



## SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**A Note on Definitions:** Please know that all definitions and labels do not mean the same to all people. Use the preferred terminology of the person/people with whom you are interacting. This list represents common usages and meanings of these terms within communities, but is not exhaustive nor universal.

1) **Gender:** The wide set of characteristics that are constructed to distinguish between the two institutionally recognized sexes: male and female. Gender is not static and can shift over time. Gender has at least three parts:

a) **Physical Markers** – Aspects of the human body that are considered to determine sex and/or gender for a given culture or society, including genitalia, chromosomes, hormones, secondary sex characteristics, and internal reproductive organs.

b) **Role/Expression** – Aspects of behavior and outward presentation that may (intentionally or unintentionally) communicate gender to others in a given culture or society, including clothing, body language, hairstyles, socialization, relationships, career choices, interests, and presence in gendered spaces (restrooms, places of worship, etc).

c) **Gender Identity** – An individual's internal view of their gender. One's own innermost sense of themselves as a gendered being and/or as masculine, feminine, androgynous, etc. This will often influence name and pronoun preference for an individual.

2) **Sexual Orientation:** The culturally-defined set of meanings through which people describe their sexual attractions. Sexual orientation is not static and can shift over time. Sexual orientation has at least three parts:

a) **Attraction** – One's own feelings or self-perception about to which gender(s) one feels drawn. Can be sexual, emotional, spiritual, psychological, and/or political.

b) **Behavior** – What one does sexually and/or with whom

c) **Sexual Identity** – The language and terms one uses to refer to their sexual orientation. It may or may not be based on either of the above and can also be influenced by family, culture, and community.

3) **Transgender:** A term used broadly that refers primarily to individuals who identify differently from the sex assigned at birth or a term used by people for whom the sex they were assigned at birth is an incomplete or incorrect description of themselves. The term "genderqueer" has the same basic meaning but is used somewhat more loosely.

**Transman** – Typically refers to an individual assigned as female at birth who at some point, starts to identify in a more male-oriented way or as a man.

**Transwoman** – Typically refers to an individual assigned as male at birth who at some point, starts to identify in a more female-oriented way or as a woman.

4) **Intersex:** A term referring to people who have physical markers that differ from the medical definitions of

male or female. Most commonly, it is used to speak about people whose genitalia is not easily classifiable as 'male' or 'female' at birth but it can be used to refer to any biological marker that falls outside medical norms for masculine and feminine.

- 5) **Gay:** Most frequently used by male-identified people who experience attraction primarily or exclusively for other male- identified people.
- 6) **Lesbian:** Most frequently used by female-identified people who experience attraction primarily or exclusively for other female-identified people.
- 7) **Bisexual:** A term used to indicate attraction or potential for attraction to more than one gender.
- 8) **Pansexual:** A term used to indicate attraction or potential for attraction to any gender, preferred by some over 'bisexual' because it does not imply the existence of only two genders.
- 9) **Heterosexual/Straight:** A term used to indicate attraction primarily or exclusively for people of the 'opposite' sex..
- 9) **Same Gender Loving:** A term created by African American communities and used by some people of color who may view labels such as 'gay' and 'lesbian' as terms referring to and/or representing white people.
- 11) **MSM:** Abbreviation for Men who have Sex with Men, a term used to describe men who engage in same-sex sexual behavior but who may choose not to label themselves as "gay/bisexual."
- 10) **Two Spirit:** An English translation of a concept present in some Indigenous cultures that refers to someone who is assigned one sex at birth but fulfills the roles of both sexes or of another sex.
- 12) **Femme:** An identity term most frequently used by people with a more feminine gender identity and/or gender presentation
- 13) **Butch or Stud:** An identity term most frequently used by people with a more masculine gender identity and/or gender presentation
- 14) **Queer:** A political and sometimes controversial term that some LGBT people have reclaimed, while others consider it derogatory. Used more frequently by activists, academics, and some younger LGBT people, the term can refer either to gender identity, sexual orientation, or both and can be used by any gender.
- 15) **Questioning:** A term that can refer to an identity, or a process of introspection whereby one learns about their own sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Can happen at any age in and multiple times throughout ones lifetime.

- 16) **Cross dresser:** One who dresses, either in public or private, in clothing that society assigns to the opposite sex. Cross-dressing is not an indication of one's sexual orientation or gender identity.
- 17) **Drag:** Drag performers parody gender for an audience, usually for entertainment value. Drag performers do not necessarily identify as the gender they are parodying.
- 18) **Gender Nonconforming:** This term can refer to gender identity, or gender role and refers to someone who falls outside or transcends what is considered to be traditional gender-norms for their assigned sex.
- 19) **Androgynous:** Can refer to a person's gender presentation or identity. An androgynous person may identify and appear as both male and female, or as neither male nor female, or as in between male and female.
- 20) **Transphobia:** Societal, systemic, and interpersonal oppression against people of transgender experience. Also something experienced by some gender queer and gender nonconforming people.
- 21) **Homophobia:** Societal, systemic, and interpersonal oppression against LGBTIQ people and communities. Also can be experienced by those who are perceived to be LGBTIQ.
- 22) **Heterosexism:** Systemic belief that heterosexuality and the binary gender system are superior. Also, the overall creation of institutions that benefit heterosexual people exclusively and/or oppress LGBTIQ people.

**A note on gender pronouns:** People tend to refer to someone as either 'he' or 'she' based on physical appearance. Like names, pronouns are identity terms that can be chosen or rejected. A person can identify as 'he', 'she' or both, or another pronoun altogether. When an individual voices a pronoun preference, it is considered basic respect to use the preferred gender-language consistently.