



Definitions of Terms Related to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

adapted from OPHA Position Papers, OSSTF Creating Spaces and unknown sources.

Ally:

A person who is not a member of a specific group, but who supports that group, challenges discrimination and oppression of that group, and explores his or her own biases.

- Can also be referred to as “positive” (e.g.: gay positive, trans positive, queer positive).

Bisexual:

Someone who is attracted physically and emotionally to persons of the same and opposite sex.

- Bisexuals are not necessarily attracted equally to both men and women and not always attracted to both men and women at the same time.
- Bisexuality is often thought of as a “phase” on the way to coming out as gay or lesbian, but for many people, being bisexual is a life-long sexual identity.
- Not all people are comfortable with this term because gender is fluid and more varied than this term presumes.

Coming Out:

1. The developmental process through which LGBTTTTIQQ people recognize their sexual orientation / gender identity and integrate this knowledge into their personal and social lives.

2. Disclosure of one’s sexual orientation or gender identity to others. For example, “I just came out to my parents”.

- “Coming out” is not a single event. In every new social situation and with every new acquaintance, a decision must be made about whether or not to disclose one’s sexual orientation / gender identity.
- An LGBTTTTIQQ person may never be “out” in all parts of life

GenderQueer:

A recent term coined by young people who experience a very fluid sense of both their gender identity and their sexual orientation

- They prefer to be open to relocate themselves on the gender and sexual continuums.

Cross Dresser:

A person who wears clothing associated with the opposite gender, generally for personal enjoyment.

- This term has replaced the term “transvestite”.
- Many cross-dressers are heterosexual men.
- “A cross-dresser wears women’s clothes because they are women’s clothes. A transwoman wears women’s clothes because she is a woman.”

Drag Queen, Drag King:

Someone who dresses up in clothing of the opposite gender for fun and entertainment.

- A man who dresses up as a woman to attend a social function is called a “Drag Queen”, a woman is called a “Drag King”.
- Though drag is often associated with gay or trans communities, assumptions should not be made as to the person’s sexual orientation or gender identity.

Female Impersonator:

A man who dresses as a woman to perform professionally in public.

Gay:

A term for homosexual. This can refer to both males and females, (for example “the gay community”) but is increasingly used to refer to men only.

Gender Identity:

A person’s deep sense of being male, female, neither or both; how we think about and express our gender.

- Society tends to view gender as a strictly binary concept, which is now being challenged. (The first thing a parent asks about a new baby is “Is it a boy or a girl?”)

Gender Role:

Characteristics attached to culturally defined notions of femininity and masculinity.

Homophobia / Biphobia / Transphobia:

Fear and hatred of homosexuals / bisexuals / transpeople, often exhibited as prejudice, discrimination, harassment, and acts of violence (known as “bashing”).

- LGBTTTTIQQ people (especially those who have experienced a lot of homophobia in their lives) may internalize feelings of fear or shame, and suffer low self-worth or self-hatred. This is called “internalized homophobia”.
- Some heterosexuals may suffer discrimination because they do not necessarily fit in with assigned gender roles – for example a young boy who is called gay because he enjoys dancing.

Heterosexism:

The assumption that everyone is or should be heterosexual and that heterosexuality is the only normal, natural sexual orientation.

- Because of this assumption, heterosexuals enjoy advantages that are not also bestowed on non-heterosexuals. This is known as “heterosexual privilege”.

Heterosexual:

Someone who is physically and emotionally attracted to people of the opposite sex.

Homosexual:

Someone who is physically and emotionally attracted to people of the same sex.

- Because the term is associated historically with a medical model of homosexuality and has often been used in derogatory, marginalizing and hurtful ways, most homosexual people encourage the use of the terms lesbian, gay and bisexual.

Intersex:

A person who has some mixture of male and female genetic and/or physical sex characteristics.

- The term “hermaphrodite” used to be used, but is now considered inappropriate and offensive.
- Intersex children have often been subjected to surgery and assignment to male or female gender based on medical opinion.

Lesbian:

A female homosexual.

- The term lesbian is derived from Lesbos, a Greek island home to Sappho, a poet and teacher who loved other women.

LGBTTIQ:

Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, Two-Spirit, intersex, queer and questioning.

Queer:

An umbrella term that encompasses a broad range of sexual and gender identities, behaviours and expressions.

- Previously a derogatory term, this word has been reclaimed by the queer community, who use it proudly.
- Queer expresses political and cultural statements and attitudes.

Questioning:

People who are questioning their gender identity or sexual orientation.

- They may choose to explore other options in terms of gender and sexual identification and presentation.
- In some cases they may experience confusion and/or conflict.

Sexual Identity:

How we identify and present our sexual orientation to ourselves and others.

- Sexual orientation, sexual identity and sexual behaviour are not necessarily congruent, for example not everyone acts on their attractions and we can know our sexual orientation

without ever having had sex.

Sexual Orientation:

How we identify sexually, defined by the sex of individuals for whom we feel an attraction and affection, both physical and emotional.

- Three sexual orientations are heterosexual, homosexual (gay/lesbian), and bisexual.
- Some are very young when they become aware of their sexual orientation however awareness can arise at any time in life.
- Like being right-handed, left-handed or ambidextrous, sexual orientation is not a choice. It is unknown what determines sexual orientation.

Straight:

A term for heterosexual.

Transgender:

A self-identifying term for someone whose gender identity or expression differs from traditional gender roles.

- Can apply to masculine lesbians or effeminate/ feminine men who are psychologically and/or physically androgynous
- Transgender is also often used as an umbrella term in English-speaking North America to refer to everyone who crosses gender roles in one way or another including transsexuals, drag queens, transvestites etc.
- Transgender people, as a rule, do not desire to alter their bodies by means of hormones and/or surgery, focusing instead on expanding their gender identity mentally and expressing their gender role through nonbinary (“third gender/ third sex”) behaviour. In some cases, however, a transgender person might move through the sexual-gender spectrum to subsequently identify as transsexual.

Transsexual:

Someone who has an intuitive, life-long conviction that he or she is really of the opposite gender to that assigned at birth. A transsexual person

experiences acute gender discomfort (“gender dysphoria”) and is thereby driven to change their physical sex by having surgery (known as Sex Reassignment Surgery or SRS) and taking hormones (testosterone or estrogen), and wearing gender specific clothing.

- This process of change is known as transitioning.
- Transsexuals may be referred to as female-to-male (ftm; a transman) or male-to-female (mtf; a transwoman).
- A transwoman should absolutely be referred to as ‘she’ and a transman as ‘he’.
- Some transsexuals prefer not to “come out,” but instead, to blend in as “regular” men or women.
- TS/TG (short for transsexual/transgendered) people may identify as gay, lesbian, straight, bisexual or otherwise. Many are now “coming out” as transqueers (gay transmen and lesbian transwomen).

Transpeople:

An umbrella term which includes those persons who identify as transsexual, transgender, Two-Spirit, intersex, genderqueer, gender-diverse, queer and/or questioning. (Also synonymous with “trans community” or “tran population.”)

Two-Spirit:

An English term coined within queer aboriginal populations to describe a person’s spiritual nature as being comprised of both male and female spirits.

- Two-Spirit people often had elevated status as spiritual healers (shamans) in their communities.
- People who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual or who have multiple gender identities may identify as two-spirit. However, people who identify as two-spirit do not necessarily identify with these non-native terms

