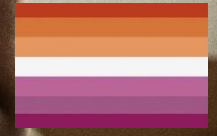
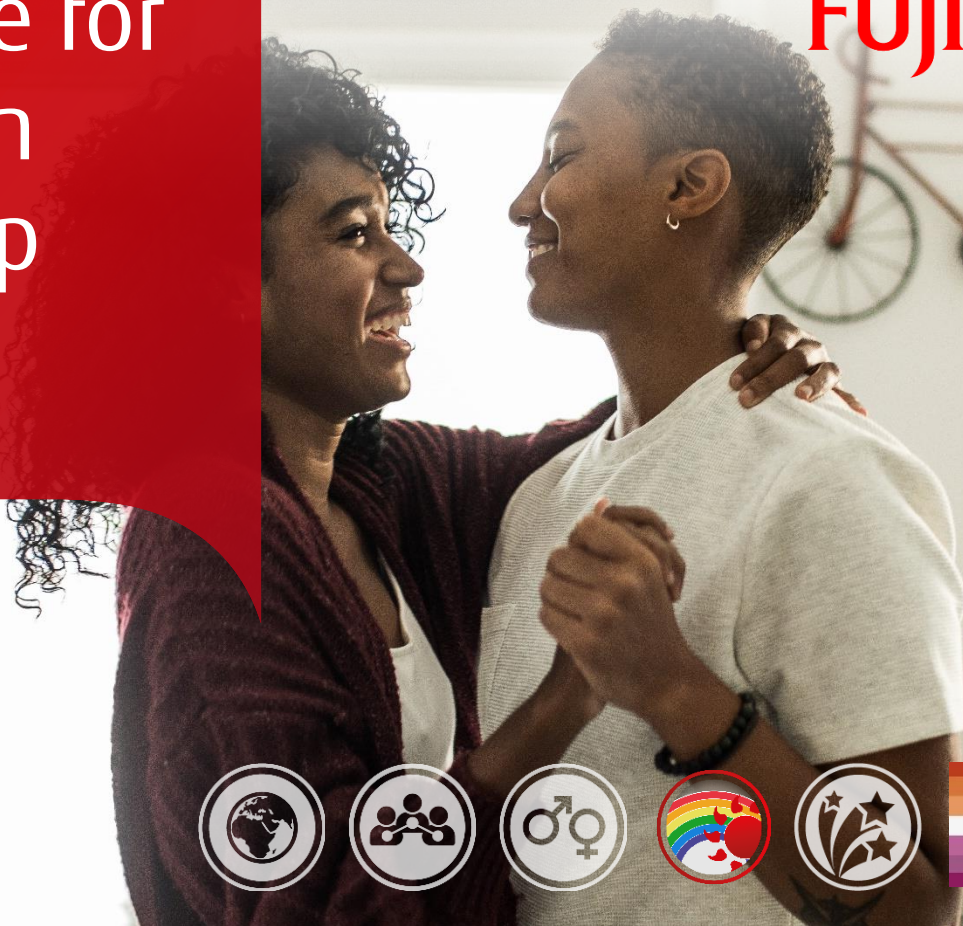


# A Guide for Lesbian Allyship



## What is Lesbian?

The dictionary definition states:

“ Noun: a homosexual woman. A person, especially a female, who is sexually attracted to people of the same sex or gender. A gay woman. ”

### Historically

The word lesbian comes from the name of the Greek island Lesbos, the birthplace of the poet Sappho (the origin of the word sapphic). The use of lesbian to mean gay woman or female homosexuality dates back to 1732. Before this was used, the word lesbian meant "of Lesbos", such as "Lesbian wine" or "Lesbian culture".

Romantic and sexual relationships between women go back far in human history, including to ancient times. Most ancient civilizations were surprisingly LGBTQ+ friendly, thinking that it was just human nature to crave sexual or romantic contact with the same gender. Use of the word lesbianism to describe erotic relationships between women had been documented in 1870. In 1890, lesbian was used in a medical dictionary as an adjective to describe tribadism (as "lesbian love").

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

### Today

Recently there are more women that are likely to choose other terms to describe their identity (queer, bi, pansexual/pan) and reserve "lesbian" to describe their relationship. Women who Love Women (WLW) have also developed a distinct community, creating their own pride flags and slang words. Celebrities such as Cynthia Nixon and Lindsay Lohan commenting openly on their relationships with women and reality television portraying same-sex relationships. This rise in acknowledgment of Women Who Love Women has gained social acceptance. However, stereotypes of slim and elegant, butch or androgynous are a common misconception in mainstream culture.

## What are some of the issues that Lesbian women face?

### Sexism and Discrimination

There is a growing public movement around tackling sexism and discrimination against women. There are universal experiences for all women, but for lesbian and bi (LB) women there are additional barriers because of heteronormativity which is the assumption that everyone is straight.

LB women often find themselves repeatedly coming out when accessing healthcare.

### Greater risk of hate crime

Lesbian and bi women are at increased risk of hate crime when they express affection towards their partner in public or if they are viewed as having a look that is "too masculine".

Compared to heterosexual people certain LGBT+ groups found to be at particular risk, including LBT+ women, young people and those identifying as LGBT+ from black and ethnic minority groups.

### Sexualization

Although there is an increasing visibility of lesbian and bi women in media, much of this portrayal is hypersexualized. Many lesbian and bi women do not feel that these portrayals reflect the reality of their relationships, but are instead created for a straight male audience.

### LBT+ women don't have monogamous relationships

Monogamy is something completely different to sexual orientation and applies equally to all identities, including heterosexuality. Both are absolutely valid but assumptions cannot and should not be made.

Often there is a misconception lesbian and bi women have an interest in a threesome with a straight couple. Whilst this is mostly harmless, many women can experience discomfort in, what should be, their safe spaces as this attention from straight couples can be persistent.

# Over 50%

of LGBT+ women have experienced significant

## Depression and Anxiety

compared to 1 in 5 (19%) women overall in the UK

(Stonewall 2018, NHS England 2014)

## 30% of lesbians & 23% of bi women

have experienced inappropriate curiosity from healthcare staff.

(Stonewall 2018)

### Older LBT+ women

Older LBT+ women experience assumptions that they will not be LBT+. This is closely linked is an assumption that older women must have children and if they have children they won't (or can't) be LBT+. Older LGBT+ people are more likely to live alone (41% vs 28%), and have concerns about aging because of their sexuality. (Stonewall 2011)

## Myth Busting

### Lesbians are 'feminine' or 'butch'

Butch and femme are terms used in the lesbian subculture to acknowledge a masculine (butch) or feminine (femme) identity with its associated traits, behaviors, styles and self-perception. The terms were founded in lesbian communities in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some lesbian feminists have argued that butch-femme is a replication of heterosexual relations. Research showed that 95% of lesbians are familiar with butch/femme codes and can rate themselves or others in terms of those codes, and yet the same percentage feels that butch/femme was "unimportant in their lives".

In the 21st century, some younger people are also beginning to eschew labels like 'butch' or even 'lesbian' and identify instead as [queer](#).

“ Fujitsu makes me proud of who I am every day, as a lesbian I am not judged on my sexual preference but instead respected and valued for the way I work. I feel that Fujitsu has created an inclusive environment for everyone and it makes me proud to work here. ”

Zara King



### Same-sex couples have 'male' and 'female' roles

Same sex relationships come in different shapes and sizes. Some people may display attributes or take on responsibilities typically associated with what it means to be 'male' or 'female' but others won't. Even then, there's a longer conversation to be had around the fact that those associations are based on sexist stereotypes, rather than what makes someone 'male' or 'female'.

On the flipside, people's assumptions that same sex couples don't form families is also incorrect. There's a whole host of ways for lesbian couples to have children, whether that's donor insemination and fertility treatment, adoption, fostering, or surrogacy.

### Multiple 'Coming Out'

Lesbian women like other LGBT+ people experience 'coming out' as something that LGBT+ people have to do again and again, if they choose to do so. Whether starting a new job, meeting new neighbors, making new friends, coming into contact with old friends or meeting up with distant relatives, it's a decision lesbians have to make constantly.

### Only young people 'Come Out'

There's also a misconception that people usually come out at a young age. Realising you're LGBT+ and feeling comfortable enough to tell others can happen at any stage of life, whether you're 15, 55, or 95 years old.

### We all act like the lesbian women you see on telly

Unfortunately, LGBT+ representation is often white, young, cisgender and of non-faith background. That leaves out a lot of people who are part of the lesbian community. Women talk about 'visibility' frequently, and that's because it's vital. Have you heard the phrase, 'you can't be what you can't see?' Without visible role models, it can be really hard to understand and embrace your own identity.

Don't forget that lesbians are present across all communities within society, this means there are:

- Senior citizens
- People with disabilities
- People of different ethnicities
- People of faith
- Young people

That might sound obvious, but often the specific experiences of those groups are overlooked, which in part is because lesbian representation is not diverse enough.

### A phase you're going through

The last thing a person needs after opening up about their sexuality is to have this trivialized as a phase. It's not likely that a person just woke up and thought, "You know what, I think I'll try being a lesbian". You may well be one of the first people, the person sharing has had the confidence to tell; so it's a privilege they are telling you - appreciate this! Do not change the focus to be about your own feelings, but by giving positive feedback and not making assumptions, support them by asking questions about how they feel.

## Homophobia

Homophobia encompasses a range of negative attitudes and feelings toward lesbian women. It has been defined as contempt, prejudice, aversion, hatred or antipathy, which may be based on irrational fear and ignorance, and is often related to traditional/religious beliefs.

Here are a few ways that society erases lesbian identity and experiences:

### Outing

This is when someone shares your story without your consent and this makes the information outside of your control. Each person's story is theirs to share when they choose.

### How do you know you are lesbian?

Femme lesbians and bi women are often seen as a challenge for straight men to "convert" more than masculine presenting lesbians.

Derogatory comments like "she just hasn't met a 'real man'" or "she's never even been with a man" serve to erase a lesbian or bi woman's sexuality.

Many heterosexual people do not have homosexual relationships to validate they are straight, likewise many LGBT+ people know their own sexuality without having to have a heterosexual relationship.



## What can I do?

### See it

Be self confident in recognizing when inappropriate behavior / actions / conversations are taking place.

### Say it

Being confident in yourself to "call out" the inappropriate behavior / actions / conversations. This can be at the time that it is taking place or after the event (whatever is appropriate, in your judgement). If the inappropriate behavior / actions / conversations are taking place in a public environment NEVER put yourself in any danger – **Seek Assistance**.

### Sort it

By seeing the inappropriate behavior/ actions / conversations and calling it out – Report it now through the correct channels.

Here's a great start to find out more...

### Fujitsu Internal Links

Be a better [Lesbian Ally](#)  
Sign our [Fujitsu Pride Pledge](#)

### Lesbian in the Workplace

Myths about [coming out in the workplace](#)  
Myths about coming out in the workplace [video](#)

### Help and Support

Internal [Helplines](#)

External Helplines:

[AKT](#) supporting young LGBT+ people between 16 and 25 years old.

[LGBT Foundation](#) LGBT Foundation support the needs of the diverse range of people who identify as LGBT

[Imaan](#) the UK's leading LGBTQ Muslim charity.

[Stonewall](#) and [LGBT Consortium](#) services that enable you to find LGBT mental health services in your local area.

### 127 Learning and Myth-Busting

Lesbian Myths Busted: [Busting Lesbian Myths](#)

Coming Out in the [Workplace](#)

Challenging Homophobia in the Workplace: [video](#) and [article](#)

### Opinion Articles

Internal [Helplines](#)

External [Helplines](#)





## Fujitsu values are:

We respect each individual's human rights and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, creed, sex, age, social status, family origin, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation, nor will we commit other violations of human rights. Such discrimination will not be tolerated.

We will be resolute in upholding human rights in everything we do and will not tolerate such discrimination in others. Ignorance and inaction do not constitute excuses for discrimination. We will make every endeavour to be fully aware of human rights issues and foster respect and equality for all.

We seek through our actions to uphold human rights, ensuring that our organization is well respected by society.

## FUJITSU

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