

Basic Sexuality & Gender Terms

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Languages are living forces that evolve and grow as primary expressions of history and culture, used by communities and individuals. Any 'term' is at best a working concept of a given culture, time and place. The following definitions therefore are intended to give a current sense of how some words are used.

SEX & GENDER

Sex – refers to biological and physiological characteristics.

Assigned sex – what a doctor determines your physical sex to be at birth.

Gender – socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities and attributes.

Gender roles – behaviors, activities and attributes assigned by a social group to one or other sex.

Gender identity/expression – how a person expresses their gender to other people; how a person experiences a shared sex with other like persons for personal relationships, social, political, economic and spiritual association; a pervasive sense of the sexual self.

Gender non-conforming – refers to people who do not follow other people's ideas or stereotypes about how a person should look and act based on conventional images of assigned female and male sex.

Transgender – a person who goes from one gender identity to another based on the person's sense of a mismatch between internal gender identity and external physicality, often spoken of as MtF (male-to-female) or FtM (female-to-male). A transgender person may desire to legally and medically change their sex.

Gender queer – though in the past used as a negative or pejorative term, currently, is a gender identity that is neither male nor female, that is a blend (integration) of or some combination of genders, or is beyond conventional genders.

Gender fluid – a gender identity/expression wherein the person recognizes elements of femaleness and maleness as integrated within oneself, and feels free to experience and express oneself through one or the other at any given moment without claiming one or the other as dominant.

Cis or cisgender – having a gender that is commonly considered to match that person's assigned sex.

Cisgender privilege – a life experience that more than less aligns with cultural expectations of the person's assigned sex and thus automatically receives recognition, approval and advantages over others who do not conform.

Androgyny – a gender expression to describe a person with both female and male anatomy.

Intersex – a general term used for a variety of genetic, hormonal, or anatomical conditions in which a person's reproductive or sexual anatomy doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male. In the past, when a child was born intersex, many doctors and parents responded with panic and rushed to correct the perceived 'problem' with surgery, which often caused later in life mental and physical difficulties. Some intersex individuals identify as transgender or gender variant; others do not.

Two spirits – an all-encompassing term increasingly used by indigenous persons representing third and fourth gender characteristics, such as the Lakota (Sioux) *winkte* and the Dino (Navajo) *n<dleeh* and other Native terms. Tribal terms have often been blanketed by social scientists and anthropologists under the term, *berdache*, but many native persons today regard this as a foreign and imposed term.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Sexual orientation – expression of a person's attraction to other people's sex and gender; in recent Western history, a sexual identity: is usually spoken of as heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual. Everyone has a sexual orientation. There are persons who have only ever experienced one or other sexual orientation, and there are others who have shifted or changed over time.

Homosexual – an exclusive or primary attraction to persons of one's own gender.

Bisexual – an attraction to persons of one's own gender and persons of other genders. A bisexual person may be attracted to one gender more than another, equally attracted to all genders, or may consider gender unimportant in terms of attraction.

Heterosexual – an exclusive or primary attraction to persons of the opposite gender, that is male attracted to female and female attracted to male.

Heterosexual paradigm – the assumption that males are always and only attracted to females, and that females are always and only attracted to males, in some times and places, often considered an expression of nature and the moral order. This binary model has been historically articulated in the west since the late 17th century as universally normative, and is contrasted to a view of sexuality as a location on a continuum of sexualities ranging from exclusive attraction to the opposite sex to the exclusive attraction to the same sex.

Asexuality – an emerging sexual orientation. Some people who identify as asexual do not experience sexual attraction to other people, while others experience sexual attraction but no desire to act genitally on these attractions.

Asexuality and **Celibacy** are not the same. Many people who are asexual live a celibate life, meaning that they do not engage in sex with others. But while Celibacy is a choice (often motivated by religion and other life circumstances), asexuality is not.

Transgender is NOT a sexual orientation. Transgender individuals can be lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, straight, or any other sexual orientation.

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