

PSU Queer Resource Center • Terminology and Definitions

Sexuality and Attraction

Sexual Orientation

The direction of one's sexual interest toward members of the same, different, or multiple genders. It is based on to whom a person is emotionally, physically, romantically, and/or sexually attracted.

Romantic Orientation

Romantic orientation refers to an individual's pattern of romantic attraction based on a person's gender. This is considered distinct from sexual orientation, which refers specifically to a person's patterns of sexual attraction. Romantic orientation may or may not align with a person's sexual orientation (gay/homoromantic v. asexual/panromantic).

Homosexual

A person who has emotional, physical, and sexual attraction to persons of the same gender. More of a medical term, it is considered outdated when referring to gay people or communities due to its clinical/research-based connotation. It is used primarily in conservative political or religious circles as a negative descriptor and rarely used in community.

Gay

Can refer to a man who has emotional, physical, and/or sexual attractions to other men. Also used for same gender attracted people generally.

Lesbian

A woman who has emotional, physical, and/or sexual attractions to other women.

Bisexual

A person who is emotionally, physically, spiritually, and sexually attracted to members of more than one gender. Some prefer less binary based terms such as pansexual.

Asexual

A person who does not experience sexual attraction to others and/or does not experience interest in sex. Asexuality is distinct from abstention from sexual activity and celibacy, which are behavioral and generally motivated by factors such as an individual's personal or religious beliefs. Some asexual people may engage in sexual activity for various reasons including to please romantic partners.

Pansexual

A person who is emotionally, physically, spiritually, and sexually attracted to members of all genders. While bisexuality categorizes attraction based on people of the same and different gender from oneself, pansexuality is a term that is often used to reflect the fluidity of the gender spectrum. Some pansexual people may say that gender does not play any role in to whom they are attracted.

Heterosexual/Straight

A man who has emotional, physical, spiritual, and sexual attractions to women or vice versa. This is also the sexuality that dominant discourse prescribes.

Same-gender loving

A term from the African American/Black queer community and used by people of color who may see 'gay' and 'lesbian' as terms of the white queer community.

Questioning

The process of exploring one's own sexual and/or gender identity.

Queer

Derogatory slang term used to identify LGBT people. This term has been embraced and reinvented as a positive, proud, political identifier when used by LGBT people among and about themselves.

LGBTQQIAP2S

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Pansexual, Two-Spirit

Sex and Gender

Sex

A medical term designating a certain combination of gonads, chromosomes, secondary sex characteristics, and hormonal balances. A binary system (male or female) set by the medical establishment, usually based on genitals and sometimes chromosomes. Because this is usually divided into 'male' and 'female' this category assigns gendered meaning to bodies and ignores the existence of intersex and trans people.

Gender

A complex combination of roles, expressions, identities, performances, and more, that is assigned gendered meaning by a society. Gender is defined by both individuals and by society, and how gender is embodied and understood varies from culture to culture and from person to person. Gender is more complex than a binary or even a simple spectrum.

Gender Identity

An individual's internal sense of their gender. One's gender identity may or may not align with their assigned gender, and one's gender identity is not visible to others.

Pronouns

He/him/his • She/her/hers • They/them/theirs • E/em/eir • First letter of name • Ze/zir/zirs • Ze/hir/hirs • Hu/hum/hus • Per/per/pers • Ve/ver/vis • One/one/one's • A person's name

Gender Expression

The way you present or appear to other people.

Transgender

An umbrella term for a range of people, behaviors, and expressions that transgress society's view of gender as necessarily fixed, unmoving, and following from one's biological sex.

Trans Man

A man who was assigned female at birth (meaning they were medically and legally designated as female and likely raised as such) but then came to know themselves as a man. Some people may identify as transmen, without the space, to indicate that their gender is somehow more complex than simply being a man.

Trans Woman

A woman who was assigned male at birth (meaning they were medically and legally designated as male and likely raised as such) but then came to know themselves as a woman. Some people may identify as transwomen, without the space, to indicate that their gender is somehow more complex than simply being a woman.

Transsexual

This term often refers to binary trans people (trans men and trans women), or to trans people who physically transition in any way. While still a preferred term for many, some people dislike the term because of its connection to the medicalization of trans people and the focus it can put on physical transition.

Cisgender

The prefix 'Cis' is of Latin origin, meaning "on the same side as or of". Therefore, someone who is cisgender has a gender identity that is the same as the gender they were assigned at birth. Cisgender is the opposite of transgender/trans. "Cisgender" is preferred over terms like "biological", "genetic", or "real" male or female which set up cis people as the norm and trans people as the inadequate other.

Intersex Person

A person born with any manner of "ambiguity" in terms of gendered physical characteristics. This can include genitals, reproductive organs, hormones, chromosomes, or any combination thereof. Intersex is a more modern term that replaces the out of date term 'hermaphrodite'. Many intersex people believe that early childhood surgical intervention is not only unnecessary but cruel and advocate counseling and support for children and families.

Genderqueer

This term can be used as an umbrella term for all people who queer gender, as a similar term to gender nonconforming or as a specific non-binary gender identity.

Non-Binary

This term refers to people who identify outside of or beyond the gender binary of man and woman.

Agender

Agender is a term which can be literally translated as 'without gender'. It can be seen either as a non-binary gender identity or as a statement of not having a gender identity.

Two-Spirit

A term specific to Native/First Nations cultures and people which some LGB, queer, pansexual, transgender, intersex, and gender non-conforming people identify as. This term should not be co-opted by non-Native/First Nations people.

Crossdresser

Someone who dresses as and presents themselves as a gender other than the one they typically identify with. Cross dressing can be purely aesthetic, sexual, a facet of someone's gender identity, or have other meanings.

Drag

Taking on the appearance and characteristics associated with a certain gender, usually for entertainment purposes and often to expose the humorous and performative elements of gender.

Bias and Discrimination

Homophobia

Fear, anger, discomfort, intolerance, or lack of acceptance toward LGBTQ people, homosexuality, or any behavior or belief that does not conform to rigid sex role stereotypes. The internalized version of this is having these feelings about one's own non-heterosexual orientation.

Transphobia

The irrational fear of those who are trans, gender non-conforming, or those perceived as such due to the inability to deal with gender ambiguity. Transphobia can be seen within the LGBTQIA community, as well as in general society.

Biphobia

The fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of bisexuals, which is oftentimes related to the current binary standard. Biphobia can be seen within the LGBTQIA community, as well as in general society.

Heterosexism

Heterosexism is a system of attitudes, bias, and discrimination in favor of opposite-sex sexuality and relationships. It can include the presumption that other people are heterosexual and/or that opposite-sex attractions and relationships are the only norm and therefore superior.

Cissexism

Cissexism is a system of attitudes, bias, and discrimination in favor of cisgender gender identities and expressions. It can include the presumption that other people are cisgender and/or that cisgender identities and expressions are the only norm and therefore superior.

Ally

A person (outside, part, or all of the LGBTQIA community) who supports LGBTQIA people. Someone who confronts heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, heterosexual, and cisgender privilege in themselves and others; has a concern for the well-being of LGBTQIA people; and a belief that heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, monosexism, transphobia, and cissexism are social justice issues.

