

# Census 2021 Briefing

## Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

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### Datasets: Sexual orientation and gender identity

**Datalink:** the datasets used for this briefing can be accessed [here](#) and [here](#).

**Definition:** This briefing covers two census questions. 'Sexual orientation' is an umbrella term for sexual identity, attraction and behaviour. 'Gender identity' refers to how an individual perceives their gender.

**Census day:** The 2021 census was held in England and Wales on 21 March 2021. It was undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic so may not show 'normal' population and household patterns due to temporary changes in living circumstances during the pandemic.

## Key points

- Some 89.3% of Greater Manchester residents described themselves as straight or heterosexual, using the categories available on the 2021 census. This was very similar to the pattern for England as a whole (89.4%). The proportion was highest in Wigan (92.0%) and lowest in Manchester (84.6%).
- A higher proportion of residents answered that they were gay or lesbian in Greater Manchester (2.0%) than in England (1.5%).
- There were 6,450 people (0.3%) in Greater Manchester who said their gender was different to the sex they were registered with at birth (0.2% in England). Some 99.3% of residents who answered the question said their gender was the same.
- Some 2,650 people described themselves as trans men and 2,530 as trans women in Greater Manchester in 2021 (both 0.1% of residents who answered a question on gender identity). This response was similar to national patterns.
- A total of 1,595 people described themselves as non-binary (less than 0.1%).

## Introduction

For the first time the 2021 census contained questions on sexual orientation and gender identity. The language used to discuss these topics is evolving and to some extent novel. Care has been taken to clarify terms, but it is worth bearing in mind that there are debates around some distinctions. This briefing examines sexual orientation first and then gender identity.

### Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation covers sexual identity, attraction and behaviour. The question was voluntary among residents over the age of 16 and some 92.5% of people answered it nationally (93.1% in Greater Manchester). Across the city region of Greater Manchester 89.3% of residents said they were straight or heterosexual - in line with national patterns. In Manchester and Salford, however, the proportions who answered this way dropped well below the average (84.6% and 86.4% respectively).

Some 2% of Greater Manchester residents described themselves as gay or lesbian (compared with 1.5% in England). The proportion was highest in Manchester and Salford (3.3% in both). Residents who described themselves as bisexual constituted 1.4% of the Greater Manchester population (1.3% in England).

When the gay and lesbian category is combined with a range of others into an 'LGB+ grouping'<sup>1</sup>, then 6.7% of Manchester residents were LGB+, followed by Salford (5.6%). All other districts were below average. Out of more than 300 local authorities in England, Manchester had more LGB+ people than any other (29,222). Leeds was next with 27,962, followed by Birmingham (26,804) and Brighton and Hove (25,247).

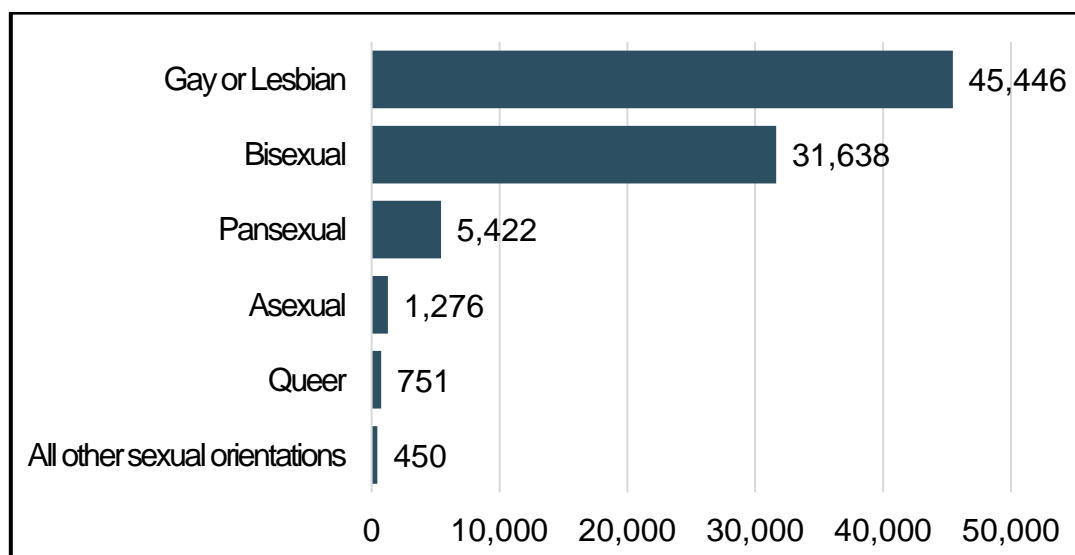
The chart below shows the numbers of Greater Manchester residents who picked categories other than straight or heterosexual. Below that, a table gives the district

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<sup>1</sup> LGB+ refers to people who are gay or lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, queer or 'other sexual orientation'.

level totals. We do not know from the census how respondents interpreted the terms of the question – only that they selected these responses to describe themselves<sup>2</sup>.

**Sexual orientation other than straight/heterosexual, Greater Manchester, 2021**



Source: 2021 Census, ONS

**Number of residents by local authority and identified sexual orientation, 2021**

Local Authority	Straight or Heterosexual	Gay or Lesbian	Bisexual	All other sexual orientations	Not answered
Bolton	210,665	2,806	2,317	570	15,931
Bury	140,309	2,443	1,524	395	10,202
Manchester	370,576	14,608	11,782	2,830	38,162
Oldham	169,261	2,153	1,541	489	13,594
Rochdale	159,265	2,040	1,514	412	11,714
Salford	187,447	7,181	4,142	925	17,230
Stockport	217,470	3,983	2,502	637	14,335
Tameside	168,142	3,315	2,081	612	10,985
Trafford	169,221	3,032	1,857	523	11,519
Wigan	247,126	3,885	2,381	507	14,795
<b>Greater Manchester</b>	<b>2,039,482</b>	<b>45,446</b>	<b>31,641</b>	<b>7,900</b>	<b>158,467</b>

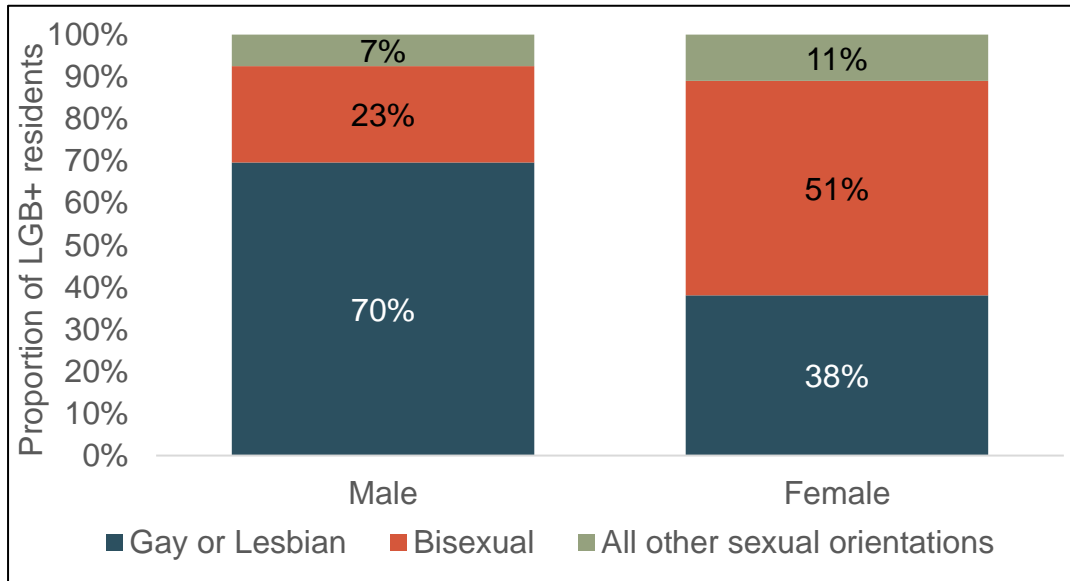
Source: ONS, Nomis - 2021 Census

<sup>2</sup> The language of sexual orientation and gender identity is evolving and generates different perspectives. According to [a guide](#) from Stonewall, a charity, the distinction between gay/lesbian and queer is that those who identify as queer reject labels of orientation or gender identity; pansexuals are people whose romantic or sexual attractions are not limited by sex or gender; asexual people do not experience sexual attraction. Non-binary is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity does not sit comfortably with 'man' or 'woman' but does not describe a sexual orientation.

## Gender and sexual orientation

More women described themselves as bisexual (1.9% of women) than gay or lesbian (1.4%) in Greater Manchester. Among men, 2.6% identified as gay and 0.9% said they were bisexual.

### Gay or lesbian, bisexual or 'other' sexual orientation, by gender, 2021



Source: ONS, Nomis - [2021 Census](#)

## Age (orientation)

Among younger residents aged between 16 and 34, 85.5% identified as straight or heterosexual, compared with 91.9% amongst residents aged 55 and over.

Meanwhile, 6.8% of younger residents (50,000 people) said they were gay or lesbian, while among older residents 1.1% did so (8,300).

## Gender identity

A total of 93.7% of the residents of Greater Manchester aged over 16 said that their gender identity was the same as that with which they were registered at birth (99.3% of those who answered the gender identity question).

Some 6,442 residents (0.3%) said their identity was different to their birth gender but stated no specific identity. There were 2,647 trans men and 2,528 trans women (both 0.1% of residents<sup>3</sup>), according to the census. Meanwhile, 1,594 residents defined their identity as non-binary and a further 855 residents selected the ‘all other gender identities’ category. When combined, the non-binary and ‘all other gender identities’ group constituted 0.1% of residents.

Manchester was the district where there were notably different patterns than elsewhere in respect of gender identity – both in comparison with Greater Manchester and England as a whole. This was the case for those opting not to answer the gender identity question as well as for variances in other categories. Out of more than 300 English local authorities, Manchester was fourteenth on the prevalence of residents who said their gender identity was different from their sex at birth.

Gender Identity (%)	Manchester	Greater Manchester	England
Gender identity the same as sex registered at birth	91.7%	93.7%	93.5%
Gender identity different from sex registered at birth but no specific identity given	0.5%	0.3%	0.2%
Trans woman	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%
Trans man	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%
All other gender identities	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%
Not answered	7.3%	5.7%	6.0%

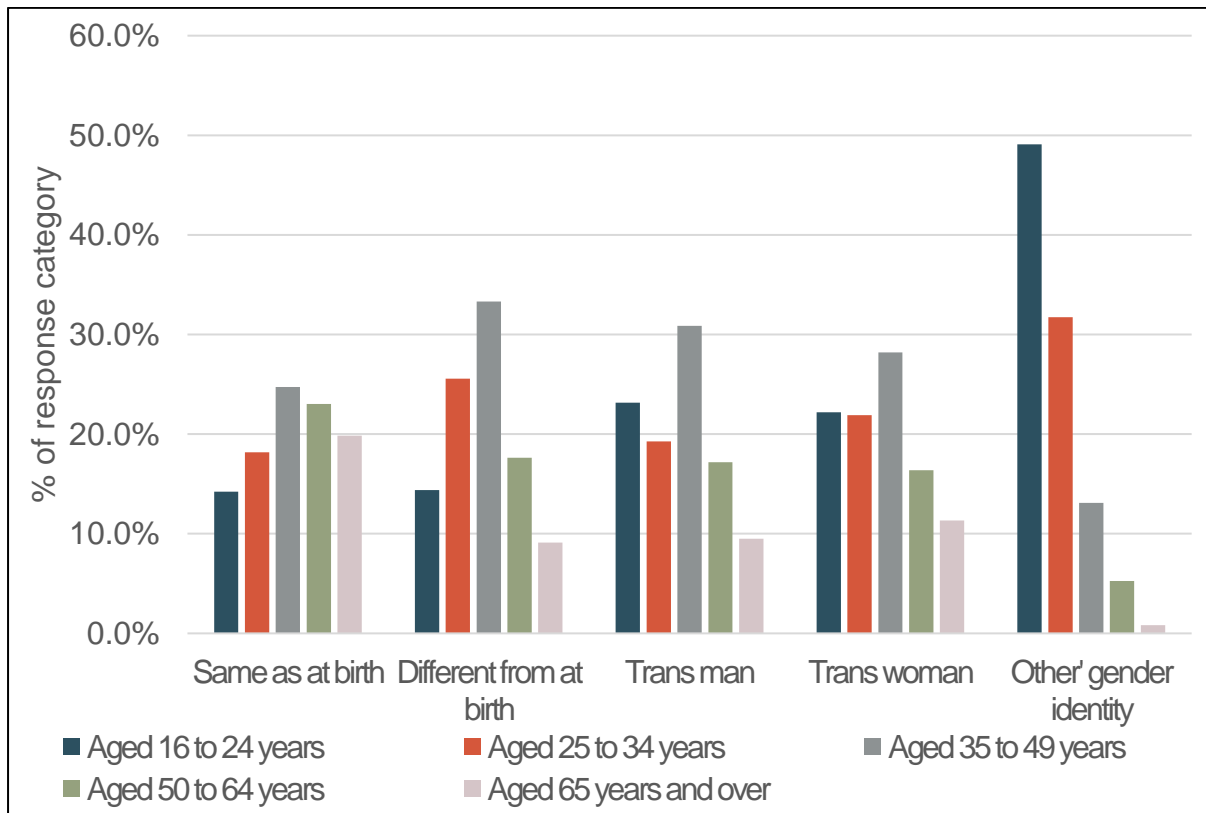
Source: ONS, Nomis - [2021 Census](#)

## Age (gender identity)

Some types of gender identity appear to be disproportionately accounted for by younger residents. The chart below shows proportions of responses on gender identity by age bracket. Among residents who selected the ‘other gender identity’ option (which includes non-binary), those under the age of 24 accounted for just under half of all responses in this category (49%).

<sup>3</sup> When rounded to .1 of a decimal place

**Gender identity by age (proportion of responses in category), 2021**



Source: ONS, Nomis - [2021 Census 2021](#)

Although the questions on orientation and identity were separate, the census offers some insight into the interaction between them. Aside from heterosexual residents, and those who identify with the sex they were registered with at birth, the majority of trans residents in Greater Manchester said they were straight or heterosexual (50.6% of trans women; 57.3% of trans men). Meanwhile, among the ‘all other gender identities’ group, 86.7% identified as ‘lesbian, gay, bisexual or other (LGB+)’. The proportions for these responses were very similar to national patterns.

**Reflections**

Large cities can have a reputation for being relatively tolerant and welcoming of people who see themselves as ‘different’ in various ways. This may help explain why the districts of Greater Manchester which contain the city centre of Manchester were less ‘straight’ than the rest of the conurbation. These districts drive the variations described in this briefing.

On sexual orientation, there is variation by age and gender in responses. For example, whereas a higher proportion of women say they are bisexual, rather than gay or lesbian, among men the proportion who see themselves as gay is higher. On identity, meanwhile, there are some notable differences among age groups. These are especially obvious in respect of the 'other' category (mostly made up of people who see themselves as non-binary).

It is possible that the number of residents who did not answer the sexual orientation question on the census (158,467 in Greater Manchester) could be taken to suggest an undercount of the LGBT+ population. A recent House of Commons paper noted that those who "chose not to respond might well identify as LGBT+ in other contexts but didn't wish to share this on the census."<sup>4</sup> However, it is not possible to know this from the census alone and would necessitate other kinds of research.

## Further reading

The ONS briefing on sexual orientation can be read [here](#)

The ONS briefing on gender identity can be read [here](#)

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<sup>4</sup> <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/2021-census-what-do-we-know-about-the-lgbt-population/>