

Definitions to Help Understand Gender and Sexual Orientation

Asexual: Often called “ace” for short, asexual refers to a complete or partial lack of sexual attraction or lack of interest in sexual activity with others. Asexuality exists on a spectrum, and asexual people may experience no, little or conditional sexual attraction.

Sex Assigned at Birth: The sex, male, female or intersex, that a doctor or midwife uses to describe a child at birth based on their external anatomy.

Bisexual: A person emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one gender, though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree. Sometimes used interchangeably with pansexual.

Cisgender: A term that describes a person whose gender identity aligns with the sex assigned to them at birth.

Cis-Heteronormative: This term refers to the assumption that heterosexuality and being cisgender are the norm, which plays out in interpersonal interactions and society, and furthers the marginalization of queer and gender diverse people.

Dyadic: Not Intersex.

Gay: A term that describes a person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same gender. Men, women and non-binary people may use this term to describe themselves.

Gender Binary: A system in which gender is constructed into two strict categories of male or female. Gender identity is expected to align with the sex assigned at birth and gender expressions and roles fit traditional expectations.

Gender Dysphoria: Clinically significant distress caused when a person's assigned birth gender is not the same as the one with which they identify.

Gender-Expansive: A person with a wider, more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically associated with the binary gender system. Often used as an umbrella term when referring to young people still exploring the possibilities of their gender expression and/or gender identity.

Gender Expression: External appearance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut or voice, which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either feminine or masculine.

Gender Identity: An internal, deeply felt sense of being female, male, a blend of both or neither. Refers to how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. Can be the same as or different from their sex assigned at birth.

Gender Non-Conforming: A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender, or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category.

Genderqueer: Genderqueer people typically reject notions of static categories of gender and embrace a fluidity of gender identity and often, though not always, sexual orientation. People who identify as “genderqueer” may see themselves as being both male and female, neither male nor female or as falling completely outside these categories.

Heteronormative: The outright or underlying assumption that all people are heterosexual.

Intersex: An umbrella term used to describe a wide range of natural bodily variations. In some cases, these traits are visible at birth, and in others, they are not apparent until puberty.

Lesbian: A woman who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other women. Women and non-binary people may use this term to describe themselves.

LGBTQ+: An acronym for “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer” with a “+” sign to recognize the limitless sexual orientations and gender identities used by members of our community.

Non-Binary: An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Non-binary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. While many also identify as transgender, not all non-binary people do. Non-binary can also be used as an umbrella term encompassing identities such as agender, bigender, genderqueer or gender-fluid.

Pansexual: Describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to people of any gender though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree. Sometimes used interchangeably with bisexual.

QTPOC: Queer and Trans People of Color.

Queer: A term people often use to express a spectrum of identities and orientations that are counter to the mainstream. Queer is often used as a catch-all to include many people, including those who do not identify as exclusively straight and/or folks who have non-binary or gender-expansive identities. This term was previously used as a slur, but has been reclaimed by many parts of the LGBTQ+ movement.

Same-Gender Loving: A term some prefer to use instead of lesbian, gay or bisexual to express attraction to and love of people of the same gender.

Sexual Orientation: An inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people. Note: an individual’s sexual orientation is independent of their gender identity.

SOGIE: Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression.

Transgender: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.

Two Spirit: An umbrella term and identity within many first nations communities both historically and presently that describes people who live within a spectrum of genders, sexual identities, gender expressions and gender roles.

Note: For younger students, reference the Welcoming Schools handout: [Defining LGBTQ+ Terms for Elementary School Students](#).