

Glossary: Physical Sex, Sexuality, Gender Identity and Gender Expression

Several terms and definitions are provided below. They are starting points to understanding physical sex, sexuality, gender identity and gender expression. This glossary is constantly growing and evolving and we acknowledge that there are limitations to any definition or terminology.

Asexual- Having a lack of (or low level of) sexual interest or desire for sex or sexual partners. Exists on a spectrum from people who experience no sexual attraction or have no desire for sex to those who experience low levels and only after significant amounts of time.

Bisexual- A person emotionally, physically and/or sexually attracted to male/men and females/women. This attraction does not have to be equally split between genders and there may be a preference for one gender over others.

Cis (cis-gendered)- A description for a person whose gender identity, gender expression, and biological sex all align. Opposite would be trans.

'Coming Out' / 'Inviting In'- Like many words and terms, 'Coming Out' means different things to different people. It generally means telling other people about your gender identity or sexuality. It can mean realising you are attracted to people of the same sex, perhaps calling yourself gay, lesbian or bisexual, and deciding to tell some people in your life. It can also mean that the concepts of gender, what it means to be a boy and girl are blurred or don't fit for you. The idea of 'coming-out of the closet' might not fit or feel right for some people. For some people it feels like they have a dark secret that needs to be hidden away, or that they need to come out to everyone all at the same time. Some people prefer to think of more like inviting people into their life. Who they "invite in" to that precious part of their life is up to them, a bit like if they were throwing a special party.

Drag- A cross-dressing parody performance.

Gay- A term used to describe individuals who are primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the same sex. More commonly used when referring to males, but can be applied to females as well.

Gender- Gender is different from physical sex. It is a very personal sense of who we are, and how we see ourselves in terms of a girl, a boy, a combination of these or maybe neither. "Gender norms" are how our society expects men and women to behave and look in particular ways – most societies have pretty rigid ideas of what it means to be a man, woman, masculine, feminine. Some girls are masculine, some boys are more feminine, some feel both at the same time, while others experience themselves as being outside gender norms altogether.

Gender Diversity- An umbrella term that includes all the different ways gender can be perceived. It can include people questioning their gender, those who identify as trans or transgender, gender queer and many more labels.

Gender Queer- A person whose gender identity is neither man nor woman, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders. This identity is usually related to or in reaction to the social construction of gender, gender stereotypes and the gender binary system. Some gender queer people identify under the transgender umbrella while others do not.

Heterosexism- Heterosexism refers to culturally and institutionally entrenched attitudes and practices which serve to oppress and marginalise LGBTIQ persons.

Heterosexual- a person primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the "opposite sex". Also known as straight.

Heteronormativity- the assumption, in individuals or in institutions, that everyone is heterosexual (e.g. asking a woman if she has a boyfriend) and that heterosexuality is superior to all other sexualities. Leads to invisibility and stigmatizing of other sexualities. Heteronormativity also leads us to assume that only masculine men and feminine women are straight.

Homophobia- an umbrella term for a range of negative attitudes (e.g., fear, anger, intolerance, resentment, erasure, or discomfort) that one may have towards members of LGBTIQ community. The term can also connote a fear, disgust, or dislike of being perceived as LGBTIQ.

Homosexual- a person primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the same sex/gender.

Internalised- The way in which a member of an oppressed group may accept negative social and moral judgements.

Intersectionality- The interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, socio-economic background, disability, sex and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination, disadvantage and oppression.

Intersex- People born with physical, hormonal or genetic features that are neither wholly female nor wholly male; or a combination of female and male; or neither female nor male.

Lesbian- A term used to describe women attracted romantically, erotically, and/or emotionally to other women.

LGBTIQ- Acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex and Queer. Often Asexual is added, LGBTIQA.

Misgendering- referring to someone using a word, especially a pronoun or form of address, that does not correctly reflect the gender with which they identify.

Mx- pronounced mix, Mx is a gender neutral title option ie) Dr, Ms, Mr, Mx.

Outing- When someone discloses information about another's sexual orientation or gender identity without their knowledge or consent.

Pansexual- a person who experiences sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction for members of all gender identities/expressions.

Physical Sex- Physical sex is the make-up of a body including genetic, hormonal and physical characteristics. Many people think of male and female as the only way that these characteristics are expressed, but this isn't the whole story. Some people are Intersex, people born of intermediate sex, with genetic, hormonal and physical features that can be thought of as typical of both male and female at the same time. You can't tell someone's physical sex by looking at them alone because so much of our characteristics are on the inside of our bodies, such as hormones and chromosomes.

Pronouns- For many people, gender is simple and clear-cut: either their gender identity aligns with physical sex or gender presentation falls closely within traditional norms that most people assume the appropriate 'he' or 'she'. Many other individuals present their gender identity and expression ambiguously, causing traditional assumptions about gender to be irrelevant or incorrect. Gendered pronouns like "he" and "she" can be very uncomfortable and limiting for some people who prefer gender-neutral pronouns and some individuals feel more comfortable using a pronoun different from the one associated with their physical sex or apparent gender expression. Examples of gender neutral pronouns can be; they, their, ze, hir.

Queer- An umbrella term to refer to all LGBTIQA+ people. A political statement, as well as a sexual orientation which advocates breaking binary thinking and seeing both sexual orientation and gender identity as fluid. Can also be a simple label to explain a complex set of sexual behaviours and desires. For example, a person who is attracted to multiple genders may identify as this.

Questioning- The process of exploring one's own sexual orientation, investigating influences that may come from their family, religious upbringing and internal motivations.

Sexuality- Sexuality is separate from a person's physical sex and their gender, sexuality refers to who a person is attracted to, who they want to go out with, and who they crush on. For lots of people sexuality isn't as simple as being straight or gay. A person's physical sex, gender and sexuality can be confusing and complicated at times for everybody, no matter how they identify.

Sexual Prejudice- A more comprehensive term than 'homophobia', 'transphobia' or 'heterosexism'. A term which covers all these.

Trans/Transgender- An umbrella term covering a range of identities that transgress socially defined gender norms. It may mean someone who mentally and emotionally identifies as a different gender to the one they have been assigned by society, often living their lives as that gender, and who may or may not choose to undergo sex reassignment surgery. Or it could be a person who transcends the binary gender systems altogether, so that they identify as neither male or female gender.

Transsexual- A person who identifies as a member of the "opposite" sex, i.e. other than their assign sex. A person who identifies as Transsexual usually seeks hormone therapy and often surgery to bring their body into line with their gender identity.

N.B. The use of quotation marks denotes that the notion that there is such a thing as an "opposite" sex or gender is incorrect.