga minskat sedan mitten av 1990-talet. År 2001 tog 3 971 ungdomar livet av sig; 87 procent av dem var pojkar.^[65] I Storbritannien har självorden bland ungdomar ökat markant sedan början 1990-talet och i princip hela ökningen har skett bland pojkar.^[66]

I Norge har självordens relativa andel av dödsfallen i åldersgruppen 10–24 år ökat från sju procent 1973 till att 1992 ligga på 26 procent. Kraftigast är ökningen hos pojkar, men man har även observerat hur flickor anammat mer effektiva pojkmетодer.^[67] Självordsnivån bland barn och tonåringar har en större tendens att fluktuera över tid och är känsligare för snabba övergående trender och påverkan genom massmedia och Internet.

Äldre och självord

Ibland väljer mäniskor med smärtsamma sjukdomar att avsluta sitt liv istället för att invänta en oundviklig död. För de män som är över 80 år ökar självorden kraftigt i jämförelse med kvinnor över 80 år som begår självord.^[68] Ensamhet och fördomar mot äldre pekas av vissa ut som skäl till varför äldre väljer att ta sitt liv.^[69]

Efterlevande

Efterlevande är de anhöriga som sörjer en person som har tagit sitt liv. I sorgprocessen kan efterlevande uppleva depression, existentiell ångest och även få egna självordstankar. Det rör sig om 10 000–15 000 personer varje år i Sverige.^[70] Självord upplevs ofta som en katastrof av de efterlevandes anhöriga och vänner, och ses som en stor kostnad för samhället. Självord är tabu nästan överallt i världen.^{[71][72]}

Metoder

Förgiftning

Förgiftning med fasta och flytande ämnen är den vanligaste självordsmetoden i Sverige, 32,5 procent av självorden i Sverige mellan 1995 och 2004 skedde med denna metod.^[73] Förgiftning med bekämpningsmedel står för en tredjedel av alla självord i världen och är enligt WHOs uppskattningar världens vanligaste självordsmetod.^{[74][75]} Det är ovanligt i Europa och i Nordamerika, däremot utbrett i Asien, särskilt skuldsatta bönder på landsbygden i utvecklingsländer som Indien och Kina är utsatta. Dödigheten vid förtäring av vissa vanliga bekämpningsmedel ligger på drygt 70%.^[75]

Gasning

Inandning av gaser och ångor är den sjätte vanligaste självmordsmetoden i Sverige, 4,6 procent av självmorden i Sverige mellan 1995 och 2004 skedde med denna metod.^[49] Självmord genom kolmonoxidförgiftning från förbränning av träkol är betydligt mer vanligt i Asien än i Europa; år 2003 var det den andra vanligaste självmordsmetoden i Hongkong där det utgjorde 25 procent av alla fallen.^[76] Den här metoden är möjlig att genomföra med exempelvis helium vilket förhindrar panik och kvävnadskänsla innan människan tappar medvetandet.^[77]

Överdos

Barbiturater är en läkemedelsgrupp som upptäcktes i början på 1900-talet och vars olika preparat i rätta mängder kan användas för att behandla ångest, sömnproblem och epilepsi men som fasats då den var svår att dosera och ofta användes för självmord och förgiftningsolyckor. Under de senaste årtiondena har förskrivningen av preparat i barbituratfamiljen till stor del upphört till förmån för de mycket säkrare bensodiazepinerna, och självmordstalen med sömnmedel har sjunkit.^{[78][79][80]} Många föredrar att ta livet av sig med tabletter till följd av att det är pålitligt, snarare än att använda sig av en så kallad "exit bag".^[81] Det finns företag som tjänar pengar på att sälja självmordspiller till de som önskar att begå självmord. Försäljningen är kontroversiell.^[82] Särskilt Nembutal är populärt, men även Cyanid.

Hängning

Hängning är den näst vanligaste självmordsmetoden i Sverige med en andel på 28,1 procent av självmorden under perioden från 1995 till 2004.^[49]

Skjutning

Skjutning är den tredje vanligaste självmordsmetoden i Sverige, 10 procent av självmorden i Sverige mellan 1995 och 2004 skedde med denna metod.^[49] I USA är självmord den vanligaste typen av dödsorsak föranledd av skjutvapen, och den i särklass vanligaste självmordsmetoden. Den stora spridningen av handeldvapen är en viktig anledning till att USA har höga självmordstal i internationella jämförelser.^[källa behövs] I USA var år 2000 4 % av alla skottskador som behandlades på sjukhus misslyckade självmord.^[83]

Dränkning

Självdräckning är den fjärde vanligaste självmordsmetoden i Sverige, 8,6 procent av självmorden i Sverige mellan 1995 och 2004 skedde med denna metod.^[49]

Fall från hög höjd

Hopp från hög höjd är den femte vanligaste självmordsmetoden i Sverige, 5 procent av självmorden i Sverige mellan 1995 och 2004 skedde med denna metod.^[49] Cirka 60–70 personer tar livet av sig i Sverige varje år genom hopp från hög höjd.^[84] Det är vanligt att man använder sig av broar, då dessa ofta når en viss höjd, men det händer att mäniskor överlever sina självmordsförsök, trots fall på så mycket som 26 meter.^{[85][86][87][88][89][90]} Många broar i Stockholm har fått höjda stakat för att förhindra mäniskor från att begå självmord.^{[91][92][93][94][95][96]} Bland annat 2012 som en del av SPIS, Suicidprevention inom Stockholms län.^{[97][98][99][96]}



Höga staket designade för att försvåra självmord.

Stickande och skärande

Att med stickande och skärande föremål åsamka sig själv sår som skall leda till att man förblöder är den sjunde vanligaste självmordsmetoden i Sverige 2,5 procent av självmorden i Sverige mellan 1995 och 2004 skedde med denna metod.^[49]

Självtändning

Självtändning innebär att den som försöker ta livet av sig, sätter eld på sig själv med hjälp av någon form av brandfarlig vätska.

Trafikolyckor

En del trafikolyckor och då främst singelolyckor är i själva verket självmord eller självmordsförsök^{[100][101]} Det är också vanligt att personer hoppar framför tåg och tunnelbanevagnar, bilar, eller dylikt, för att dö, något som kan orsaka förseningar. Detta har gjort att vissa argumenterat för att personer ska hindras från detta genom glasdörrar vid spåren, som hos Citybanan.^[102]

Hoppa framför tåg

Vart tjugonde självmord i Sverige sker genom kollision med tåg. Metoden ses som ett allvarligt arbetsmiljöproblem för lokförare. 145 (76 %) av de 192 dödsfall som skedde vid den svenska järnvägen mellan 2000 och 2002 självmord.^[103] CCTV av järnvägsspår har utvecklats och försöksinstallerats på sträckningen Lund-Malmö, där många självmord sker.^[104] Omkring två tredjedelar av alla självmordsförsök i tunnelbanan i Montréal, Kanada misslyckas. Samma siffror gäller i övriga städer, bland annat Stockholm. Överlevande får ofta mycket allvarliga men, som lemlästning^[105] och förarna blir ofta starkt påverkade psykiskt.^[106]

Självmord via polis

En metod som polisen i främst USA uppmärksammat är självmord genom att vifta med ett skjutvapen eller liknande för att sedan bli ihjälskjuten av polisen. I massmedia i USA kallas detta ofta för Suicide by cop. I Sverige inträffar varje år flera försök där mäniskor vill bli skjutna av polisen.^[107] Ett exempel är Mattias Flink som uppgav att han sköt andra för att han ville bli skjuten av polisen och stupa i strid.^[108]

Religiösa perspektiv

I de flesta kultursärerna och kanske framför allt de som präglats av de abrahamitiska religionerna har självmord betraktats som en tabubelagd gärning. Samtidigt har dock rena självmordsattacker i till exempel krig belönats med ett martyrskap och en säker plats i himmel. I islams jihad och kristendomens korståg fick de stridande och medvandrande löfte om en plats i paradiset om de dog, något som sannolikt ökade offerviljan, särskilt vid betänkande den religiösa tiden för dessa företeelser.

I historisk tid har ofta personen som försökt ta sitt liv setts som en brottsling, som försökt sig på ett mord men misslyckats. Det hänger samman med att livet inte sågs som ens eget, utan tillhörande Gud eller staten. I dag har de flesta moderna kyrkor och andra religiösa samfund antagit en mer förlåtande syn på självmördaren; man utgår ifrån att självmördarna inte är riktigt tillräckneliga (i någon mening sjuka och utan förmåga att begripa sin egen situation) och blir därför, ur en teologisk synvinkel, ansvarsbefriade. I Sverige blev (i juridisk mening) självmord lagligt 1856, men fortfarande är självmord och, ännu vanligare, medhjälp till självmord olagligt på många håll i världen.

För övrigt har det i modern tid ägt rum en normalisering av synen på självmord till att se det som ett ödesdigert uttryck för psykisk ohälsa och samhället har på de flesta håll tagit som sin uppgift att på olika sätt försöka intervenera – uppenbart självmordsbenägna kan frihetsberövas och underkastas psykiatrisk tvångsvård. På många håll har civila organisationer som kyrkor och intresseföreningar nödnummer dit självmordsbenägna kan ringa för att få stöd och råd; flera av dem går att nå genom landets nödnummer.

Enligt senaste forskning inom suicid så kan självmord ibland ses som en psykisk olycka. Psykisk ohälsa är inte alltid förklaringen till att någon tar sitt liv. En person som befinner sig i en extremt pressad livssituation, som arbetslöshet, skilsmässa eller en anhörig död, kan få självmordstankar. Att en person har självmordstankar är inte farligt men om denne börjar agera på dessa tankar kan en psykisk olycka ske som leder till att denne tar sitt liv.^[109]

Judendomens syn

Judendomens syn på självmordet har i mångt och mycket gått i arv till kristendom och islam. För judar är självmordet absolut tabu och personen anses vara en mördare. Det sägs också att livet inte är ens eget utan Guds och att det därför är orätt att ta sitt liv. Efter självmordet fastnar själen i världen, hos oss: Kroppen återgår till stoft, men själen får inte komma in i paradiset.

I Tanach (eller gamla testamentets böcker i Bibeln) beskrivs några självmord. Det första är judarnas förste konung, Saul, som tog sig av daga med svärd när hans vapendragare tvekade att göra så. Vidare, när Ahitofel önskar soldater för att slå kung David, men nekas detta, tar han sitt liv. När Simri blir överfallen i Tirsa retirerar han till sitt palats och bränner det med sig själv i.^[110] Simson dödade sig själv och sina fiender i en självmordsattack enligt Domarboken.^[111]

Kristendomens syn

Svenska kyrkan gör idag ingen skillnad mellan människor som dött på grund av självmord eller av andra orsaker. Man betonar Guds kärlek till alla människor och försöker på olika sätt hjälpa anhöriga, och människor som funderar på att begå självmord. Historiskt sett har synen varit en helt annan, man har bland annat nekat att begrava självmördare i vigid jord.^[112]

Bland katoliker har självmord betraktats som en av de allvarligaste synderna man kan begå. Historiskt har kyrkan haft en sträng hållning mot personer som begått självmord, inte hållit begravningsgudstjänst och inte låtit dem ligga i vigid jord. Enligt katolska kyrkans katekes (n. 2280-2283) är människan förvaltare och inte ägare av sitt liv. Självmord är ett brott mot den kärlek som människan ska hysa till sig själv och ett uttryck för bristande solidaritet med de sociala sammanhang man ingår i. Svåra psykiska besvär, ångest eller fruktan för prövningar, lidande eller tortyr är förmildrande omständigheter vid bedömningen av suicid. Man ska inte misströsta om evig frälsning för den som berövat sig livet, eftersom Gud kan ge möjlighet till ånger också på andra sidan döden, och kyrkan ber för dem som begått denna desperata handling.

Enligt aposteln Matteus i Matteusevangeliet 27:5 ska Jesu lärjunge Judas Iskariot ha hängt sig efter att ha förrått Jesus.

Islams syn

Enligt koranen förbjuder Allah (Gud) människan att döda eller skada sig själv. I Koranen står det: "Av denna orsak förskrev Vi för Israels barn att om någon dödar en människa, som inte själv har dödat någon eller försökt störa ordningen på jorden och sprida sedesfördärv, skall det anses som om han hade dödat hela människosläktet och om någon räddar en människa skall det anses som om han hade räddat hela människosläktet". [Koranen 5:32].

Hinduismens syn

Hinduismen godkänner inte självmord. Anledningen är att en människa inte kan komma ifrån sitt öde och liv. Den som begår självmord får ett svårare liv efter detta, eller går tillbaka till en lägre livsnivå. Det är ett stort misstag för individen om självmord begås. En hindu som begår självmord kommer varken till himlen eller till helvetet, utan denne återföds till något sämre hela tiden och kommer aldrig kunna uppnå moksha.^[113]

Buddhismens syn

Inom buddhismen har man olika uppfattningar om frågan att ta sitt eget liv. I skrifterna står det, [källa behövs] att det är tillåtet att begå självmord när man har nått en viss upphöjd nivå i livet för de upplysta; de upplysta har inga önskningar kvar i livet och kan uppgå i nirvana. I Kina och Japan utfördes ibland sådana rituella självmord där munkar drack te av olika örter och upplöst harts under flera dagar för att sedan begravas levande. Där kunde sedan munken sitta i flera dagar innan han dog. Lyckades självmordet fullt ut blev liket självmumifierat. Däremot var det inte tillåtet att begå självmord om man tillhörde de icke-upplysta. De oupplysta har en lång väg att gå med många återfödelser, medan en upplyst persons handlingar inte längre anses generera karma, varken ont eller gott.

Ett litet antal buddhistiska munkar (utan status som upplysta) har också, i modern tid, tagit livet av sig i politisk protest, som regel genom att dränka in sig i bensin och antända sig på offentlig plats.

I litteratur och film

Självmord har länge skildrats i litteraturen. Den grekiske skalden Homeros hjältefigur Ajax begår självmord genom att slänga sig över sitt svärd när han besegrats av Odysseus.

Litteraturhistoriens kanske mest kända självmord äger rum i William Shakespeares pjäs *Romeo och Julia* om förbjuden kärlek. Den slutar med att de två förälskade ungdomarna begår självmord efter ett missförstånd.

Den tyske skalden Johann Wolfgang von Goethe skrev 1774 den korta brevromanen *Den unge Werthers lidanden* om målaren Werther som är olyckligt kär i sin bäste väns trolovade, Charlotte. Den känslösamma Werther mäktar inte med och skjuter sig. Romanen var upphovet till en våg av känslosamhet och svärmande krig begrepp som *Weltschmerz*. Mest uppståndelse väckte alla de självmord som tillskrevs romanen (se *Werther-effekt*).



Ajax självmord

Självmord i film är ofta av typen självmordsattack eller blivande martyrschap. Ett av de mer makabra exemplen på motsatsen är den japanska filmen *Suicide Club* som börjar med hur 54 flickor i skoluniform hoppar framför ett framrusande pendeltåg. Filmen kretsar kring Tokyo-polisen som försöker reda ut hur mängder av ungdomar fås att sluta självmordspakter på Internet.

"Det finns bara ett enda riktigt allvarligt filosofiskt problem: självmordet." Så börjar Camus filosofiska roman *Myten om Sisyfos*, som behandlar det absurdas livets val och kval. Enligt författaren är även en tråls enformiga liv, utan hopp eller mening, värt att leva.

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Externa länkar

-  Wikimedia Commons har media som rör [Självmord](#).
-  Scholia har publikationer om [Självmord](#) (<https://scholia.toolforge.org/topic/Q10737>)

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Självmordsattack

En **självmordsattack** är ett attentat som är utformat så att utövaren får dödliga skador. Motivet är ofta politiskt och/eller religiöst. Många självmordsbombningar förekommer på platser med mycket folk, som torg, eller under färd i fordon som buss, båt, flygplan och tåg. Självmordsbombningar är en form av terrorism i de fall då de riktas mot civila.

Självmordsattacker förekommer i många fall från 1800-talet i Europa. 1831 sprängde den nederländske löjtnanten Jan van Speijk sin egen båt i hamnen i Antwerpen den 5 februari 1831 för att inte bli tagen av belgarna under den belgiska revolutionen. I Ryssland uppstod en rörelse som ville ta död på stats- och regeringschefer, som vid bombattentatet mot tsar Alexander II av Ryssland 1881 då Ignacy Hrynowiecki tog sitt liv då han utförde attentatet.

I modern tid förknippas självmordsbombare mycket med al-Qaida och muslimsk fundamentalism. Självmordsattacker har varit en del i konflikterna i Egypten, Irak, Afghanistan, Libanon, Israel–Palestina-konflikten och Kaukasus.

Kända attacker

- Under andra världskriget genomförde flera japanska stridspiloter, så kallade kamikazepiloter, självmordsattacker genom att frivilligt störtdyka med sina krigsflygplan rakt in i USA:s örlogsfartyg.
- Den 11 september 2001 genomförde militanta islamister de så kallade 11 september-attackerna i USA, där bland annat flygplan kapades och kördes rakt in i World Trade Center och försvarshögkvarteret Pentagon.
- Den 11 december 2010 utfördes Bombdåden i Stockholm 2010 i anslutning till Drottninggatan i Stockholm mitt under pågående julhandel. Först exploderade en bil på Olof Palmes gata och tio minuter senare skedde en explosion på Bryggargatan. I den senare explosionen omkom gärningsmannen och två personer skadades lindrigt.
- Den 22 juni 2015 utörfördes attentatet mot den grekisk-ortodoxa kyrkan Mar Elias kyrka i Damaskus, Syrien, när en beväpnad man sköt och detonerade en bombväst inne i kyrkan. Minst 25 personer dödades (inklusive terroristen) och 52 skadades.

Se även

- Kamikaze



Den 11 september 2001 slog terrorister till i USA.

- Självantändning
- Ledarlöst motstånd
- Politisk brottslighet
- Våldsfrämjande radikalisering

Källor

Den här artikeln är helt eller delvis baserad på material från engelskspråkiga Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page), tidigare version (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicide_attack).

- Kimball, Charles. *När religionen blir ond*

Litteratur

- Reuter, Cristoph (2009). *Med livet som vapen*. Lund: Historiska media. ISBN 9189442857

Hämtad från "<https://sv.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Självmordsattack&oldid=58487367>"



Självmordsbrev



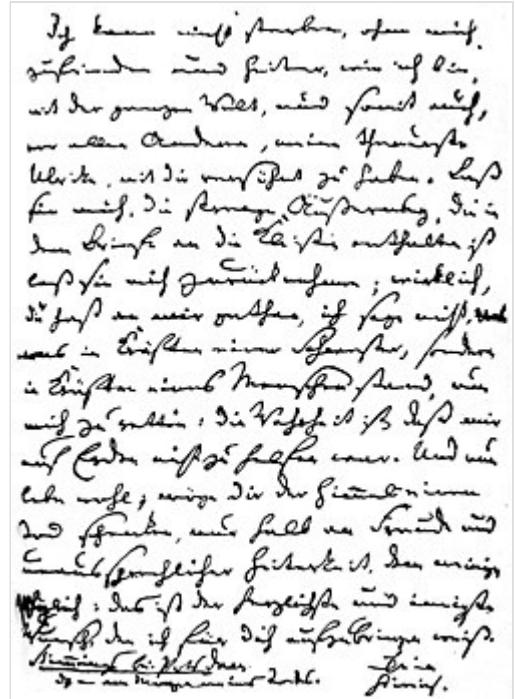
Den här artikeln **behöver källhänvisningar för att kunna verifieras.** (2017-04)

Ätgärda genom att lägga till pålitliga källor (gärna som fotnoter). Uppgifter utan källhänvisning kan ifrågasättas och tas bort utan att det behöver diskuteras på diskussionssidan.

Ett **självmordsbrev** är ett meddelande som framställs av någon som planerar självmord. Självmordsbrev förekommer som text, ljud eller video, och kan vara avsedda att hittas före eller efter att självmordet genomförts. Den kan till exempel innehålla ett informellt testamente, eller en beskrivning av de tankar och känslor som föranleder självmordsförsöket.

Det kan finnas många syften med självmordsbrev. Författaren kan vilja påverka sina anhöriga efter ett genomfört självmord, antingen till att minska eller förstärka skuldkänslor.

Skrivande av ett självmordsbrev är en allvarlig signal om en självmordskris. Det är också vanligt att den som genomför en självmordsattack framställer ett självmordsbrev.



Ich kann mich darüber, ob mich
zufrieden sind Eltern, wie ich bin,
ob der gerechte Tod, und sonst auch,
ob mein Andenken, mein Vermächtnis
lebt, mit dem Gefühl zu fühlen. Ich
für mich. Ich kann mich darüber, ob ich
in dem Leid, in die Zeit, als es aufgetreten ist
einfach mit Freuden; vielleicht,
ob ich an mein Ortschen, ob ich mich noch
wieder in Erinnerung sehe, oder
in Erinnerung mein Name, mein
und mein Leben. Ich kann mich darüber, ob ich mir
auf Gedanken nicht freie kann. Und um
euch zu sagen, wie ich die Situation meine
und fühle, und falls es kommt mit
einer ungünstigen Entscheidung, ob das einzige
Möglich ist, dass ich der Angestellte und einzige
Vater, der ich für Sie aufzubringen weiß.
Heinrich von Kleist 1811. Heinrich von Kleist

Ett självmordsbrev skrivet av den tyska poeten Heinrich von Kleist 1811.



Självmordsförsök

Självmordsförsök, *parasuicid*, innebär att en person gör ett försök att begå självmord, men överlever. Beräkningar gör gällande att 10–15 procent av dem som överlever ett självmordsförsök kommer att dö genom självmord. De som överlever ett självmordsförsök kan drabbas av allvarliga skador och funktionshinder. Den som överlever en hängning kan på grund av syrebrist drabbas av hjärnskador, medan den som tar en överdos med droger kan få organsvikt, särskilt leversvikt. Den som hoppar från hög höjd och överlever kan ådra sig svåra skador på ryggrad och skallben/hjärna.

Det är inte ovanligt att personer som företar misslyckade självmordshandlingar både vill och inte vill fortsätta leva. Handlingen utgör då ett försök att bryta det starka spänningstillstånd de hamnat i.

Referenser

Den här artikeln är helt eller delvis baserad på material från engelskspråkiga Wikipedia, *Suicide attempt* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicide_attempt), 23 juli 2019 (https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Suicide_attempt&oldid=907538576).

Se även

- Självmordskris

Tryckta källor

- Egidius, Henry, *Psykologilexikon*. Stockholm: Natur och Kultur 2008, sid. 628 ISBN 978-91-27-11658-0
- Suominen, Kirsi et al., "Completed Suicide After a Suicide Attempt:A 37-Year Follow-Up Study", *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 161:3, March 2004, 563–564, ISSN 0002-953X

Hämtad från "<https://sv.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Självmordsförsök&oldid=49629775>"



Självmordspakt

Självmordspakt kallas det när två eller fler personer ingår en pakt att begå självmord tillsammans. Det är alltså en typ av kollektivt självmord, men det begreppet förknippas främst med större grupper av personer som begår självmord, ofta av ideologiska, religiösa eller liknande skäl.

En anledning till att folk ingår självmordspakter kan vara att de inte själva klarar av att ta steget att begå självmord och att det känns tryggare att göra det tillsammans med någon annan. Sedan internet etablerats, har folk från olika delar av världen fått kontakt med varandra och ingått självmordspakter, ibland kallat neticide.^[1]

Exempel

- Två flickor i Wales, Storbritannien, försöker begå självmord efter att ha träffats på internet. Den ena dog, den andra hamnade i koma.^[2]
- En norsk man och en kvinna från Österrike begår självmord genom att hoppa från Preikestolen, ett högt stup och känt turistmål i Norge. I planeringsstadet av detta självmord var även en norsk flicka inblandad. Hon försökte senare avstyra självmordet genom att lämna mailkorrespondensen till polisen, men för sent.^[3]
- Fem människor hittas döda i en bil i Japan efter att ha dött av kolmonoxidförgiftning. Uppgifter finns att 60 personer i Japan ska ha begått självmord genom kolmonoxidförgiftning efter att ha eldat med traditionella kolbrännare i terrakotta.^[4]

Källor

1. ^ Får sällskap in i döden - via internet (<https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/article10540439.ab>), Aftonbladet, 2005-02-06
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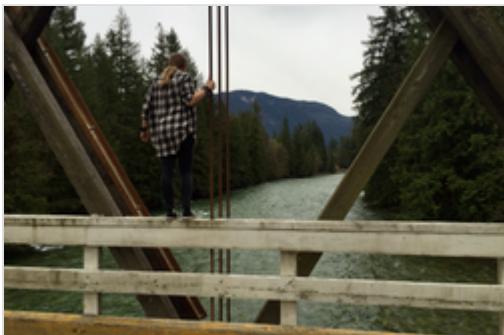
Suicide among people with autism

Suicide among people with autism has been the subject of increasing scientific research, particularly since the late 2010s. Studies have identified a significantly higher prevalence of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts in this population, affecting both minors and adults, including through requests for assisted suicide. The suicide mortality rate among autistic individuals is estimated to be three to seven times higher than that of the general population, with variations across countries.

The underlying causes of this increased risk are currently under investigation. Survivor accounts frequently reference feelings of being perceived as a burden, internal conflict related to autism, psychological trauma, and fatigue associated with masking autistic traits in social contexts. Additional risk factors include experiences of bullying, delayed diagnosis, and high intellectual ability. These risks are often under-recognized by clinicians and family members. The high number of assisted suicide requests by autistic individuals in countries such as Belgium and the Netherlands has prompted debate regarding the adequacy of social and healthcare support systems for autistic people.

Evidence suggests that fostering self-esteem and enhancing social inclusion can contribute to reducing suicide risk within the autistic population.

Statistics and facts



Someone on the edge of a bridge

The suicide rate among autistic individuals is widely recognized as significantly higher^{[1][2][3][4][5][6][7]} than in the general population and is considered one of the leading causes of death within this group.^[8] Reported rates vary depending on the methodology used and the country in which the research is conducted. Part of this variability stems from differences in the measurement tools employed, particularly those that do not differentiate between suicide attempts and non-suicidal self-injurious behavior.^[9]

Several studies conducted between 2014 and 2017, particularly in the United Kingdom, reported suicide rates approximately six times higher among autistic individuals compared to the general population.^[9] A 2016 Swedish study found the rate to be 7.5 times higher.^{[4][10]} According to a 2017 report by the National Institute of Public Health of Quebec, the suicide rate among autistic youth under the age of 24 was twice that of their non-autistic peers.^[P 1] A similarly elevated rate was observed in Utah among autistic youth between 2013 and 2017.^[11] A controlled study in Taiwan involving 5,218 autistic adolescents reported a suicide attempt rate of 3.9%, compared to 0.7% in the control group.^[12]

A Danish cohort study involving over 6.5 million individuals over a 10-year period concluded that individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) have a risk of suicide attempts and suicide more than three times higher than the general population.^{[13][14][P 2]} Within the cohort, 35,020 individuals

had a confirmed ASD diagnosis; among them, 587 (0.9%) attempted suicide, and 53 died by suicide.^[15] Similar rates were observed among individuals exhibiting autistic traits but without a formal diagnosis.^[16] In England, a separate analysis of individuals who died by suicide found a significant overrepresentation of autistic characteristics.^[17]

Rates of suicidal ideation

A 2023 systematic review and meta-analysis conducted by Victoria Newell and collaborators found that suicidal ideation affects 34.2% of autistic and presumed autistic individuals without intellectual disabilities. Suicide attempts and behaviors were observed in 24.3% of this population, significantly higher than the general population, in which transnational estimates place suicidal ideation at approximately 9%, with 2–3% reporting suicide plans or attempts.^[16] A separate meta-analysis published in 2022 by O'Halloran et al. found that about one-quarter of all autistic individuals experience suicidal ideation and approximately one in ten have attempted suicide during their lifetime.^[18]

The prevalence of suicidal ideation varies by region.^[16] Reported rates are lower in several Asian countries, including South Korea, Taiwan, China, Singapore, and Japan, compared to Europe and Oceania.^[16] This lower prevalence may not reflect actual trends. It could be influenced by factors such as legal penalties for suicide, cultural emphasis on family honor, and greater stigma surrounding autism and mental health.^[19]

Gender ratio

A 2014 systematic review by Segers and Rawana initially found higher suicide rates among autistic men compared to women.^[20] However, subsequent cohort studies conducted in Denmark,^{[21][14]} Sweden,^[22] Ontario (Canada),^[23] and Utah (United States)^[11] reported that suicidal ideation and suicide attempt rates are consistently higher among autistic women and girls than among their male counterparts. This trend contrasts with patterns observed in the general population, where men typically exhibit higher rates of suicide completion than women.^{[24][25]}



14-year-old autistic teenager in sensory withdrawal (or shutdown)

A 2023 systematic review identified autistic women without intellectual disabilities as a population at particularly high risk.^[9] However, it found limited confirmation of earlier findings suggesting that suicidality is more frequent among autistic women.^[26] Most of the studies included in this review had a majority of female participants.^[26] The elevated suicide risk in this population may be linked to challenges in diagnosis, often resulting in delayed or missed identification of autism in women.^[24]

Age group trends

In the Danish cohort, suicide rates were higher than in the general population across all age groups beginning at age 10.^{[15][14]} The highest suicide rate was recorded among individuals aged 30 to 39.^[14]

The 2023 meta-analysis noted a lack of comprehensive research on suicide rates by age group^[9] but suggested that rates tend to be higher among adults than among youth,^[16] especially from age 20 onward.^{[26][27]} These rates remain elevated in older adults, who exhibit suicidal ideation at rates five to six times higher than in the general population.^[28]

Methods of suicide

According to data from the Utah cohort, autistic individuals are less likely than non-autistic individuals to die by firearm-related suicide but show no significant differences in the overall selection of suicide methods.^[11] There is also no notable distinction between men and women in the techniques used. Approximately 73% of suicides involve violent means.^[11] Non-violent methods typically include asphyxiation and poisoning.^[10]

In a Finnish cohort study of autistic individuals with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities, recorded suicide methods included hanging, drowning, poisoning (via cigarette or medication ingestion), and suicide by train—either by lying on the tracks or jumping in front of a moving train.^[29]

Limitations of research

Most studies on suicide and autism are conducted in high-income countries, even though global suicide rates tend to be higher in low- and middle-income regions.^[30] Additionally, there is a notable lack of research focused on autistic individuals with intellectual disabilities.^[31] Another methodological limitation concerns the frequent failure to distinguish between passive suicidal ideation (a wish to be dead) and active suicidal ideation (an intention to end one's life), which may affect the accuracy of reported prevalence rates.^[30]

History of studies

The issue of suicidality among autistic individuals began receiving public attention in the early 2010s. On November 17, 2010, Lynne Soraya, a parent of a suicidal autistic child, published a blog post on *Psychology Today* highlighting the severe lack of resources and data on the subject.^[P 3] In a follow-up post two and a half years later, she noted the initiation of a pioneering study involving 791 American children,^[P 4] which found that suicidal ideation occurred 28 times more frequently among autistic children than in a control group.^{[P 5][1]}

A 2014 systematic review by Magali Segers and Jennine Rawana underlined the scarcity of research dedicated specifically to suicide within the autistic population, despite a broader literature on suicidality in the general population. Their review identified only ten studies that quantified the proportion of autistic individuals in suicidal populations, which ranged from 7.3% to 15%.^[20] Also in 2014, Italian neurologist and pediatrician Michele Raja, drawing on preliminary findings from a British study led by Dr. Sarah Cassidy, published an editorial in *The Lancet* urging healthcare professionals to recognize the elevated suicide risk in autistic individuals,^[32] particularly those historically diagnosed with Asperger syndrome.^[Note 1] This appeal contributed to the inclusion of suicide prevention as a dedicated research theme supported for four years by the *International Society for Autism Research* (INSAR), incorporating participatory research methodologies that involved autistic individuals directly in the research process.^[A 1]

As of 2018, few scientific studies had specifically addressed the suicide risk among autistic individuals.^[3] Subsequent research has found that autistic traits are more prevalent among adults who have attempted suicide than in the general population.^{[17][33]} These traits are also more pronounced in individuals with multiple suicide attempts compared to those with only one attempt.^[33]

In 2020, journalist and autism rights advocate Sara Luterman criticized the disparity in research funding between basic and applied autism studies. She highlighted the allocation of significant resources to studies involving genetically modified animals while comparatively little funding was directed toward understanding the high suicide rate among autistic adults.^[14] In February 2025, Brittany N. Hand and colleagues drew attention to common misinterpretations in the communication of scientific findings related to autism and mortality. They particularly criticized how the study by Hirkivoski et al. was presented in high-impact journals and mainstream media, which claimed that being autistic reduced life expectancy by 16 to 18 years without adequately contextualizing the role of suicide. This miscommunication reportedly had negative consequences for autistic individuals, including home insurance denials, psychological distress, altered retirement planning, and increased healthcare disparities.^[34]

Underestimation of suicide risk

Collaboration between autistic individuals experiencing suicidality and healthcare professionals is considered essential for reducing mortality.^[35] Access to post-diagnostic support services also plays a critical role.^[36] However, autistic individuals frequently encounter barriers to accessing suicide prevention hotlines and mental health support services, including administrative and systemic obstacles.^[37]

In 2022, medical researcher Luke Curtis stated:

The autistic community is highly exposed to suicide risk. Much more community support, clinical attention, and quality research are needed to prevent and treat depression and suicide in children, adolescents, and adults.

—Luke Curtis^[38]

By healthcare professionals

A 2020 survey conducted by Jager-Hyman found that American physicians involved in suicide prevention reported greater difficulty identifying suicide risk in autistic patients compared to non-autistic patients. These physicians also tended to perceive non-autistic patients^[39] as being at higher risk, despite statistical evidence indicating a higher suicide risk among autistic individuals.^[40] This suggests a tendency among healthcare professionals to underestimate suicide risk within the autistic population.^[40] A 2023 survey of physicians in the northeastern United States indicated that fewer than half correctly identified autistic individuals as a high-risk group for suicide.^[41]

In a 2018 investigation published by *Spectrum News*, journalist Cheryl Platzman Weinstock reported that psychiatrists may overlook signs of suicidality in autistic patients due to differences in emotional expression.^[P 6] Common indicators of suicide risk in the general population—such as changes in sleep,

appetite, or social behavior—may already be present as part of the individual's baseline characteristics, complicating risk detection.^[P 6]

By parents

A 2023 meta-analysis indicates that rates of suicidal ideation reported by parents are consistently lower than those reported by autistic youth themselves.^[26] This discrepancy suggests that autistic individuals may be more accurate in recognizing and reporting their suicidality, while parents tend to underreport these symptoms.^[18] Studies combining self-report and informant-based methods support this observation.^[26]

Development of therapies and suicide prevention tools

Until 2020, no suicide risk assessment tool was specifically designed for the autistic population.^[40] General tools, such as the *Safety Planning Intervention* developed by Stanley and Brown in 2012, have been used by healthcare professionals, though they are not tailored to autistic individuals.^[42] In 2021, a research team led by Sarah Cassidy developed the *Suicidal Behaviours Questionnaire—Autism Spectrum Conditions (SBQ-ASC)*,^{[43][P 7]} which, as of 2023, remains the only validated screening instrument specifically for autistic individuals.^[9] Other general tools, such as the *Ask Suicide-Screening Questions (ASQ)* and the *Self-Injurious Thoughts and Behaviors Interview—Self Report (SITBI-SR)*, have also been found to apply to this population.^[44]

A multicenter study launched in 2020 is evaluating the effectiveness of dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), a treatment already proven effective for suicidal individuals with borderline personality disorder, in autistic populations.^[45]

Risk factors

Some suicide risk factors specific to the autistic population differ from those observed in neurotypical individuals,^{[46][47]} however, few studies have comprehensively identified them.^{[4][20][24]}

The high prevalence of autistic traits among individuals with a history of suicide attempts may be explained by several hypotheses: that high autistic traits are an independent predictor of suicidality; that undiagnosed autism is more prevalent among individuals who attempt suicide; or that comorbid conditions associated with autism contribute significantly to suicide risk.^[33]



Allegory of a suicide by consumption of a lethal substance

Recognized risk factors

Common risk factors for suicide across populations include depression, social isolation,^[48] and experiences of harassment. Among autistic individuals, these factors are often compounded by a heightened sense of being perceived as a burden, conflicted feelings of belonging, and a persistent sense

of trauma.^[49] A review by Segers and Rawana identified additional risk factors, including lower socio-economic status, racialization, and behavioral challenges.^[20] Limited access to healthcare services and support may further exacerbate these risks.^[27] Autistic youth most at risk of suicidal ideation or attempts are often those with both the highest number of adverse life events (e.g., bullying, bereavement, theft) and the least developed coping mechanisms.^[50]

The combination of perceived burdensomeness and conflicted belonging may contribute to suicidal ideation among autistic individuals. The likelihood of acting on these thoughts may depend on an individual's tolerance of fear related to death and physical pain.^[51] A 2023 review by Annabelle M. Mournet and colleagues identified interpersonal constructs as the most extensively studied and strongly evidenced contributors to suicide risk, followed by depressive symptoms.^[52]

Mental health, harassment, and sexual violence

Poor mental health is strongly associated with increased suicide risk.^[53] Data from the Ontario cohort identified mood disorders, anxiety, schizophrenia, and personality disorders as contributing factors.^[23] The Danish cohort further emphasized the roles of anxiety and seasonal affective disorders.^[54] Depression is a particularly prevalent risk factor, affecting autistic individuals at a rate approximately four times higher than that of the general population.^[55] Anxiety affects an estimated 40% of autistic children and 60% of autistic adults,^[55] with higher prevalence among women.^[56]

Social stigma and discrimination experienced by autistic individuals negatively impact mental health.^[57] Earlier misconceptions attributed poor mental health outcomes to autism itself;^[P 8] however, since the 2010s, studies have demonstrated that mental health issues—particularly anxiety and depression—are largely the result of minority stress and adverse living conditions.^[58] It is estimated that between 70% and 80% of autistic individuals have at least one co-occurring mental health condition.^[9]

Bullying has been identified as a contributing factor to suicidal ideation since at least 2013,^[59] and this link has been confirmed by subsequent research.^{[20][60]} High rates of sexual violence, particularly among autistic women, also contribute to elevated suicide risk.^[61] Among youth, social isolation and depression—both often related to bullying—are additional contributing factors.^[P 6]

Camouflaging

Camouflaging, also referred to as masking, is recognized as a suicide risk factor specific to the autistic population.^[24] This coping strategy involves consciously suppressing or altering autistic behaviors to conform to social norms, to facilitate social interaction, and avoid discrimination.^[62] It is particularly prevalent among autistic women, who often report experiencing psychological distress and suicidal ideation related to the sustained effort required to mask their traits in public.^{[63][62][27]}

Researchers such as South et al. have questioned the expectation that autistic individuals must camouflage behaviors—such as making eye contact despite discomfort—to meet societal norms.^[5] Studies indicate that camouflaging is associated with adverse mental health outcomes, including heightened risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviors.^[5]

A 2020 online study, in which the majority of participants were women aged 20 to 23, found a correlation between camouflaging, thwarted belonging, and suicide risk.^[64] These findings were reinforced by a 2023 study that identified camouflaging as a significant transdiagnostic suicide risk factor that can persist

across the lifespan.^[65]

Late diagnosis

Late diagnosis of autism, particularly in individuals without intellectual disability, has also been associated with increased suicide risk. A 2014 study by Sarah Cassidy found that individuals diagnosed later in life had a higher prevalence of suicide attempts.^[P 9] A 2023 review confirmed this association, though it emphasized the need for further research due to potential selection biases.^[24]

High intellectual potential

Autistic individuals without intellectual disability appear to be at higher risk for suicide than those with co-occurring intellectual disabilities.^{[24][23][66][10]} However, research on individuals with more severe disabilities remains limited, in part due to methodological barriers such as reliance on written questionnaires.^[24]

A 2023 controlled study conducted by the University of Iowa on 7,000 autistic children found that those with both autism and high intellectual potential exhibited higher rates of suicidal ideation than autistic children with average IQ levels.^{[P 10][67]}

Risk factors under investigation

Several risk factors associated with suicidality in the general population remain underexplored within the autistic population. These include sleep disorders and eating disorders, both of which are more prevalent among autistic individuals^[56] and may contribute to increased suicide risk.^[5]

Education level

Findings on the relationship between educational attainment and suicide risk in autistic individuals differ from those observed in the general population. While a 2014 review identified low educational attainment as a risk factor for suicide mortality,^[20] a large Danish cohort study found that suicide rates among autistic individuals increased with higher levels of education. The highest rates were observed among those holding a doctoral degree (PhD).^[35] In contrast to trends in the general population, a high level of education does not appear to be a protective factor^[68] and may instead constitute a risk factor for autistic individuals. This association may be explained by increased individual pressure and greater exposure to stressors such as masking.^[35]

Employment

Autistic individuals experience higher rates of unemployment and social exclusion compared to the general population.^{[24][69]} However, employment does not appear to confer a protective effect against suicidality^[27] among autistic individuals, unlike in the general population.^[27] The Danish cohort study suggests that autistic employees may be more vulnerable to workplace discrimination, bullying, and precarious or low-paid jobs, which may increase stress and contribute to higher suicide risk.^[27]

Self-harm

Self-harm is recognized as a risk factor for suicide in the general population and is highly prevalent among autistic individuals.^[70] However, its role in predicting suicide risk within the autistic population^{[71][72]} remains unclear.^[9] A study involving 334 middle-school students in China found that 2.28% of those who engaged in self-harming behaviors also exhibited high levels of autistic traits, often accompanied by anxiety and rumination.^[73] Self-injurious behaviors are more frequently observed in autistic individuals with intellectual disabilities than in those without.^[61]



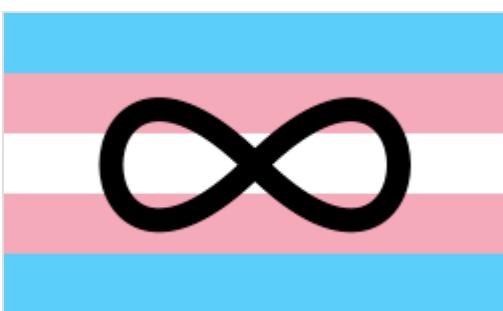
Extreme nail biting is often associated with autism spectrum disorders, as in this example.

In clinical settings, self-harm among autistic individuals is often interpreted as a symptom of autism itself, whereas in the non-autistic population, it is more commonly associated with elevated suicide risk.^[P 6] Currently, no direct association has been demonstrated between self-harming behaviors and suicide risk among autistic individuals.^[74] One hypothesis suggests that self-harm may contribute to suicide risk by diminishing the fear of death or physical pain.^[75]

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

A Swedish cohort study (1987–2013) identified ADHD as an additional suicide risk factor in autistic individuals.^[22] However, this finding was not corroborated by a similar Danish cohort study, indicating inconsistency in the available data.^[35]

Gender diversity



Flag combining the symbols of transidentity and neurodiversity

Gender dysphoria has been identified as a suicide risk factor in a 2022 review by O'Halloran and colleagues.^[76] This finding aligns with broader research showing that transgender and non-cisgender individuals have higher suicide rates than the general population.^[77]

Autistic individuals report higher rates of gender diversity and gender dysphoria compared to the general population.^[5] Suicidal ideation is significantly more prevalent among transgender and non-cisgender autistic individuals than among cisgender autistic individuals.^[78]

Sleep

While a significant body of research links sleep disorders to increased suicide risk in the general population, this correlation had not been specifically studied within the autistic population as of early 2025. A group of researchers identified the investigation of sleep-related issues as a top priority for future studies on the mental health of autistic adults.^[79]

Dismissed risk factors

According to data and self-reported accounts from autistic adults in Australia, the COVID-19 pandemic did not correspond with an increased suicide rate within this population.^[80] Respondents indicated that the pandemic had both positive and negative effects.^[80] Although it was occasionally associated with heightened depressive symptoms, no direct link to increased suicide risk was established.^[80]

Protective and preventive factors

Protective factors commonly identified in the general population—such as older age, higher educational attainment, employment, and cohabiting with a partner—have not demonstrated the same protective effects among autistic individuals.^[27] Resilience appears to be influenced by multiple factors.^[81] Some research suggests that the co-occurrence of autism and bipolar disorder may contribute to increased resilience in certain individuals.^[82] Identity formation also plays a significant role in suicide prevention. Improved outcomes are reported when family members and caregivers incorporate a neurodiversity-oriented perspective.^[83]

Enhancing quality of life and expanding access to social support networks are associated with reduced suicide risk.^[84] The promotion of self-esteem is likewise recognized as an important protective factor.^[49]

Contact with animals



Assistance dog trained to meet the specific needs of autistic people

Animal-assisted therapies are being investigated for their potential to reduce suicide risk among autistic individuals.^[85] Research suggests that interaction with dogs may have beneficial effects. Two primary mechanisms have been proposed: the responsibility of caring for the animal may foster a sense of purpose, and the perceived unconditional affection from the dog may contribute to improved mental health and a sense of social acceptance.^[85]

A qualitative study involving interviews with 36 autistic dog owners in the United Kingdom found that regular interactions with their pets, including activities such as walking, were associated with improved mental well-being and a perceived reduction in suicide risk.^[86]

Social inclusion

Social inclusion is recognized as a key protective factor against suicide among autistic individuals.^{[49][36]} Interventions may include support for developing social skills and facilitating meaningful social connections.^[50]

Psychology researcher Annabelle Mournet has emphasized the misconception that autistic individuals lack social motivation.^[P 11] She argues that many autistic people seek social relationships but encounter barriers due to social rejection.^[P 11] She advocates for the inclusion of social support components in suicide prevention strategies targeting the autistic population.^[P 11]

Public debate and publicized suicides

Ethical debate on assisted suicide

In Belgium and the Netherlands, assisted suicide is legally permitted for individuals experiencing psychological suffering.^[87] An overrepresentation of euthanasia requests from individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder—particularly women—has prompted ethical debates.^[87] Key concerns include the assessment of decision-making capacity in autistic individuals, the availability of alternative treatments,^[87] and whether autism alone constitutes sufficient grounds for assisted suicide.^[88] Researcher Michael M. Waddell has argued that autistic individuals represent a vulnerable group at risk of "irreparable harm through premature death by assisted suicide."^[87] In the context of discussions on expanding assisted suicide eligibility in Canada to include psychological suffering, legal scholar Trudo Lemmens stated that such policies risk reinforcing "the ableist presumption that life with a chronic disability is not worth living."^[P 12]



Claims have circulated suggesting that global initiatives, including a purported secret decision by the World Economic Forum, are promoting assisted suicide among autistic individuals and people with disabilities. These claims are unfounded and considered misinformation.^[P 13]

Assisted suicide in the Netherlands

Data from the Netherlands indicate a notable proportion of euthanasia cases involving individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Between 2011 and 2014, 19% of euthanasia requests for psychiatric conditions involved autistic individuals.^{[89][90]} From 2012 to 2021, 40 cases of euthanasia due to psychological suffering involved autistic individuals, including five under the age of 30 whose requests cited autism as the sole reason.^[P 14]

A qualitative analysis of nine Dutch cases found that the motivation for seeking assisted suicide was related less to the view of autism as an incurable condition and more to the ongoing challenges of living with the condition.^[91] A research team led by Irene Tuffrey-Wijne concluded that existing criteria for euthanasia in the Netherlands may not provide adequate safeguards for autistic applicants.^[91] Commenting on these findings, Canadian professor Tim Stainton highlighted broader ethical concerns, suggesting that societal failures—including insufficient accommodations and perceptions of disability as

a source of inevitable suffering—may contribute to these requests.^[92] He argued that such circumstances reflect a broader belief that "it is better to be dead than disabled," underscoring the need for improved support systems and societal inclusion.^[92]

Assisted suicide in Belgium

Between 2007 and 2012, a sample of 100 psychiatric patients who requested assisted suicide in the Flemish region of Belgium included 19 individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.^[93]

One high-profile case was that of Tine Nys, a 38-year-old woman diagnosed with Asperger syndrome. After several previous suicide attempts, her request for euthanasia was granted in 2010. The case led to extended legal proceedings and public debate concerning the interpretation of "unbearable psychological suffering" under Belgian euthanasia law, particularly in the context of autism without intellectual disability.^{[94][95]} Critics, including an autistic physician^[P 15] and a French autism advocacy association,^[A 2] argued that her suffering stemmed primarily from systemic factors such as a delayed diagnosis, social discrimination, and stigmatization of mental illness, rather than from autism itself.

Youth suicide associated with bullying and social rejection

Studies on youth suicide in the Netherlands have identified a recurring profile involving autistic boys who experience persistent social rejection.^[96] One such case is that of Cameron Warwick, an autistic and openly homosexual teenager in England, who endured prolonged bullying after coming out at the age of 12. He died by suicide in 2019 at the age of 16.^[P 16] Another case involved a 14-year-old boy named Daan from Waregem, Belgium, who was also autistic and reportedly subjected to bullying at school and sports clubs before taking his own life in 2023.^{[P 17][P 18]}

Testimonies from autistic women have also described prolonged experiences of school bullying, often leading to suicide attempts. These cases reflect a broader pattern in which social isolation, harassment, and lack of support contribute significantly to mental health challenges among autistic individuals.^[P 19]

Gareth Oates

In 2010, Gareth Oates, an 18-year-old from Stowmarket, United Kingdom, died by suicide after stepping in front of a train at Marsden Station.^[P 20] His case drew attention to issues surrounding school bullying and inadequate mental health support. According to his mother, Oates had experienced bullying from an early age, including being called "suicide boy" by peers,^[P 21] and had expressed suicidal thoughts since the age of 11. Despite warnings to Suffolk's mental health services, no effective intervention was provided.^{[P 22][P 23]} His death highlighted the lack of a dedicated national mental health support service for individuals aged 16 to 18 in the UK.^[P 24]

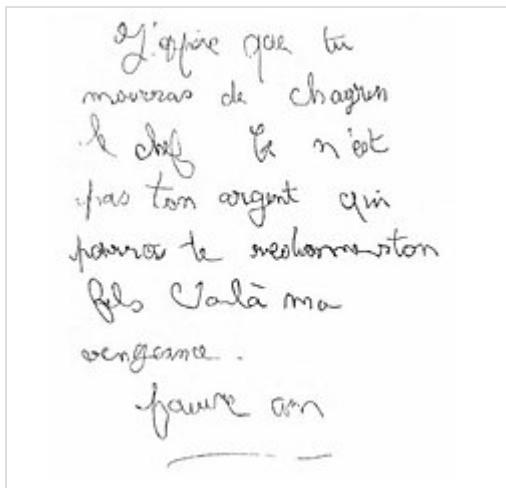


Gareth Oates threw himself under a train at Marsden.

Caitlyn Scott-Lee

In April 2023, Caitlyn Scott-Lee, a 16-year-old autistic student of Chinese origin, died by suicide at Wycombe Abbey School in England.^[P 25] Her diary indicated that a recent disciplinary action—following an incident during a school trip to Eton College—had contributed to her distress.^[P 26] Her father, who is also autistic, subsequently became involved in research and advocacy related to neurodiversity and mental health.^{[P 26][P 27]}

Impact of living conditions



Example of an anonymous hate letter whose author rejoices in the death of a child

In Canada, the lack of appropriate housing options for autistic adults without family support has been linked to poor living conditions, including placement in substandard accommodations. These circumstances have contributed to cases of suicide.^[P 28] On August 16, 2013, an anonymous hate letter was sent to the parents of an autistic child in Newcastle, Ontario, urging them to euthanize their child or relocate. The incident generated significant public condemnation in Canada and internationally, highlighting persistent stigma toward autistic individuals.^{[P 29][P 30][P 31]}

In October 2018, a 21-year-old individual from Sherbrooke, Quebec—presumed to be autistic and diagnosed with depression—died by suicide after unsuccessfully seeking psychological support over 20 months.^[P 32] In France, a couple from Woustviller publicly discussed the difficulties they faced in securing appropriate care for their severely disabled autistic child. In August 2021, they described their situation in terms of a "well-thought-out" collective suicide, underscoring the psychological toll of systemic shortcomings in care availability.^{[P 33][Note 2]}

In May 2022, Lindsay Bridges reported the suicide of her 20-year-old autistic daughter, which followed months of isolation and inadequate treatment in psychiatric wards in Manchester, United Kingdom.^[P 34]

Impact of sexual violence

In June 2021, a 12-year-old autistic girl in Southport, England, died by suicide through ingestion of lethal substances. Her death followed the refusal by local police to formally record her complaint of sexual assault by an older boy.^[P 35]

Impact of medication

In 2015, a 13-year-old autistic boy named Yassine died after jumping from the 10th floor of a building in the Franc-Moisin neighborhood of Saint-Denis, France.^[P 36] Initially not classified as suicide,^[P 36] the case later prompted advocacy group Vaincre l'autisme to raise concerns about the prescription of Abilify (aripiprazole), a medication associated with increased suicide risk.^[P 37] This led the French National Agency for the Safety of Medicines and Health Products to issue a warning noting that the medication is not recommended for use in autism.^{[P 37][P 38][P 39]}

Associative and political responses

In September 2021, the United Nations issued a statement calling on France to address the elevated suicide rates among autistic individuals.^[A 3] In response, the French government's 2023 national strategy for individuals with neurodevelopmental conditions included measures to adapt suicide prevention helplines and support platforms to the specific needs of autistic people.^[P 40]

Since at least July 2021,^[A 4] the UK's National Autistic Society has published guidance for families and healthcare professionals regarding suicide prevention for autistic individuals.^[A 5]

In August 2023, the RAID police unit in Bordeaux, France, intervened to prevent the suicide of a man diagnosed with autism and schizophrenia, concluding negotiations after approximately ninety minutes.^[P 41]

Cultural representations

In Germany, the novel *Alle Farben grau* ("All the Colors Are Grey"), published in September 2023, was inspired by the real-life case of a 16-year-old autistic teenager named Emil who died by suicide shortly after receiving a diagnosis of depression.^{[P 42][P 43]} The narrative highlights the lack of adequate support before his death, which occurred following a period of disappearance.^[P 42]

In 2022, during media promotion for his book *Bienvenue dans mon monde* ("Welcome to My World"), French game show contestant and radio commentator Paul El Kharrat publicly disclosed having experienced suicidal thoughts.^{[P 44][P 45]}

See also

- Autism therapies
- Autistic masking
- Autistic rights movement
- Discrimination against autistic people
- Employment of people with autism
- Mental health inequality
- Mental health of LGBTQ people
- Mortality of autistic individuals
- Suicide among LGBTQ people

Notes

1. The diagnosis of Asperger syndrome has no longer existed since the release of the ICD-11 in 2020.
2. As the young autistic person had not declared a desire to die, the situation is not legally considered a collective suicide.

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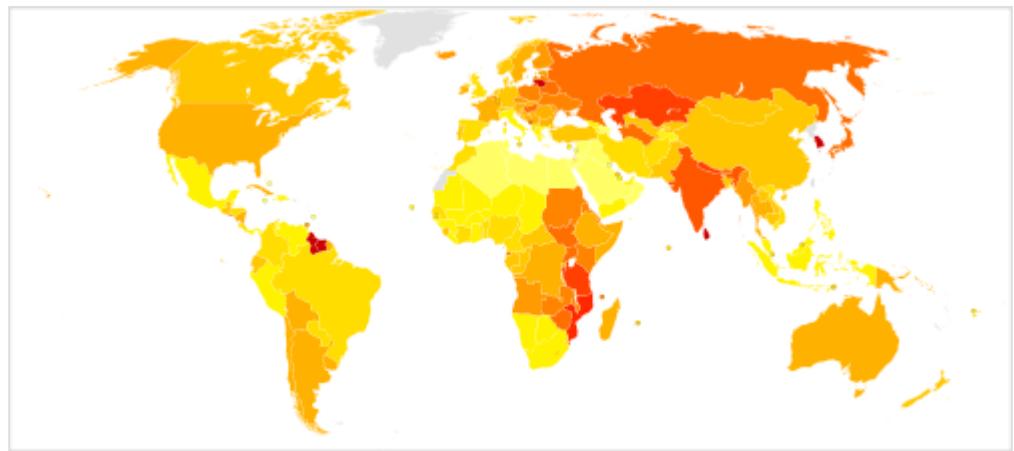
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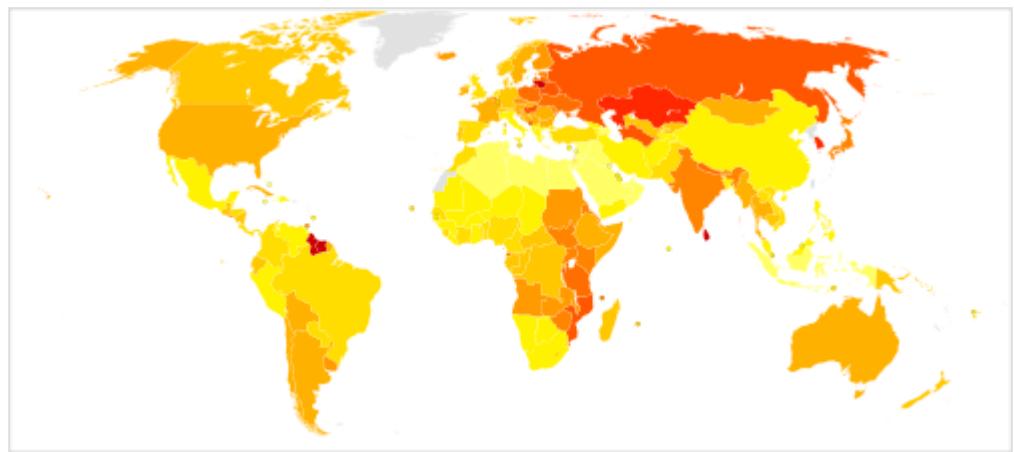
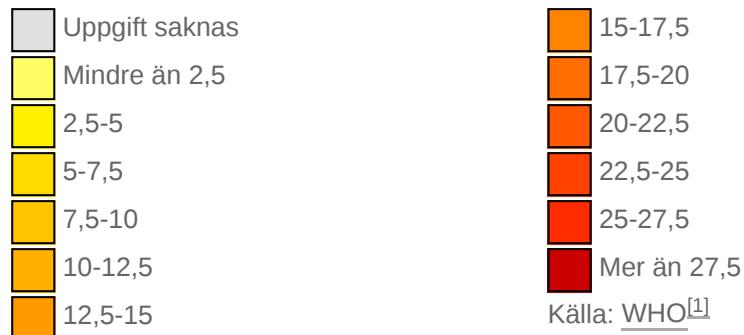
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Självmordsstatistik



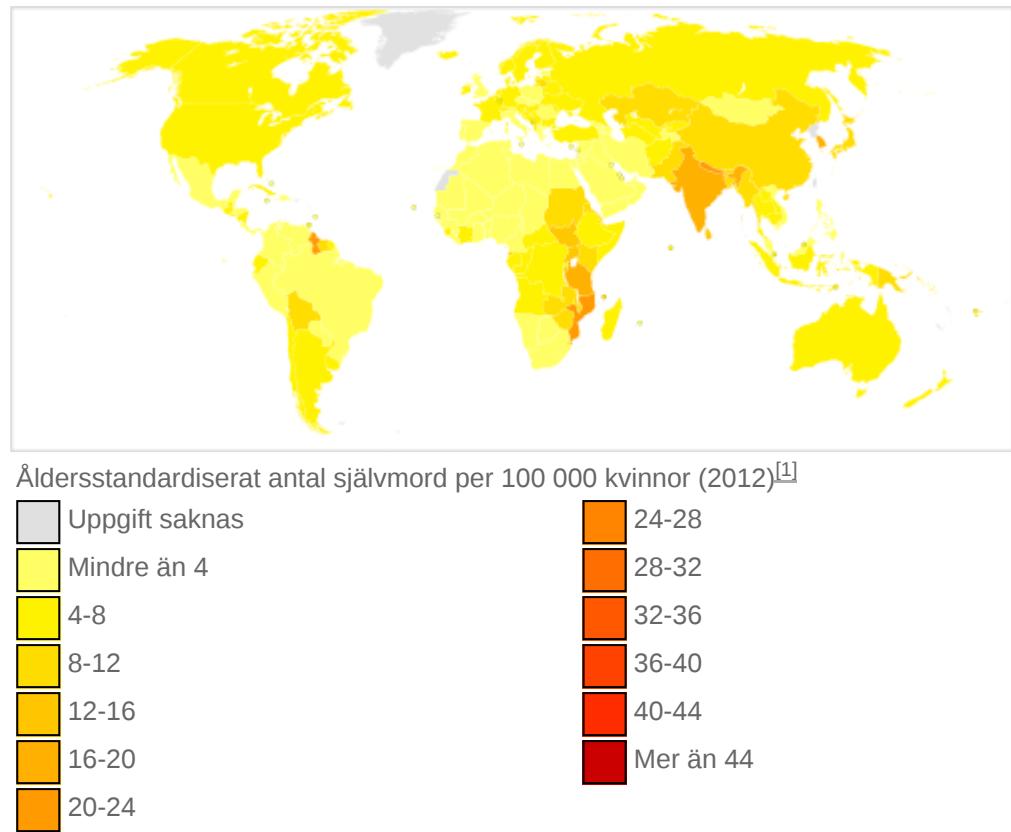
Åldersstandardiserat antal självmord per 100 000 invånare i världens länder (2012).



Åldersstandardiserat antal självmord per 100 000 män (2012), samma färgskala som nedan.^[1]

Självmordsstatistik bygger på inrapporterade data över vilka dödsfall som varit självmord. Då det i många fall inte är entydigt när ett dödsfall är ett självmord är det en stor osäkerhet i validiteten i materialet. Då det dessutom finns kulturella skillnader mellan länder när dödsfall klassas och rapporteras

som självmord, så är talen mellan länder i många fall inte jämförbara.



Statistiken bygger på världshälsoorganisationens (WHO:s) justering av dödsorsaksstatistik för att kompensera för att olika länder har olika åldersstruktur. Denna åldersstandardisering görs för att annars skulle två länder som har samma självmordsfrekvens i varje åldersgrupp, men olika medellivslängd i befolkningen, få olika självmordsfrekvens.^[2]

Omfattning

WHO har sammanställt statistik som tyder på att 873 000 personer (2007) tar sitt liv varje år.^[3] En del länder rapporterar emellertid av politiska eller byråkratiska skäl bara enstaka självmord. En del länders regeringar har inte kontroll över sitt territorium, folkräkningen är rudimentär och statistiken som förs över dödsorsaker är knapphändig.

Många av de länder som inte rapporterar några självmord ligger i Afrika. Där finns många andra vanliga dödsorsaker, som olika infektionssjukdomar, malaria, aids och svält, som står för en stor del av de sammanlagda dödstalen. Statistik från Sydamerika och delar av Asien är inte heller tillförlitliga.^[4] I Kina har man ingen heltäckande statistik, men man har gjort undersökningar av representativa regioner; nivån var som i Västvärlden, men könsfördelningen var annorlunda: mycket jämna, men med något fler kvinnor.^[5] I Mellanöstern kan man av politiska skäl vilja skylla antalet självmord.^[källa behövs] Men fattigdom och hopplöshet misstänks vara faktorer bakom självmord, vilket gör att man kan anta att självmord förekommer överallt.^[källa behövs]

Ett land som Kuwait, som har en fungerande statistik men inte någon utbredd fattigdom, har dock en mycket låg självmordsnivå med inte ens två självmord per hundra tusen invånare, så man behöver inte anta att självmord är lika utbrett överallt.^[5] En mer möjlig siffra för hela jorden borde alltså vara omkring en miljon.

I västvärlden – i länder som Australien, Nya Zeeland, Västeuropa, Kanada och USA – ligger självmorden på samma någorlunda höga nivå. Det tros hänga ihop med en åldrande befolkning. Flest självmord begås på olika håll i Östeuropa (Litauen och Ryssland har anmärkningsvärda nivåer bland män, över 74 respektive 69 per hundra tusen invånare) och Japan (dryga 35 för män och nästan 13 för kvinnor per hundra tusen invånare). En del av OSS-länderna har mycket hög självmordsnivå. Kazakstan har över 50 självmord per hundra tusen män men bara knappt nio av lika många kvinnor begår självmord.^[5]

I Europa varierar självmordsnivån från 11 till 36 självmord per hundratusen invånare där länderna med högst nivå ligger i östra Europa. Där ligger i synnerhet yngre män i riskzonen.^[6] Europas katolska delar har lägre självmordsnivå än de protestantiska, södra Europa har lägre självmordsfrekvens än norra Europa.

Lista

Åldersstandardiserat tal för självmord per 100 000 invånare år 2012:^[1]

Ranking	Land	Män	Kvinnor	Totalt
1.	 Guyana	100	22,1	44,2
2.	 Sydkorea	41,7	18,0	28,9
3.	 Sri Lanka	46,4	12,8	28,8
4.	 Litauen	51,0	8,4	28,2
5.	 Surinam	44,5	11,9	27,8
6.	 Moçambique	34,2	21,1	27,4
7.	 Nepal	30,1	20,0	24,9
8.	 Tanzania	31,6	18,3	24,9
9.	 Kazakstan	40,6	9,3	23,8
10.	 Burundi	34,1	12,5	23,1
11.	 Indien	25,8	16,4	21,1
12.	 Slovenien	20,3	4,4	20,8
13.	 Sydsudan	27,1	12,8	19,8
14.	 Turkmenistan	32,5	7,5	19,6
15.	 Ryssland	35,1	6,2	19,5
16.	 Uganda	26,9	12,3	19,5
17.	 Ungern	32,4	7,4	19,1
18.	 Japan	26,9	10,1	18,5
19.	 Vitryssland	32,7	6,4	18,3
20.	 Zimbabwe	27,2	9,7	18,1
21.	 Bhutan	23,1	11,2	17,8
22.	 Sudan	23,0	11,5	17,2
23.	 Komorerna	24,0	10,3	16,9
24.	 Ukraina	30,3	5,3	16,8
25.	 Marocko	9,9	1,2	16,8
26.	 Ekvatorialguinea	24,1	8,6	16,6
27.	 Eritrea	25,8	8,7	16,6
28.	 Polen	30,5	3,8	16,6
29.	 Lettland	30,7	4,3	16,2
30.	 Kenya	24,4	8,4	16,2
31.	 Malawi	23,9	8,9	16,0

32.	 Zambia	20,8	10,8	15,7
33.	 Montenegro	24,7	6,4	15,3
34.	 Djibouti	20,9	9,5	15,1
35.	 Finland	22,2	7,5	14,8
36.	 Belgien	21,0	7,7	14,2
37.	 Island	21,0	6,7	14,0
38.	 El Salvador	23,5	5,7	13,8
39.	 Angola	20,7	7,3	13,8
40.	 Moldavien	24,1	4,8	13,7
41.	 Estland	24,9	3,8	13,6
42.	 Myanmar	16,5	10,3	13,1
43.	 Trinidad och Tobago	20,4	6,2	13,0
44.	 Tjeckien	21,5	3,9	12,5
45.	 Papua Nya Guinea	15,9	9,1	12,4
46.	 Serbien	19,9	5,8	12,4
47.	 Somalia	18,1	6,8	12,4
48.	 Frankrike	19,3	6,0	12,3
49.	 Chile	19,0	5,8	12,2
50.	 Bolivia	16,2	8,5	12,2
51.	 USA	19,4	5,2	12,1
52.	 Uruguay	20,0	5,2	12,1
53.	 Rwanda	17,1	7,2	11,9
54.	 Portugal	18,9	4,9	11,7
55.	 Kroatien	19,8	4,5	11,6
56.	 Etiopien	16,5	6,7	11,5
57.	 Österrike	18,2	5,4	11,5
58.	 Kuba	18,5	4,5	11,4
59.	 Thailand	19,1	4,5	11,4
60.	 Sverige	16,2	6,1	11,1
61.	 Madagaskar	15,2	6,9	11,0
62.	 Irland	16,9	5,2	11,0
63.	 Bulgarien	16,6	5,3	10,8
64.	 Bosnien och Hercegovina	18,0	4,1	10,8
65.	 Salomonöarna	13,9	7,2	10,6
66.	 Australien	16,1	5,2	10,6
67.	 Rumänien	18,4	2,9	10,5

68.	 <u>Argentina</u>	17,2	4,1	10,3
69.	 <u>Slovakien</u>	18,5	2,5	10,1
70.	 <u>Kongo-Kinshasa</u>	15,8	4,8	10,1
71.	 <u>Nicaragua</u>	15,4	4,9	10,0
72.	 <u>Mongoliet</u>	16,3	3,7	9,8
73.	 <u>Kanada</u>	14,9	4,8	9,8
74.	 <u>Nya Zeeland</u>	14,4	5,0	9,6
75.	 <u>Kongo-Brazzaville</u>	14,7	4,6	9,6
76.	 <u>Centralafrikanska republiken</u>	14,1	5,3	9,5
77.	 <u>Kambodja</u>	12,6	6,5	9,4
78.	 <u>Pakistan</u>	9,1	9,6	9,3
79.	 <u>Schweiz</u>	13,6	5,1	9,2
80.	 <u>Tyskland</u>	14,5	4,1	9,2
81.	 <u>Kirgizistan</u>	14,2	4,5	9,2
82.	 <u>Ecuador</u>	13,2	5,3	9,2
83.	 <u>Norge</u>	13,0	5,2	9,1
84.	 <u>Laos</u>	11,2	6,6	8,8
85.	 <u>Danmark</u>	13,6	4,1	8,8
86.	 <u>Luxemburg</u>	13,0	4,4	8,7
87.	 <u>Guatemala</u>	13,7	4,3	8,7
88.	 <u>Uzbekistan</u>	13,2	4,1	8,5
89.	 <u>Gabon</u>	12,1	4,5	8,2
90.	 <u>Nederlanderna</u>	11,7	4,8	8,2
91.	 <u>Bahrain</u>	11,6	2,9	8,1
92.	 <u>Östtimor</u>	10,2	5,8	8,0
93.	 <u>Mauritius</u>	13,2	2,9	8,0
94.	 <u>Turkiet</u>	11,8	4,2	7,9
95.	 <u>Kina</u>	7,1	8,7	7,8
96.	 <u>Bangladesh</u>	6,8	8,7	7,8
97.	 <u>Sierra Leone</u>	11,0	4,5	7,7
98.	 <u>Singapore</u>	9,8	5,3	7,4
99.	 <u>Elfenbenskusten</u>	10,6	4,1	7,4
100.	 <u>Fiji</u>	10,6	4,1	7,3
101.	 <u>Kamerun</u>	10,9	3,4	7,0
102.	 <u>Costa Rica</u>	11,2	2,2	6,7
103.	 <u>Nigeria</u>	10,3	2,9	6,5

104.	<u>Maldiverna</u>	7,8	4,9	6,4
105.	<u>Brunei</u>	7,7	5,2	6,4
106.	<u>Swaziland</u>	8,6	4,1	6,2
107.	<u>Storbritannien</u>	9,8	2,6	6,2
108.	<u>Lesotho</u>	9,2	3,4	6,1
109.	<u>Paraguay</u>	9,1	3,2	6,1
110.	<u>Malta</u>	11,1	0,7	6,0
111.	<u>Israel</u>	9,8	2,3	5,9
112.	<u>Albanien</u>	6,6	5,2	5,9
113.	<u>Brasilien</u>	9,4	2,5	5,8
114.	<u>Afghanistan</u>	6,2	5,3	5,7
115.	<u>Benin</u>	8,8	3,1	5,7
116.	<u>Togo</u>	8,5	2,8	5,5
117.	<u>Honduras</u>	8,3	2,8	5,5
118.	<u>Senegal</u>	8,6	2,8	5,4
119.	<u>Colombia</u>	9,1	1,9	5,4
120.	<u>Makedonien</u>	7,3	3,2	5,2
121.	<u>Iran</u>	6,7	3,6	5,2
122.	<u>Spanien</u>	8,2	2,2	5,1
123.	<u>Gambia</u>	7,5	2,6	5,0
124.	<u>Vietnam</u>	8,0	2,4	5,0
125.	<u>Mali</u>	7,2	2,7	4,8
126.	<u>Kap Verde</u>	9,1	1,6	4,8
127.	<u>Burkina Faso</u>	7,3	2,8	4,8
128.	<u>Guinea</u>	7,1	2,4	4,7
129.	<u>Guinea-Bissau</u>	7,2	2,4	4,7
130.	<u>Cypern</u>	7,7	1,5	4,7
131.	<u>Italien</u>	7,6	1,9	4,7
132.	<u>Panama</u>	8,1	1,3	4,7
133.	<u>Tchad</u>	7,4	2,3	4,7
134.	<u>Qatar</u>	5,7	1,2	4,6
135.	<u>Indonesien</u>	3,7	4,9	4,3
136.	<u>Liberia</u>	0,8	2,0	4,3
137.	<u>Mexiko</u>	7,1	1,7	4,2
138.	<u>Tadzjikistan</u>	5,7	2,8	4,2
139.	<u>Dominikanska republiken</u>	6,1	2,1	4,1

140.	 Grekland	6,3	1,3	3,8
141.	 Botswana	5,7	2,0	3,8
142.	 Jemen	4,3	3,0	3,7
143.	 Niger	5,3	1,9	3,5
144.	 Förenade arabemiraten	3,9	2,6	3,2
145.	 Georgien	5,7	1,9	3,2
146.	 Peru	4,4	2,1	3,2
147.	 Ghana	4,2	2,2	3,1
148.	 Sydafrika	5,5	1,1	3,0
149.	 Armenien	5,0	0,9	2,9
150.	 Mauretanien	4,5	1,5	2,9
151.	 Filippinerna	4,8	1,2	2,9
152.	 Haiti	3,3	2,4	2,8
153.	 Namibia	4,4	1,4	2,7
154.	 Belize	4,9	0,5	2,6
155.	 Venezuela	4,3	1,0	2,6
156.	 Tunisien	3,4	1,4	2,4
157.	 Barbados	4,1	0,6	2,3
158.	 Bahamas	3,6	1,3	2,3
159.	 Jordanien	2,2	1,9	2,0
160.	 Algeriet	2,3	1,5	1,9
161.	 Libyen	2,2	1,4	1,8
162.	 Irak	1,2	2,1	1,7
163.	 Azerbajdzjan	2,4	1,0	1,7
164.	 Egypten	2,4	1,2	1,7
165.	 Jamaika	1,8	0,7	1,2
166.	 Oman	1,2	0,6	1,0
167.	 Libanon	1,2	0,6	0,9
168.	 Kuwait	1,0	0,6	0,9
169.	 Saudiarabien	0,6	0,2	0,4
170.	 Syrien	0,7	0,2	0,4

Källor

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Självskadebeteende

Självskadebeteende (även **icke suicidalt självskadebeteende**, engelska: *nonsuicidal self-injury*, **NSSI** eller **deliberate self-harm**, **DSH**) är ett självdestruktivt beteende som innebär att avsiktligt och upprepade gånger utsätta sig för **självskada**.^[1] Självskadebeteende skiljer sig från **självmordsförsök** genom att det inte finns någon (medveten) avsikt att avsluta sitt liv.^[1] Att medvetet skada sig själv känslomässigt kallas **självdestruktivt beteende**. Ingetdera är någon psykisk diagnos, utan ingår som symptom på flera **psykiska störningar**.

Former av självskadebeteende

Självskadebeteende innebär att utsätta sig själv för smärta genom att till exempel skära, bränna, förgifta, bryta fingrar och tår, slå sig själv, dunka huvudet i väggen, och så vidare.^[2] Närmare nio av tio som vårdades på sjukhus i Sverige för självdestruktivt beteende under 2011 hade skadat sig själv genom förgiftning, till exempel med läkemedel.^[3] Det förekommer även att som ett självskadebeteende få läkare eller tandläkare att utföra onödiga kirurgiska ingrepp. Som ett exempel nämner Görel Kristina Näslund i boken *Borderline personlighetsstörning: uppkomst, symptom, behandling, prognos* en kvinna som åt cigaretter för att få bli magpumpad. Många med självskadebeteenden saknar dock uppsåt att skada sig själva så mycket att det uppstår behov av att söka sjukvård.

Historia

Självskadebeteende har rapporterats genom stora delar av historien men har på senare tid blivit allt mer belyst genom media och forskning.^[4] Karl Menninger beskrev på 1930-talet några fall som han kallade "handledsskärandesyndrom" (*wrist cutting syndrome*).^[5]

Förekomst

Förekomsten för beteendet varierar stort bland studier, alltifrån 4–5,9 procent hos vuxna^[4] samt 5,5–42 procent hos ungdomar.^[1] I enkäter till svenska skolungdomar svarade 35–40 procent att de skadat sig själva, och 15–20 procent att de gjort det vid minst fem tillfällen.^[6] Olika bedömningsmetoder skiljer sig, och vissa täcker ett brett spektrum av NSSI-handlingar, vilket ökar prevalensen.^[6] På samma sätt ökar prevalensen om man inkluderar lättare former av NSSI, såsom att riva/pilla på ett sår eller bita sig i läppen.^[6]

År 2014 skadade sig 1 384 elever i Sverige så allvarligt att de måste vårdas på sjukhus.^[7] Det finns risk för mörkertal eftersom inte alla ungdomar söker hjälp efter att ha skadat sig själva.^[6] Självskador förekommer betydligt oftare bland ungdomar och unga vuxna, jämfört med övriga vuxna.^[6] Vanligast är att självskadebeteendet debuterar vid cirka 12–14 års ålder och förekomsten är som högst under ungdomsåren för att sedan minska i vuxen ålder.^[6]

Självskador är vanligare bland flickor än bland pojkar och debuterar vanligen vid cirka 12 till 14 års ålder.^[6]

Symtom på många diagnoser

Beteendet beskrivs ofta i media, men är ingen egen diagnos i den standardiserade diagnosmanualen **ICD-10**. **DSM-5** har förutom som symptom vid ett antal diagnoser, även beskrivit självskadebeteende som en egen diagnos.^[8] Det råder ingen fullständig samsyn om frågan huruvida självskadebeteende mer eller mindre alltid är en egen diagnos eller ett symptom på en annan psykisk störning.^[8] Betraktas det som en egen diagnos uppträder det i så fall ofta med andra diagnoser.

Självskadebeteende förekommer vid ett flertal psykiska diagnoser, såsom **masochism**, **posttraumatiskt stresssyndrom**, **dissociativa störningar**, **bipolär sjukdom**, **psykos**, **uppförandestörning**, **hjärnskador**,^[5] **histrionisk personlighetsstörning**, **borderline personlighetsstörning**, **antisocial personlighetsstörning**, **tourettes syndrom**, **utvecklingsstörning**,^[2] **depression** och **autismspektrumstörning**.^[9] Det kan även förekomma vid intag av **amfetamin** och hos fångar på **fängelser**. Det finns ett påvisat samband mellan **ätstörningar** och självskadebeteende - de som lider av ätstörningar har ofta också självskadebeteende och vice versa.^[2]

Att tvångsmässigt rycka ut hår (trikotillomanji), tvångsmässigt dra loss skinnbitar (dermatillomanji), eller **nagelbitning** kan även i vardagligt tal anses för självskadebeteende, men räknas normalt inte in. Inte heller **ätstörningar** eller **substansmissbruk** gör det, men kan också ses i samma ljus.

Självskadebeteende



Orangea band har använts för att signalera medvetenhet om självskadebeteende.

Klassifikation och externa resurser

ICD-10	X60 (https://icd.who.int/browse10/2019/en#/X60) — X83 (https://icd.who.int/browse10/2019/en#/X83)
1177 Vårdguiden	Sjalvskadebeteende---att-skada-sig-sjalu/ (http://www.117.se/Fakta-och-rad/Sjukdomar/Sjalvskadebeteende---att-skada-sig-sjalu/)



Andelen fall av självskador, rapporterade av myndigheter, i världen år 2004 per 100 000 invånare.

Beroende

Självskadebeteende har jämförts med ett beroende. Exempelvis nämns i en sådan jämförelse: en tendens hos en del självskadande personer att inte kunna stå emot sina impulser till att skada sig; att en del upplever en ökad spänning i kroppen där det upplevs som om det enda sättet att få stopp på det är självskada; att frekvensen och allvarlighetsgraden i självskadebeteendet ökar för att personen ska uppnå samma effekt.^{[10][11][12]} Det saknas dock empiriska studier på om självskadebeteende är beroendeframkallande.^[10]

Behandling och hantering

I flera studier framkommer behovet av en tydlig, flexibel och individanpassad vård som planeras tillsammans med den som uttrycker ett självskadebeteende.^[6] Vidare framkommer behovet av tillräckligt med tid och att det finns tillgång till olika behandlingsinsatser och meningsfulla aktiviteter.^[6]

I en SBU-rapport från 2015 fann man ett antal förbättringspunkter inom svensk sjukvårds sätt att bemöta individer med självskadebeteende.^[6]

- Vårdens omhändertagande av personer med självskadebeteende och attityderna bland vårdpersonal kan förbättras betydligt. God kontakt mellan vårdpersonal och vuxna personer med självskadebeteende, som också innehåller med inflytande, kontinuitet och respekt kan vara avgörande för det fortsatta omhändertagandet.^[6]
- I de fall som gränssättning eller tvångsåtgärder används är det särskilt viktigt att det genomförs på ett respektfullt sätt.^[6]
- Det är viktigt att ungdomar med självskadebeteende kan berätta om detta för personer i sin omgivning som kan ge stöd.^[6]
- Det finns en risk för att ansvaret för att hjälpa personer med självskadebeteende hamnar mellan stolarna.^[6]

Orsaker till självskadande utan avsikt att dö

Det finns åtskilliga orsaker till varför personer utövar självskadebeteende. Det är svårt att fastställa någon enhetlig anledning då det vanligtvis är mycket individuellt.^[12] Trots den ökade kunskapen om att självskadebeteende förekommer är det oklart just varför vissa män skadar sig själva. Det finns många olika teorier som försöker förklara och kategorisera självskadebeteende, men man har ännu inte kommit överens om hur man bäst beskriver beteendet.^[13]

Beteendet att vilja skada sig själv har sedan millennieskiftet alltmer uppmärksammats såväl inom skola och sjukvård som av massmedia och samhället i stort.^[6] Då beteendet både kan vara mycket svårt att förstå och väcker en hel del känslor kan det för både lekmän och yrkesverksamma inom till exempel hälso- och sjukvården upplevas som provocerande.^[6]

Självskadebeteende kan vara ett sätt för den självskadande att bryta dissociativa upplevelser, känna kontroll eller reglera känslor. I en studie gjord 1969 med 62 kvinnor med borderline personlighetsstörning hade 41 av dessa ett självskadebeteende. Hos dessa var den vanligaste formen av självskadebeteende att skära sig själv. Hälften av de självskadande sa att det var viktigt för dem att se blodet rinna. De uppgav olika anledningar till att de skadade sig själva, varav de vanligaste nämnda orsakerna var: att minska ångest eller förtvivlan; konkretisera en inre diffus smärta i konkret fysisk smärta; straffa sig själv; minska tomhetskänslor; uttrycka vrede; hämnas på någon; känna kontroll; distrahera sig själv från jobbiga minnen; eller känna sig verklig.^[2]

Hill et al., (2011) hänvisar till Connors (1996) där han föreslår att funktionerna kan delas upp i fyra kategorier: återskapande av barndomstrauma (återupplevande), uttryck av känslor och behov, rationalisering av sig själv, och hantering av dissociativa processer. McKenzie et al., (2014) vill dock dela upp det i fem kategorier: ett alternativ till mer plågsamma situationer, förändra ens sociala omgivning, avstryka negativa tankar och känslor, ändra sin syn på en själv, samt en metod att sätta igång olika psykofisiologiska reaktioner, till exempel ändring i endogena opiatер.

Personlig historik

Taliaferro et al., (2012) utför en anonym enkätundersökning på 61 330 studenter i Minnesota, USA för att försöka urskilja faktorer hos tonåringar med ett självskadebeteende. I deras studie kommer de fram till att hopplöshet, ångest, depression och misshandel medför högst risk för självskadebeteende. Andra källor påvisar samband med sexuella övergrepp, samt psykiska och övriga fysiska övergrepp som riskfaktorer.^[14]

Kommunikation

Vikten av kommunikation, eller snarare bristen på densamma, tas ofta upp i samband med självskadebeteende. Självskadebeteende förklaras i vissa fall både objektivt och subjektivt som ett sätt att kommunicera där det inte finns ord som räcker till eller då det inte finns något annat sätt att visa hur man faktiskt mår. Svårigheten att, i ord, berätta och prata om ens situation.^{[4][12]}

Självbild

Många självskadande personer pratar om att självskadandet ingår i ett komplex av klander mot sig själv. En anledning till att de tillgriper självskadebeteende är då personen anser sig förtjäna att bli straffad, ett hat emot en själv.

Skam- och skuldkänslor är vanliga känslor som personer vill komma undan och fly ifrån, då ser de självskadebeteende som ett hjälpmedel. När man känner på sig att man har gjort någonting fel, man har kanske svikit sig själv och personer i sin omgivning, attackerar vissa personer sig själva i ett försök att antingen fly undan dessa känslor eller att rätta till situationen. Ifall de straffar sig själv har de, på något plan, återfått sin självbild efter att de svikit sina egna principer.^[4]

När de bestämmer sig för att exempelvis skära sig själv kan de inleda en process där de bryter ner sin egen självbild, till en självbild där de endast ser sig som något kroppsligt. Man är inte längre någon individ med ansvar, sociala relationer eller skyldigheter, utan endast ett objekt av kött och blod. De lyfter bort eventuella ansvar, plågsamma känslor och tankar.^[4]

Distrahering

En förklaring och orsak till användandet av självskadebeteende är att genom dess utförande så kan de förleda uppmärksamhet från smärtsamma känslor och tankar. De tvingas att fokusera på någonting annat som är orelaterat till sin plåga. Det byter ut psykiskt lidande till fysisk smärta.^[4] I andra fall förklarar personer med självskadebeteende handlingen med att de vill känna någonting, även om det är smärta.^[4]

Påverka omgivningen

Att utföra självskadebeteende kan vara ett försök att förändra sin sociala omvärld. När ens omgivning får reda på att personen skadar sig själv framkallar detta ofta ett mer omsorgsfullt beteende.^[4] Detta är grunden till det vanliga tankesättet att de behöver uppmärksamhet och att det är ett rop på hjälp.

Förebyggande åtgärder

Det råder stor osäkerhet om vilka behandlingar som är mest effektiva för personer som skadar sig själva.^[15]

När självskadebeteendet blivit nästan enda sättet för en ung människa att hantera känsomässiga svårigheter behöver de behandling, till exempel kognitiv beteendeterapi eller dialektisk beteendeterapi.^[16]

Internationellt har program som syftar till att förebygga olika former av psykisk ohälsa hos barn och ungdomar blivit allt mer efterfrågade.^[1] Det finns två skolbaserade program som möjligen kan förebygga självskadebeteende i form av självmordsförsök, enligt en genomgång av den samlade forskningen på området.^[1] Programmen riktar sig till alla elever i klasserna.^[1] Ett av dem (Good Behavior Game) syftar till att förstärka positiva beteenden och attityder mellan skolelever och lärare.^[1] Det ges på lågstadiet under ett till två år. Det andra programmet är specifikt utvecklat för att förebygga självord (Youth Aware of Mental Health).^[1] Det ges på högstadiet och består huvudsakligen av fem timmars interaktiva övningar.^[1]

Terminologi

Det saknas internationell konsensus om hur självskadebeteende ska klassificeras och definieras.^[1] Det finns dock två begrepp som domineras; non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) som oftast används i Kanada och USA samt begreppet deliberate self-harm (DSH) som är mest förekommande i Europa och Australien.^[1]

DSH omfattar alla självinitierade destruktiva beteenden men tar per definition inte hänsyn till vilken avsikt som driver beteendet.^[1] DSH inkluderar följaktligen beteenden som ingår inom NSSI men också handlingar som kan resultera i suicid.^[1] Självskadebeteenden kan vara direkta eller indirekta. Ett exempel på indirekta självskadebeteenden är risktagande beteenden.^[1]

Se även

- Kontrafobi
- Självdestruktivitet
- Upprepningstvång
- Dödsdrift
- Identifikation med förövaren
- Självordskris
- Åtstörningar

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Mortality of autistic individuals

There is some correlation between autism and reduced life expectancy, but study results are inconclusive as to whether autism and comorbidities are linked or whether individuals were unable to acquire proper and timely care options as in the neurotypical population. Furthermore, studies are limited to primarily having information about higher needs populations.

Autistic individuals were once reported to have a significantly reduced life expectancy, on average approximately seventeen years shorter than that of the general population, however this is no longer accepted in the scientific community as a blanket characteristic of autism due to problems and misrepresentation of the study conclusions. Mortality rates during childhood and early adulthood can be notably higher. Various health conditions are more prevalent among autistic individuals, including epilepsy, cardiovascular diseases, and elevated suicide rates, particularly among those without co-occurring intellectual or learning disabilities; however with the lack of study in autism and lack of comprehensive testing and diagnosis for autism, it is impossible to determine whether these comorbidities are related to autism or merely correlation (e.g. people already making regular visits to a doctor are more likely to have a diagnosis than those who have no reason for regular medical visits). Other common causes of death, such as respiratory, infectious, and digestive diseases, are comparable to those of the general population but may be exacerbated by side effects associated with long-term use of neuroleptic medications. Socio-economic disparities and a higher incidence of accidental deaths, including drownings, also contribute to increased mortality among higher needs individuals. Historically, the autistic population has been vulnerable victims to infanticide. Among individuals with learning disabilities, women have the lowest life expectancy, which may be due to increased difficulty to access resources.

Early mortality among autistic individuals has been the subject of research since the 1990s, particularly in the more developed countries of the Anglosphere and Scandinavian countries. Identified as a "hidden crisis" in 2015, this phenomenon is primarily attributed to comorbidities associated with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), limited access to appropriate healthcare, and inadequate recognition and management of pain, especially among non-speaking individuals. Genetic predispositions and environmental factors may also play a role. Social exclusion has been linked to lack of awareness of support, lack of healthcare options, and increased suicide risk; while infanticide has been associated with broader societal attitudes. Strategies to reduce early mortality include improved management of epilepsy, prevention of accidental drownings and sudden illnesses, enhanced suicide prevention measures, better communication between autistic individuals and healthcare providers, and promotion of regular physical activity.



Donna Williams, an autistic woman who died on April 22, 2017, from cancer at the age of 53.

History

Research on autism and mortality is a relatively recent field.^[1] An elevated risk of accidental drowning among autistic individuals was identified as early as 1996.^[2] In 1999, Torben Isager and colleagues published a mortality study involving 381 autistic individuals in Denmark between 1945 and 1980. Among them, twelve had died, representing a higher mortality rate than in the general population. The causes of death included five cases of sudden illness, one additional case suspected to be due to sudden illness, four accidental deaths (three potentially linked to illness or personal difficulties), and two suicides. Half of the deceased individuals had been diagnosed with intellectual disability, while the other half had not.^[3]

In 2001, Robert M. Shavelle and colleagues conducted a study on mortality among autistic individuals in California between 1983 and 1997, identifying 202 deaths within a cohort of 13,111 individuals. The study is regarded as significant due to the size of the cohort and the methodology employed.^[4] Results indicated a higher mortality rate compared to the general population, particularly among women and individuals with co-occurring intellectual disabilities. The reported life expectancy was 62 years for men and 62.5 years for women. The main causes of death included sudden illness, respiratory diseases, suffocation, and drowning.^[5]

In 2008, a Danish study involving 341 individuals, as an update to a 1999 study, found that the mortality rate among autistic individuals was approximately twice that of the general population, with a higher rate observed among women.^[6]

In 2010, Christopher Gillberg and colleagues conducted a study on 120 autistic individuals born in Sweden between 1962 and 1984, reporting a mortality rate of 7.5%, which was 5.6 times higher than the general population. The study did not establish whether autism itself was a direct contributor to the observed outcomes.^[7] In 2013, Deborah Bilder and colleagues published findings from a study of 305 autistic individuals, identifying 29 deaths. The causes of death were primarily attributed to comorbid conditions rather than autism alone.^[8]

At the end of 2015, a study was published based on medical data from over 27,000 autistic individuals in Sweden, including approximately 6,500 with co-occurring intellectual disability. At the time of publication, it was considered one of the most comprehensive and reliable studies on autism and mortality,^[9] primarily due to the size and scope of the cohort. According to the researchers:

[...] our findings add to accumulating evidence that autism spectrum disorders result in substantial health loss throughout the lifespan.

—Tatja Hirvikoski, Ellenor Mittendorfer-Rutz, Marcus Boman, and Henrik Larsson^[10]

A systematic review and meta-analysis published in 2022 confirmed the elevated mortality risk among autistic individuals compared to the general population.^[11] In August 2023, a large-scale study conducted in the Ontario region of Canada examined mortality in relation to socio-economic factors among both autistic and non-autistic individuals.^[12]

Clinical and social observations

Autism is classified as a neurodevelopmental disorder in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10) and is not considered a degenerative condition. However, it may be associated with comorbidities or perceptual differences that can contribute to reduced life expectancy or an increased risk of accidents, particularly in cases involving learning disabilities.^[1] Research indicates that the cognitive abilities of autistic individuals tend to remain stable with age and decline less significantly than in non-autistic individuals.^[4] Autism does not typically lead to age-related cognitive deterioration,^[13] such as a decline in working memory,^[14] although higher levels of disability or dependency may emerge over time.^[15] Studies estimate that between 20% and 25% of autistic adults experience a notable decline in cognitive function during adulthood.^[13] Many autistic adults also report a low quality of life and high levels of anxiety, which may result in social withdrawal and a perception of social environments as hostile.^[16]

Life expectancy

Autistic individuals have a reduced life expectancy compared to the general population, with estimates indicating a reduction^[9] of approximately 16 to 18 years on average.^[17] This gap may reach up to 30 years for those with co-occurring intellectual disabilities.^[9] Mortality rates among autistic individuals, particularly during childhood and early adulthood, are estimated to be two to ten times higher than in the general population.^{[18][19][20][21]} According to researcher Catherine Barthélémy, mortality between the ages of 2 and 30 is approximately three times higher.^[22] Although few studies have analyzed mortality by age group,^[23] available data suggest that the disparity decreases with age,^{[24][25]} with the life expectancy gap narrowing to about three years after age 65.^[26]

While mortality rates reported in various studies differ, all consistently indicate elevated mortality among autistic individuals, particularly due to neurological conditions such as epilepsy, and suicide.^{[15][27][28][29]} Data from New South Wales, Australia, based on a cohort of 35,929 individuals, show a mortality rate 2.06 times higher in the autistic population compared to the general population.^[30]

Life expectancy for autistic individuals may be improving globally, as medical advancements allow for earlier identification and treatment of conditions that previously led to premature death.^{[15][13]} Factors contributing to reduced life expectancy include cognitive impairments, increased vulnerability to illness, comorbidities, social exclusion, sensory hypersensitivity, and age-related health challenges.^{[31][32]}

Limitations of studies

The studies conducted in this field are primarily American,^{[25][5][8]} British,^{[33][34]} and Scandinavian (Swedish^{[21][35]} and Danish^{[3][6]}), and remain relatively limited due to a lack of international research on autistic adults.^[36] As Josef Schovanec (2017) points out, the suicide rate among autistic individuals "is one of the taboos of public debate" in France: their mortality is the subject of neither study nor public interest in this country—likely due to a focus on childhood and to practices that certain medical-social institutions seek to conceal (such as overmedication with neuroleptics).^[37] French whistleblower Céline Boussié denounced the deaths of five children in a medico-educational institute (IME) in Gers.^[38] The published studies also present certain limitations,^[29] such as the inclusion of individuals previously diagnosed with "psychosis," some of whom may be schizophrenic, a condition known to be associated

with a high risk of suicide. The available data are further constrained by the disappearance of a significant number of autistic adults from statistics for various reasons (e.g., name changes, relocation).^[31] Suicide studies, which are also limited in number, "have generally used small, non-representative samples, lack validated measures, and have not explored risk or protective factors."^[34]

Autism was first scientifically described in the 1940s, with the earliest diagnosed individuals reaching approximately 70 years of age by 2015.^[1] Research on aging and end-of-life issues in autism remains "almost entirely unexplored" (as of 2008), limiting knowledge of measures to enhance quality of life.^[39] Due to the disproportionate focus on autistic children, autistic adults (including the elderly) receive little attention in research and public discourse.^[13]

Gender differences

Since 1985, when Marion Leboyer examined differences in mortality between autistic males and females,^[40] studies have reported higher early mortality rates among autistic women compared to men,^{[20][5][41][42]} with some estimates suggesting rates up to four times higher.^[18] However, variations in reported gender-based mortality rates indicate measurement imprecision.^[21] One possible explanation is sampling bias, as women are less frequently diagnosed with autism, potentially skewing data toward those with more severe or visible medical conditions.^[18] Causes and ages of death are generally similar between genders,^[5] though men are more likely to die from nervous and circulatory system disorders, while women have higher mortality from endocrine diseases, congenital malformations, and suicide.^[43] A meta-analysis found autistic women have a suicide rate twice that of men,^[44] though a review by Magali Segers suggests men are more likely to die by suicide.^[45]

Autistic women with learning disabilities have the shortest life expectancy.^[10] Among autistic individuals without an intellectual disability, overall mortality is higher among men.^[46]

Murders

Autistic individuals have historically been victims of infanticide.^{[47][48]} As noted by Lorna Wing and others, the myth of the changeling, present in various cultures, may have contributed to the murder or abandonment of autistic infants and children. The belief that a biological child had been replaced by a supernatural being (such as a fairy, goblin, or demon) allowed some parents to justify the removal of children they perceived as strange or emotionally distant.^{[49][50]} During the rise of eugenics and Nazism in the 1930s and 1940s, many disabled individuals killed under the Aktion T4 program were likely autistic.^[51] It is estimated that approximately 3,500 autistic individuals may have been killed in this context.^[52]

No comprehensive statistics exist on the murder or deliberate abandonment of autistic individuals today, but such incidents are frequently reported by media and advocacy groups.^[53] The Autistic Self Advocacy Network documented 36 cases involving disabled individuals, predominantly autistic, in 2012. American activist Kathleen Seidel maintained a record of murdered autistic individuals



The myth of the changeling was once used to justify the abandonment of autistic babies and children.

on her blog.^[47] Josef Schovanec estimates that approximately 100 autistic individuals are killed annually in France.^[54] Anne McGuire notes that while each murder case is treated individually, the commonly cited motive is "autism" or "life with autism."^[55]

Murders of autistic individuals are typically committed by a parent or caregiver,^[47] most often the mother.^[56] Maternal infanticide is often overlooked due to societal beliefs about maternal behavior.^[56] Anne McGuire's study of three cases found that an autism diagnosis in children with significant challenges often triggered maternal clinical depression and despair, leading to infanticide.^[57] Lower socioeconomic status is a contributing factor, as limited financial resources can restrict access to adequate support for disabled children.^[58]

Suicides and euthanasia

Autistic individuals, both children and adults, exhibit a significantly higher suicide rate compared to the general population.^{[59][60][61][62]} According to a 2018 review by Hedley and Uljarević covering 13 studies, 1% to 35% of autistic individuals had attempted suicide at least once, while 11% to 66% had experienced suicidal thoughts.^[62] Additionally, 0.31% of early deaths among autistic individuals are attributed to suicide, a rate notably higher than in the general population.^[62]

Suicide is more prevalent among autistic individuals who are not intellectually disabled than those who are and is often linked to other psychiatric conditions, particularly depression.^[10] The suicide rate for autistic individuals with no learning disabilities is approximately nine times higher than the general population,^[63] making it their second leading cause of death after heart disease.^[64] Additionally, 14% of autistic children and adolescents experience suicidal thoughts, a rate 28 times higher than their non-autistic peers.^[60]

A 2014 literature review found that 10.5% to 50% of autistic individuals experienced suicidal thoughts or had attempted suicide.^[45] A study by Sarah Cassidy and Simon Baron-Cohen involving 374 adults with Asperger syndrome (a since-defunct autism subtype^[65]) reported that 66% had suicidal thoughts, with one-third having planned or attempted suicide,^[33] and 31% experienced depression,^[33] compared to 17% with suicidal thoughts in the general British population.^[34] A 2018 study of 185 autistic individuals, including 92 women, found that 49% met the criteria for depression (more prevalent among women)^[66] and 36% had suicidal thoughts.^[66] Suicide risk was not correlated with the severity of autistic symptoms but was significantly associated with loneliness, lack of social support, and comorbid psychiatric disorders.^[12] Depression screening tools designed for the general population may be unsuitable for autistic individuals.^[62]

In Belgium^[67] and the Netherlands,^[68] some autistic adults have sought euthanasia. A notable case in Belgium sparked controversy in 2016.^[69] A study of 100 euthanasia requests in Belgium from 2007 to 2011 found that 12% were made by autistic individuals.^[67]

Causes

Determining the primary cause of death for autistic individuals is challenging due to imprecise studies that often fail to identify exact causes.^[11] Complex interactions, such as child abuse, economic conditions, and environmental factors, may contribute to mortality.^[11] Autistic individuals face greater

socio-economic risks compared to non-autistic populations, yet most medical databases lack information on patients' socio-economic status.^[11]

Mortality factors for autistic individuals are similar to those in the general population, except epilepsy, which has a significantly higher incidence.^[21] These health issues occur more frequently across the lifespan of autistic individuals.^[70]

Unlike non-autistic individuals with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), whose deaths are primarily linked to accidents and risky behaviors, autistic individuals commonly die from both natural causes (e.g., diseases) and artificial causes (e.g., accidents).^[11] Common causes include heart and circulatory diseases, respiratory conditions like pneumonia and asthma, neoplasms (cancer), encephalopathies, nephrotic syndrome, and self-inflicted injuries such as head trauma.^{[1][8][71]} Intellectual disability is a risk factor for early mortality.^{[8][19]} Deaths have also been reported due to nervous system disorders, complications from neuroleptic medications,^[1] and medication overdoses.^[19] Mortality related to alcohol, tobacco, and drug use is lower among autistic individuals compared to non-autistic peers.^[72]

A scientific literature review by Magali Segers identifies key risk factors for suicide among autistic individuals, in order of significance: peer discrimination, behavioral problems, being part of an ethnic minority (Black or Hispanic) in the United States, being male, lower socio-economic status, and low educational attainment.^[45] As of 2017, the mechanisms driving suicide in autistic individuals remain poorly understood and may differ from those in non-autistic populations, as suicidal ideation is more prevalent than depression, and gender-related patterns also vary.^[34] Difficulty in expressing thoughts and feelings is a significant risk factor.^[73] The stress from mental health disorders and high suicide rates in autistic individuals may be linked to minority stigmatization.^[74] The review suggests that autism and mental health issues are not inherently connected, and anti-discrimination measures could reduce these risks.^[74]

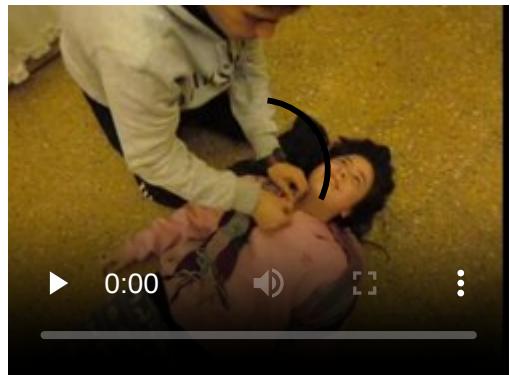
The precise contributions of biological and social factors to mortality among autistic individuals remain unclear,^[75] with emotional well-being potentially playing a significant role.^[76] Autistic individuals often exhibit lower physical activity levels, less varied diets, and more frequent use of medications, particularly neuroleptics, compared to non-autistic individuals.^[75]

Medical comorbidities

Comorbidities associated with ASD are the primary medical cause of death among autistic individuals.^[61] Genetic disorders that often co-occur with autism contribute to physical vulnerabilities.^[31] Sudden illnesses,^[19] particularly cardiac events or other diseases, are the leading cause of death among autistic individuals with no learning disabilities.^[64] Autistic individuals also have a higher incidence of gastrointestinal and digestive disorders, muscular and sensory issues, and increased susceptibility to infectious diseases.^[72] A study of 1,507 autistic adults in California found that "almost all medical problems were significantly more common among autistic adults, including immune conditions, gastrointestinal and sleep disorders, seizures, obesity, dyslipidemia, high blood pressure, and diabetes. More serious conditions, such as strokes and Parkinson's disease, were also much more frequent."^[77]

Epilepsy

Approximately one-third of autistic individuals have epilepsy,^[78] resulting in a significantly higher prevalence of epileptic seizures in this population.^[31] A 2000 study by K. Patja and colleagues in Finland found that mortality rates among epileptic individuals with intellectual disabilities were significantly higher than among non-epileptic individuals with similar intellectual disabilities.^[79] Autistic individuals with epilepsy face a higher mortality risk compared to non-epileptic autistic individuals,^[80] with life expectancy for those without intellectual disability but with epilepsy estimated at 39 years,^[81] and a mortality rate 8.3 times higher than non-epileptic autistic individuals.^[78] A 2012 scientific literature review concluded that the link between epilepsy and autism has significant health implications.^[42]



Instructions for assisting someone having an epileptic seizure (video in Spanish).

Psychiatric comorbidities

Approximately 70% of autistic individuals have at least one psychiatric comorbidity, with 41% having two or more.^[82] Social anxiety is the most common,^[82] followed by ADHD and various forms of anxiety, particularly among those without intellectual disability.^{[83][84]} Digby Tantam notes that morbidity related to substance misuse (drugs, medication, alcohol, etc.) is common among people with ADHD.^[29] Autistic individuals frequently experience sensory overload throughout their lives.^[75]

Anxiety among autistic individuals may contribute to drug and alcohol use, negatively impacting health.^[83] Chronic anxiety is also associated with deteriorating arterial health.^[85] However, no evidence links anxiety directly to suicide risk in this population.^[62]

Changes in lifestyle habits

Autonomous autistic individuals are likely to encounter the same major life changes as non-autistic individuals, such as the death of a loved one, children leaving home, career transitions, relationship dissatisfaction, physical aging, and the development of chronic health conditions. However, these changes may be more challenging for them to manage.^[86] Environmental changes, such as placement in an institution, can result in the accumulation of negative experiences and emotions, with adverse effects on health.^[87] Likewise, "for the autistic person, a hierarchical promotion can be disastrous, potentially leading to suicide attempts: a promotion can distance the person from the work they enjoyed, assigning them human management tasks that may be very different."^[88]

Autistic individuals may experience comorbid health conditions, such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases, which can necessitate support from family members.^[89] The aging of parents is considered a significant factor in mortality among some autistic individuals, as parents may eventually become unable to provide necessary care.^[89] There are no available statistical data to quantify the extent of this issue,^[89] which may primarily affect men who have not been institutionalized and who experience a decline shortly after the death of their parents.^[90] Several cases have been reported in which autonomous autistic individuals had to acquire basic life skills following the loss of their parents;^[91] however, not all possess the capacity or willingness to do so, particularly at an advanced age.

To address this issue, relatives may designate a person or institution to care for the autistic individual after their death. However, finding a solution can be challenging, as other family members may not have a sufficiently close relationship with the individual to assume this responsibility.^[86]

Social exclusion

Autistic individuals may experience significant social and cultural pressures, including bullying in educational or professional settings, pressure to conform by masking difficulties, and social isolation.^[75] While suicidal tendencies among autistic individuals previously diagnosed with Asperger syndrome may be associated with depression and comorbid conditions,^[92] Simon Baron-Cohen highlights the impact of social exclusion, isolation, and loneliness faced by autistic adults.^[93] School bullying can contribute to suicidal ideation in children and adolescents, often leading to self-critical attitudes and negative perceptions of others,^[94] stemming from rejection and repeated mockery.^[95] The role of peer discrimination in increasing suicide risk has been confirmed.^[73]

Autistic individuals often lack protective factors against suicide, including a strong social network, peer social skills, and overall life satisfaction.^[46] Communication difficulties and limited social interactions significantly reduce the likelihood of receiving support when experiencing suicidal thoughts.^[46]

Pain

Pain in autistic individuals is considered particularly difficult to assess and manage. The use of neuroleptic medications may increase the risk that pain is neither perceived nor expressed, thereby limiting its function as a warning sign of potential health issues.^[96] Several studies conclude that this situation "contributes to increased mortality linked to somatic pathologies in these so-called vulnerable populations, particularly among adults with ASD;"^[96] in addition, pain may be perceived in atypical ways.^[96]

Accidents

Accidents represent a significant cause of mortality among autistic children and young adults.^{[97][19]} A study by Joseph Guan and Guohua Li, based on data from 1,367 deceased autistic individuals in the United States, found that the proportion of accidental deaths is notably higher in the autistic population compared to the general population.^[98] The average age at death was 36.2 years, considerably lower than the general population average of 72 years.^[98] Among the causes of death, 27.9% were due to injuries, with suffocation being the most common, followed by asphyxia and drowning.^[98]

The increased risk of drowning among autistic individuals has been confirmed by two additional studies.^{[2][5]} Road accidents also represent a common cause of mortality, particularly among those who drive and have comorbid ADHD.^[29]

Culture of murder

The murder of autistic individuals with highly intensive daily support needs has been linked to a "culture of murder" shaped by notions of mercy.^[99] Perpetrators often justify their actions by emphasizing the perceived severity of the individual's autism and lifelong dependency,^[100] describing the act as "necessary"^[101] and the condition as "hopeless."^[102] Media coverage of such cases tends to focus on the

perpetrator's motives and the narrative of mercy, generating public sympathy for the offender.^[47] The rights of the autistic victim are rarely highlighted.^[103] This framing can contribute to the minimization of these acts in public discourse and, in some cases, may influence judicial outcomes, including acquittals.^[54]

In some English-speaking countries, this situation is reportedly reinforced by works of popular culture in which a character exhibiting traits associated with autism, such as in *Of Mice and Men* or *Flowers for Algernon*, requests or receives a mercy killing. Such portrayals may contribute to the persistence of a "culture of murder" that adversely affects public perceptions of autistic individuals.^[99] In 1996, a French court acquitted a mother who had killed her autistic child. Following the verdict, the rapporteur of the Chossy Law stated: "Everyone will understand that when one is alone and desperate, sometimes the death of a loved one appears as the gentlest solution. But I want to assert that when there is no longer hope, hope remains."^[104]

Prevention

The study conducted by Tatja Hirvikoski and colleagues recommends, as a primary measure, the promotion of autism-related knowledge within the medical field.^[46] However, in practice, few initiatives specifically target the prevention of premature deaths among autistic individuals.^[9] Existing prevention efforts primarily address immediate causes of mortality, such as epilepsy, accidents, and sudden death.^[20] The specific characteristics of autism can contribute to delays and complications in the treatment of somatic illnesses, potentially leading to fatal outcomes if care is not provided promptly.^[20] Access to healthcare is generally more limited for autistic individuals compared to non-autistic peers.^[75] In France, for example, "there is a significant delay in the provision of somatic care in hospitals, particularly in the field of dental care, due to the small number of specialized services or facilities ready to accommodate people with autism."^[105]

Parents and other individuals who interact regularly with non-speaking autistic individuals are generally considered the most capable of detecting health-related issues.^[106] It has been proposed that autistic individuals be provided with improved means of communicating symptoms,^[46] such as visual tools like pictograms.^[105] Further research on the adult autistic population is also recommended.^[36] The British organization, Autistica, advocates for increased study of depression and anxiety within the autistic population to identify suicide risk factors,^[107] as well as the promotion of physical activity, enhancement of quality of life, and inclusion of the perspectives of the autistic community.^[108]

The need for improved coordination of medical care for autistic individuals has been emphasized,^[8] notably by Dr. Djéa Saravane. He advises healthcare professionals to be attentive to signs of pain, particularly in non-speaking individuals, and to adapt care practices to the specific characteristics of autism, including sensory hypersensitivities and hyposensitivities. Medical environments are often inadequately adapted to the needs of autistic individuals.^[105] In addition, many autistic individuals respond negatively to changes in routine, including medical visits.^[106] Standard procedures, such as blood draws, may be particularly challenging with non-speaking patients.^[106]

A 2014 study published in *The Lancet* recommended that healthcare professionals working with autistic individuals previously diagnosed with Asperger syndrome remain particularly vigilant regarding the elevated risk of suicide, which has historically been underestimated.^[109] The study also advised that

households with a swimming pool ensure it is entirely inaccessible to autistic children who cannot swim, and that swimming instruction be provided as early as possible.^[110]

Commitments

We cannot tolerate a situation where so many autistic people will never see their fortieth birthday.

—Jon Spiers, CEO of Autistica^[111]

Associations and key figures within the autism rights movement have engaged in efforts to reduce mortality among autistic individuals. This form of activism is particularly noted in English-speaking countries. In contrast, such initiatives are less common in France, where, according to Josef Schovanec, "associations related to autism and the individuals themselves typically do not get involved."^[112]

On the website *Autistics.org*, American activist Laura Tisoncik launched an extended online campaign to denounce the murder of autistic individuals and the way such cases are portrayed in the media.^[103] This form of activism may contrast with that of certain autism-related organizations, particularly parent associations. In the case of Danielle Blais, Ari Ne'eman^[113] and Michelle Dawson^[114] criticized the Autism Society of Montreal for supporting a mother who drowned her six-year-old autistic son by organizing a fundraiser and providing testimony in her defense. On February 26, 2003, David Vardy, the Newfoundland representative for the Canadian Autism Society, stated before the Canadian Senate that "autism is worse than cancer in many ways, because the person with autism has a normal lifespan. The problem is with you for a lifetime."^[115] This statement was also condemned by Dawson^[114] and Ne'eman.^[113] In France, Josef Schovanec refers in his book *Nos intelligences multiples* to the murder of autistic individuals "killed for being autistic" as "auticide".^[54]

A deeply unsettling and little-studied social phenomenon is that of autistic individuals killed for being autistic, which could be termed 'auticide' [...]. A remarkable and specific fact, however, is that auticides are downplayed by public opinion.

—Josef Schovanec, *Nos intelligences multiples*^[54]

The Swedish study published in late 2015 received considerable media coverage. Cited by the British association Autistica in a report, it highlighted what English-speaking media referred to as a "hidden crisis."^{[63][17]} In response, Autistica called for the implementation of a national plan to prevent premature deaths among autistic individuals in the United Kingdom.^[116] On May 24, 2017, British psychiatrists Sarah Cassidy and Jacqui Rodgers published a letter in *The Lancet* announcing the launch of coordinated efforts addressing this issue. In the days that followed,^[34] researchers from Coventry and Newcastle universities, in collaboration with Autistica and the *James Lind Alliance*, organized the first international conference focused on suicide among autistic individuals.^[34]

Steve Silberman, author of *NeuroTribes*, described the levels of premature death among autistic individuals as "shocking," stating that "as a society, we can no longer waste precious human potential in this way."^[36]

See also

- [Sex and gender differences in autism](#)
- [Ableism](#)
- [Sanism](#)
- [Conditions comorbid to autism](#)
- [Suicide among autistic individuals](#)

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Judo

Judo (kanji: 柔道 *jūdō*, "Den mjuka vägen") är en modern japansk kampsport skapad av Jigoro Kano ur olika jujutsustilar, sumobrottning samt västerländsk brottning vid 1800-talets slut. Målet i judo är att besegra sin motståndare genom att kasta och/eller utföra en fasthållning, ett halslås eller ett armlås. I judo förekommer det inte sparkar och slag, till skillnad från andra budogrenar som karate och jujutsu, förutom i förutbestämda former i en kata. En utövare av judo kallas judoka.

Sporten fick sin stora spridning efter andra världskrigets slut till andra länder och är idag en olympisk sport som organiseras av Internationella Judoförbundet, vilket samlar nationella 195 judoförbund. I Sverige har judo utövats sedan 1956 och organiseras av Svenska Judoförbundet.

Historik

Jigoro Kano föddes 1860 och hade en akademisk uppväxt och från sju års ålder studerade bland annat klassisk kinesiska, engelska, kalligrafi och litteratur under flera lärare. 1873 började Kano på skolan Ikuei-Gijuku i Shiba, Tokyo. Kano var fysiskt svagare än många av sina klasskamrater så han mobbades ofta.^[1] Detta ledde till att han sökte upp en dojo för att lära sig jujutsu. I februari 1882 hade Kano nått hög nivå inom flera olika jujutsu-stilar och grundade sin egen skola vid namn Kodokan Judo i ett buddhistiskt tempel vid namn Eisho-ji. Jujutsu hade vid denna tid en svag ställning och många skolor dog ut i samband med att feodalsamhället med samurajklassen nyligen avskaffats. Hans syfte var att bevara de olika jujutsu-skolornas tekniker han fann bäst uppbyggda ur fysiologisk och mekanisk synpunkt samt samla dem inom ett gemensamt system som byggstenar för en sport lämplig som fysisk och mental fostran.^[1] 1899 blev Kano tillfrågad av Dai Nippon Butoku Kai att vara ordförande i en kommitté som skulle fastställa tävlingsregler för de olika jujutsustilarna samt för judo.

Från början var det män som tränade judo, men 1926 startades det träningsgrupper även för kvinnor på Kodokan. Utvecklingen mot den moderna tävlingsidrott som judo är idag var inte helt given eftersom dr. Kano inte ansåg att själva tämlandet var överensstämmende med de mål och ideal han hade med judon. Dock ökade judon i popularitet mycket tack vare de tvekamper som elever vid Kodokan ställdes upp i och vann.

Judon spreds sedan relativt snabbt till andra länder. Redan 1918 etablerades klubben Budokwai i London av Gunji Koizumi, ibland ansedd som den europeiska judons fader. Det var här på Budokwai som man började använda de färgade bältena för kyugrader 1924.^{[2][3]} Till Sverige kom judon först på femtiotalet. Den första svenska klubb som bildades var Hie-Gou, vilken bildades 1956 i Göteborg. Senare samma år grundades också Stockholms Judo och Jiu-Jitsu Institut i Stockholm.^[2]

Judo är sedan olympiska sommarspelen 1964 i Tokyo en olympisk sport. Torsten Ehrenmark var svensk kommentator och myntade då uttrycket "pyjamasbrottning". Det gav publiken en grovt förenklad men lättförståelig bild av vad judo är: brottning med kläder att greppa i, till skillnad från den västerländska brottingen som minimerat kläderna och förbjudit grepp i dem. Genom att ta i dräkten och dra eller trycka kan man både kasta och till exempel strypa sin motståndare (ett så kallat halslås), på sätt som vore omöjligt i västerländsk brottning. De flesta brotningskast är dock tillåtna även inom judon, och det finns inga krav på att de tekniker som används i en tävling ska finnas i Kodokans standard så länge de inte bryter mot tävlingens regler.

Judon tränas idag i de flesta länder huvudsakligen som en tävlingssport men används även för motion eller andra former av träning. Det är Kanos judo, Kodokan judo som är en olympisk idrott. I Japan finns även en mindre gren av judo som tävlar under annorlunda regler som mera befrämjar markkamp, Kosen judo.

Judo har ingen särskild åldersgräns men många svenska klubbar följer Svenska Judoförbundets rekommendation att man ska ha fyllt sex år innan man kan ta sin första ordinarie gradering. Judo finns inom vissa klubbar även för förskoleålder och brukar då vara mer lekbetonad. Det finns cirka 20 000 utövare i Sverige.^[4]



Judo skrivet med kanji.



Kyuzo Mifune och Jigoro Kano

Filosofi

I en intervju i The Oriental Review 1913 sade Jigoro Kano att: "Om jag skulle uttrycka principerna i judo i en enda mening så skulle jag säga, att det är att är en sport som använder både sinnet och kroppen på bästa möjliga sätt".^[5]

Även om tävling är en stor del av judon idag, var det inte Kanos avsikt att skapa en tävlingsidrott.^[2] När Kano grundade judon var hans mål istället att skapa en sport som utvecklade både kroppen och psyket i lika proportioner. Det görs bland annat genom kata och märks också i de ritualer som omgärdar träningen.

Tekniker som valdes ut för Kodokan Judo skulle genom fokus kring hävstångseffekt eller tyngdpunktsplacering på effektivt sätt nyttja den kraft man lade in i utförandet till att omrikta motståndarens kraft och rörelsemoment och bryta hans balans. Även efter Jigoro Kanos död har hans elever och efterföljare inom Kodokan Judo fortsatt att utveckla judon genom varianter i utförande eller helt nya tekniker. Vissa farliga moment är numera förbjudna i tävling men kan fortfarande tränas med en samarbetande partner som ren teknikupvisning eller som kata.

Gradering

För att en utövare av judo ska få försöka erhålla ett högre bälte måste utövaren uppfylla ett antal krav, till exempel antal träningstillfällen och kunskap kring ett antal tekniker, när utövaren gör detta så kan denne delta i en gradering. En gradering går till så att eleven visar ett förbestämt antal tekniker för de personer som observerar (oftast den högst graderade person inom klubben och/eller elevens tränare) och poängsätter de uppvisade teknikerna, är de uppvisade teknikerna korrekta har eleven lyckats med sin gradering och därmed erövrat sitt nya bälte. Svenska Judoförbundet tillhandahåller ett kompendium med tekniker som skall finnas med till 1 kyu men klubbarna har rätt att, så länge alla tekniker är med i graderingarna före 1 kyu, att själva göra egna graderingsbestämmelser.^[6]

Röda och vita bälten används väldigt ofta på tävlingar för att kunna urskilja två judokas, detta betyder inte att personen har erhållit graden i fråga. Svenska klubbar använder normalt bälten i färgerna vitt för nybörjare och sedan gult, orange, grönt, blått och brunt för att markera hur långt en elev nått i teknikinlärningen, så kallade kyu-grader. Vissa klubbar markerar även halvvägs mellan färgerna genom att man får sätta ett band med nästa grads färg runt ena (ibland vardera) änden på sitt bälte. Internationellt finns flera varianter för hur kyu-grader markeras men där färger används har de i allmänhet samma ordning som i Sverige.

Svart bälte eller dan-grader delas inte ut på klubbnivå utan i Sverige av en riksgraderingskommitté inom Svenska Judoförbundet. Av svart finns det tio nivåer, 1-10 dan. De högsta graderna kräver även internationellt godkännande. Den högsta graden, 10 dan, delas ut av Kodokans president, för närvarande (2007) Jigoro Kanos sonson Yukimitsu Kano. Kodokan har allt som allt bara delat ut 10 dan till 15 personer. Internationella Judoförbundet (IJF) har delat ut 10 dan till två personer. Alla dan-grader markeras likadant över hela världen.

Personer med första till femte dan bär svart bälte. De med sjätte till åttonde dan bär svart bälte men kan också välja att använda ett bälte med omväxlande röda och vita fält. På samma sätt kan personer med nionde och tionde dan välja att bär ett helrött bälte. De med tionde dan kan även bär ett så kallat dubbel vitt bälte, vilket är ett bälte som är dubbelt så brett som ett vanligt bälte och tillverkat av siden. Detta ska symbolisera att cirkeln är sluten. Både de röd-vita och de helröda bältena används oftast som ceremonibälten eller då bäraren är aktiv som instruktör. I vardagsträning bär även högdaniga utövare ofta vanliga svarta bälten.

Grader

Grad (japanskt namn)	Bältesfärg
10 dan (<i>Judan</i>) 9 dan (<i>Kudan</i>)	
8 dan (<i>Hachidan</i>) 7 dan (<i>Nanadan</i>) 6 dan (<i>Rokudan</i>)	
5 dan (<i>Godan</i>) 4 dan (<i>Yodan</i>) 3 dan (<i>Sandan</i>) 2 dan (<i>Nidan</i>) 1 dan (<i>Shodan</i>)	
1 kyu (<i>Ikkyu</i>)	
2 kyu (<i>Nikyu</i>)	
3 kyu (<i>Sankyu</i>)	
4 kyu (<i>Yonkyu</i>)	
5 kyu (<i>Gokyu</i>)	
6 kyu (<i>Rokyu</i>)	

Träning

Judo tränar man vanligen på tatamimattor, förr gjorda av rishalm men numera oftast av andra material, t.ex. pressad skumplast.^[2] Teknikerna man tränar på kan delas upp i kast, fasthållningar, armlås och halslås. Dessa tekniker kan man träna på flera olika sätt, dels genom teknikträning och dels genom vad som kallas randori och kata. Randori betyder fri träning och kan liknas vid sparring där två judoutövare försöker utföra en eller flera tekniker på varandra med motstånd från partnern. Randori är ofta en stor och viktig del av judoträningen.^[7] Kata är å andra sidan förutbestämda rörelser och syftar till att visa de grundläggande principerna i judo.

Judodräkt

Judodräkten kallas för judogi (ibland förkortat *gi*) och består av en jacka, ett bälte och byxor. Judogin är traditionellt vit, men i europeiska tävlingssammanhang används också sedan 90-talet blå dräkter för att särskilja de tävlande åt. Jämfört med exempelvis den dräkt som bärts av karateutövare så är judogin också ganska kraftig för att klara av alla ryck som den kommer utsättas för.

Tävling



Vid stora västerländska tävlingar bär den ena tävlande vit judodräkt och den andre blå, för att det ska vara lättare att skilja dem åt.

Huvuddomaren Yoshi och matchen fortsätter. Om poängen är identiska när matchtiden är slut, avgörs matchen av Golden Score. Golden Score innebär den första tävlande att få något poäng vinner och Golden Score fortsätter fram tills någon av de tävlande fått poäng eller diskvalificerats.

Så kallade "skickliga nedtagningar" är tillåtna (till exempel flying armbar) men ger inte poäng. Alla beslut kommer från mattdomaren, men kantdomarna kan meddela huvuddomaren om de anser att ett domslut är felaktigt eller missats helt.

Poäng

Målet i en judomatch är att vinna matchen med det högsta poängen Ippon, vilket man får genom att göra ett perfekt kast eller hålla en fasthållning i 20 sekunder. Man kan också göra ett halslås eller ett armlås på motståndaren och därigenom tvinga denne att ge upp. Den lägre poängen Waza-Ari är ett "halvt poäng", och får man två Waza-Ari omvandlas det till Ippon vilket alltså ger matchvinst. En Waza-Ari ges för ett kast som inte riktigt har tillräckligt med kraft eller kontroll för att ge en Ippon, eller för en fasthållning i tio sekunder. Tidigare fanns det även ytterligare två poäng, nämligen Yuko och Koka. Dessa togs dock bort 2017 respektive 2009.

Poäng i Judo	
Benämning	Poäng
Ippon	10
Wazaari	7

Påföljder

Mindre regelförseelser bestraffas med en varning, som i judo kallas shido. Den tredje varningen leder till att man diskvalificeras, vilket kallas Hansoku-make. Motståndaren vinner då matchen med en ippon, men den diskvalificerade tävlande får fortsätta tävlingen. Man kan också få en Hansoku-make direkt för allvarliga regelbrott. I sådana fall diskvalificeras spelaren som fick Hansoku-make från turneringen.^[9] Vid mycket allvarliga regelbrott kan en judoka också bli ifråntagen rätten att bära sin bältesgrad.

Se även

- Judo vid Olympiska sommarspelen

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		Kampsporter
Östasiatiska	Filippinska	modern amis · escrima · kali aikido · iaido · judo · jujutsu · jukendo · karate · kendo · kyudo · naginata · shorinji kempo · sumo · taido · jodo/jujutsu · shindo muso ryu · kashima shinto ryu · kashima shin ryu · katori shinto ryu · niten ichi ryu · daito-ryu (jujutsu) · hontai yoshin ryu (jujutsu) · ninpo taijutsu · bujinkan · ninjutsu (jujutsu)
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Judo vid olympiska sommarspelen

	1964 · 1968 · 1972 · 1976 · 1980 · 1984 · 1988 · 1992 · 1996 · 2000 · 2004 · 2008 · 2012 · 2016 · 2020 · 2024	
Lista över olympiska medaljörer i judo		
Auktoritetsdata	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LCCN: sh85070969 (http://id.loc.gov/authorities/subjects/sh85070969) • GND: 4028822-5 (http://d-nb.info/gnd/4028822-5) • BNF: cb126539926 (http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb126539926) (data) (http://data.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb126539926) • NKC: ph114840 (http://aleph.nkp.cz/F/?func=find-c&local_base=aut&ccl_term=ica=ph114840&CON_LNG=ENG) 	

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Jujutsu



Den här artikeln **behöver fler eller bättre källhänvisningar för att kunna verifieras.** (2012-02)

Åtgärda genom att lägga till pålitliga källor (gärna som fotnoter). Uppgifter utan källhänvisning kan ifrågasättas och tas bort utan att det behöver diskuteras på diskussionssidan.

Jujutsu (japanska: 柔術[?], [Jūjutsu info](#)), ibland *jiu-jitsu*, är en stridskonst som tillhör den japanska kampsportsfamiljen budo. *Jū* översätts som mjuk och följsam, ursprungligen "utan vapen" medan *jutsu* betyder metod eller teknik. Namnet syftar till konsten att besegra en motståndare med så lite fysisk styrka som möjligt, till exempel genom att utnyttja motståndarens egen kraft så att denne faller på eget grepp.



O soto osae

Historik, koryū jū jutsu och moderna system

Termen *jūjutsu* är gammal och syftar ursprungligen på japanska kampskolor, *ryū*. En del av dessa grundades för flera hundra år sedan och räknas tillsammans med olika svärds- och andra vapenskolor till koryū budo, gammal budo. De flesta gamla japanska stridsskolor är utdöda, och så även vad gäller gammal *jūjutsu*. Av de som levde vidare, tränas ett fåtal även i väst, såsom *Hontai Yoshin Ryu* och de skolor som ingår i Bujinkan. Tvärt emot vad många tror, kan ett flertal vapen ingå i *jūjutsu*. Normalt användande av svärd brukar inte räknas till *jūjutsu*, men exempelvis sätt att använda ett svärd som är kvar i baljan för att låsa sin motståndare räknas ofta dit.

I Sverige är de flesta stilar av *jūjutsu* konstruerade av svenskar (eller åtminstone västerlänningar). I dessa typer av jujutsu brukar självförsvar vara en betonad ingrediens. *Jūjutsu* introducerades i Sverige omkring år 1900 av Viking Cronholm.

Svenska ju-jutsusystem

Durewallsystemet, uppkallat efter sin skapare Kurt Durewall, kännetecknas av att det i första hand inte lär ut tekniker som sparkar och slag och är ingen tävlingssport utan humant självförsvar. Stilen använder huvudprincipen "att med minsta möjliga kraft nå största möjliga effekt utan att förorsaka smärta eller skada". Det som skiljer Durewallsystemet från övriga jiujitsustilar är att hänsyn tas även till angriparen.

Den största stilen i Sverige är Ju-jutsu Kai som är skapad av Hans Greger, som en gång i tiden var elev under Kurt Durewall. Från Ju-jutsu Kai har tre större avknoppningar skett. Den första skedde 1997 då kampjujutsu bröt sig ur. Kampjujutsu har en liknande filosofi som Ju-jutsu Kai, det vill säga fokus på både självförsvar och tävling. Den andra avknopningen har gått åt ett annat håll – Sport Ju-jutsu lägger vikten på matchträning. En annan avknopning från Ju-jutsu Kai är Jigo Ryu, som lägger mer vikt på självförsvar.

En ytterligare svensk jujutsu-stil är Jū Shin Jutsu Ryū, skapad av Georg Irenius 1972. Jū Shin Jutsu Ryū är enbart fokuserat på självförsvar, med inriktning på ett humant men effektivt försvar. I Skåne är även Jan-Erik Karlssons stil Hoku Shin Ko Ryū väl spridd. De svenska stilarna är skapade utifrån kontakter med européer som lärt sig delar av japansk jūjutsu på olika sätt, samt influenser från andra budokonster som fanns i landet. Flera nya stilar har blandat in influenser från brottingstilar och kickboxning med mera.

De flesta svenska jujutsu-stilar har graderingar och ett bältesystem som liknar judons. 2002 bildades Svenska Taijutsu/Jujutsu Förbundet (<http://www.stjf.se>) av Johan Pettersson, ett öppet förbund för de jūjutsustilar som är intresserade av att träna och samarbeta utan ekonomiska eller politiska motiv. Johan Pettersson har också grundat en jujutsustil, Gake Ryu Jujutsu. Med Svenska Budo & Kampsportsförbundets omorganisation 2009 ombildades den före detta Ju-jutsusektionen till ett underförbund till SB&K - Svenska Jujutsufederationen.

Sedan 1987 anordnas SM i ju-jutsu.

Brasiliansk jiu-jitsu

En ytterligare gren i jujutsu är brasiliansk jiu-jitsu, som koncentrerar sig huvudsakligen på vad andra stilar kallar ne-waza, markkamp. Brasiliansk jiu-jitsu har rötter i judo, och fokus ligger på obeväpnad kamp och sparring. Brasiliansk jiu-jitsu gjorde sig känd främst genom framgångar av Royce Gracie i tidiga Ultimate Fighting Championships och andra Mixed Martial Arts / Vale Tudo tävlingar. Brasiliansk Jiu-Jitsu förkortas ofta till BJJ men kallas även Gracie Jiu-Jitsu.

Stavning

Alla sätt att skriva jūjutsu med västerländska bokstäver är transkriberingar från japanskans uttal av de två kinesiska tecken, kanji, som utgör namnet. Det är svårt att säga att ett sätt är mera rätt än andra. Lokalt passar ofta västerländska jūjutsustilar på att markera åtskillnad från varandra, genom att stava annorlunda. Så brukar exempelvis Ju-jutsu Kai stava ordet ju-jutsu medan Durewall-klubbarna skriver jiujitsu. "Jujutsu" är en förenkling av "Jūjutsu" som är en transkribering enligt Hepburn-systemet.

Anledningen till de olika stavningarna är det japanska skriftsystemet kana, där "jū" är enstavigt men skrivs med mororna "ji-litet yu-u". Japaner uttalar detta ungefär som man på svenska skulle läsa "ju", med långt u och med d-förslag "djuu". "Jutsu" i sin tur består av stavelserna "ju-tsu". När jiujitsu introducerades i Sverige 1908 av Viking Cronholm (1874–1961), kom det via engelskan och en transkribering som var anpassad efter det.

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Externa länkar

-  Wikimedia Commons har media som rör Jujutsu.

Kampsporter	
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