

Definitions and Vocabulary

The exact definitions of many of these terms are open to debate and interpretation; this list is only a starting point. We have tried to provide definitions that are respectful and reflect our experiences.

Asexual – A person who is not interested in or does not desire sexual activity, either within or outside of a relationship. Asexuality is not the same as celibacy, which is the willful decision to not act on sexual feelings. Although some asexual people may not engage in sexual relationships with other people, they are nonetheless quite capable of loving, affectionate, romantic ties to others.

Assigned sex- Sex recorded at birth by a doctor, on the basis of socially defined external genitalia.

Binary Gender System – A culturally/socially defined code of acceptable behaviors, which teach that there are men and women, who are masculine and feminine, and that there is nothing outside of this system. Most popular discussion on gender assumes a binary gender system.

Bisexual – A person who is emotionally, erotically, and/or physically attracted (not necessarily equally attracted) to some other males and females.

Cisgender- A person whose gender identity is same as their assigned sex at birth: i.e. somebody who was assigned female at birth and identifies as a woman.

Closeted – Hiding one’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Coming out – becoming aware of one’s own sexual orientation and/or gender identity (personal) **or** revealing one’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity to others (social).

Cross dresser – Cross dressers periodically dress up as members of the “other” sex, but do not desire to change their birth sex. They dress up for a variety of reasons including self-expression, personal enjoyment, and/or sexual gratification. Many cross-dressers are heterosexuals, but cross-dressers can be of any gender identity or sexual orientation.

Drag Queen/King- People who dress as members of the other sex periodically for the purpose of entertainment, making a political statement, and/or expressing their own masculine or feminine side. They do not necessarily identify as the opposite sex, although they may refer to themselves as someone of the opposite sex when in drag.

Dyke, Fag and Queer – These three words historically and contemporarily are most frequently used as derogatory terms for lesbians, gay men, and anyone who is not heterosexual. In contrast to the negative usage of these words, some people within the LGBT communities have reclaimed these words. Although some LGBT people use these words positively, they are by no means considered positive words by all LGBT people, and use of them by heterosexuals is almost always considered to be inappropriate.

FTM/F2M – Female to male; trans people assigned the female sex at birth who identify as male some or all of the time.

Gay – A male identified person who is emotionally, erotically and/or physically attracted to some other male identified people.

Gender – Collection of traits thought by a culture to be associated with maleness/masculinity or femaleness/femininity.

Gender Expression – The way that a person manipulates their appearance and/or mannerism to express their gender, whether it's feminine, androgynous, or masculine.

Gender Identity – Refers to how one experiences and conceptualizes one's own gender – as man, woman, somewhere in between, and/or neither- regardless of biological sex. This is how one feels about their gender on the INSIDE.

Gender Queer- People who don't identify as either male or female, but rather something outside the traditional binary gender system.

Heterosexism – The system of advantages bestowed on heterosexuals (and consequent disadvantages experienced by LGBT people). It is the institutional form of homophobia and includes the assumption that all people are or should be heterosexual and therefore is exclusive of the needs, concerns, and life experiences of lesbians, gays and bisexuals. (see heterosexual privilege below).¹

Heterosexual Ally – A heterosexual person who supports and advocates for sexual and gender minorities, acts accordingly to interrupt homophobic, transphobic, and heterosexist remarks and actions of others, and is willing to explore these forms of bias within themselves.²

Heterosexual Privilege – The rights and privileges that heterosexuals enjoy as a result of heterosexism that LGBT people do not have. This includes institutional benefits like federally protected rights, marriage, sharing insurance policies, adoption, income tax breaks and access to spouse in cases of hospitalization, as well as cultural benefits like seeing heterosexual couples on TV, allowing heterosexual couples to be openly affectionate, etc.

Heterosexuality – Refers to emotional, erotic and/or physical attraction to some people of the “opposite” gender. The term and concept of heterosexuality were defined after and in opposition to that of homosexuality.

Homophobia – The irrational fear of people who love and/or sexually desire others of the same sex or who are *perceived* as loving and/or sexually desiring others of the same sex and/or the fear of one's own homosexual feelings. Homophobia has its roots in sexism, and it includes prejudice, discrimination, harassment, and acts of violence.

Intersex- “Intersex” is a general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male. For more information, check out www.isna.org

Lesbian- A female-identified person who is romantically/ erotically attracted to some other female-identified people.

MSM- Male-identified individuals who have sex with other male-identified individuals. Tends to be used in communities where terms like “gay” or “bisexual” have negative cultural connotations.

MTF/M2F- Male to female; trans people who were assigned the male sex at birth and who identify as female some or all the time.

Pansexual - A person who is emotionally, erotically, and/or physically attracted to some individuals of any gender identity.

Perceived Gender Expression - The way others (society) perceive your gender identity based on your gender expression (appearance/mannerisms).

Queer- having a sexual orientation, sex, or gender identity expression different from that of deemed respectable by mainstream society. A term that was originally derogatory but has been transformed within the LGBTQ community to be more inclusive of various identities.

Sex- categorization as male, female or intersex by the shape of genitalia or other biological features.

Sexual Orientation- who a person is romantically/erotically/physically attracted to.

SGL- same gender lover, a word describing non-heterosexual sexual orientation that is used in communities where other terms have a negative cultural connotation.

Straight- slang term for a person who identifies as a heterosexual and cisgender person.

Trans- an inclusive term that describes a gender identity and/or gender expression that is outside social norms.

Transgender- describes individuals who cross-over gender identities without necessarily changing their bodies. This includes individuals who identify as a gender different than their assigned sex at birth as well as those who experience themselves as being genderless. People of all sexual orientations may be transgender.

Transsexual- a person whose gender identity does not match the culturally assigned gender identity for their anatomical sex and who generally desire a physical transition that includes hormones and/or surgery. People of all sexual orientations may be transsexual.

WSW- woman-identified individuals who have sex with other woman-identified individuals.

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