



Basic Definitions:

sexual orientation and gender identity

Sexual Orientation

Describes to whom a person is sexually attracted. Some people are attracted to people of a particular gender; others are attracted to more than one gender. Some are not attracted to anyone. Sometimes the term “affectional orientation” is used synonymously to indicate that attraction can be about more than sexual desire.

Asexual ~ not attracted sexually to anyone and/or no desire to act on their attraction to anyone. Does not necessarily mean sexless.

Bisexual ~ attracted to people regardless of gender. A common misconception is that bisexual people are attracted to everyone and anyone. Often referred to as “bi”.

Heterosexual ~ attracted to people of the “opposite gender” (though this assumes there are only two genders, see below). Often referred to as “straight”.

Homosexual ~ attracted to people of the same gender. Often referred to as “gay” for men and sometimes women, and “lesbian” for women only.

Questioning ~ a term used to describe someone, often a youth, who is unsure of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Queer ~ often used as an umbrella term for bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender (BGLT) people as well as an individual identity for those who do not fit sexual orientation and/or gender identity norms in US society. Historically, it has been used as a pejorative term, and its use today is met with disfavor by some and worn proudly by others.

Homophobia ~ The fear of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people (often lumped together). It can result in avoidance, discrimination, and violence against BGLT people.

Biphobia ~ The fear of bisexual people, similar to homophobia, though it often includes the belief that bisexual people don’t exist.

Heterosexism ~ The presumption that everyone is heterosexual and/or the belief that heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality and bisexuality. Often includes the use of power of the majority (heterosexuals) to reinforce this belief and forgetting the privileges of being heterosexual in our society.



Gender Identity and Expression

A person's actual or perceived gender, as well as a person's gender identity, gender-related self-image, gender-related appearance, or gender-related expression. One's sex (male, female, intersex) is the physical biology with which they are born. One's gender (man, woman, transgender) is how they choose to identify.

Crossdressers ~ People who dress in the clothing, partially or completely, of the societal norm for the "opposite" gender. Also known as "transvestites", though that term is generally, but not completely, out of favor.

Genderqueer/Third Gender/Transgender ~ People who identify as other than a man or a woman. Some individuals identify as neither men nor women, some identify as both, and still others identify as some combination of the two. Many believe there are more than two genders. Definitions and language continue to evolve.

Intersexual ~ A person born with mixed sexual physiology, with a physical manifestation of genital/genetic/endocrinological differentiation that is different from the cultural norm. ("Hermaphrodite" was the term used previously, though it is generally disliked and out of favor by intersex individuals.)

Transsexual ~ People whose understanding of their gender is different than the body into which they were born. A person born in a man's body whose self identity is that of a woman (or vice versa).

Transphobia ~ The fear of transgender people (used here as an umbrella term) and is similar to homophobia and biphobia.

Genderism ~ The belief that there are only two genders, male and female, which are identical to the biological sexes; and the belief that males must be masculine and females feminine.

Sexual Reassignment Surgery (SRS) ~ A part of the process a transsexual person goes through in order to create the bodies they believe they were born to have. Hormone therapy and psychiatric care are also a part of this process.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

BGLT ~ An acronym for bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender. The Office of BGLT Concerns chooses to list the words alphabetically so as not to show preference for any one identity.

Coming Out ~ The term means to openly state one's identity, usually as BGLT. The term goes back to 1869 when gay people were urged to openly be themselves in Germany at the start of their gay rights movement (which was squashed by Hitler's rise). Being **out** means being open about one's identity. Being **outed** means someone else has disclosed one's identity, usually without the individual's permission.