

Sexual and Gender Identity Glossary

This information is designed to give heterosexuals and people who are just starting to think of coming out some basic common terms with the gender and sexual identity communities, so that they can speak somewhat “intelligently” with members of these communities without seriously offending people or appearing totally clueless.

Keep in mind that:

The definitions of these words are not standardized throughout society, and are used differently by different individuals and in different regions. In particular, these definitions assume the existence of two and only two each of sexes, genders, and sex/gender roles, which are separate and distinct from one another; but many people see them as overlapping, closely related, or as a limited view or model of a much richer reality.

The meanings of words change over time. Changes in thinking and attitudes toward sexual and gender identity are taking place in society as a whole and within the sexual and gender identity communities. The meanings of these words will continue to change. For example, there is a slow but clear movement in society away from thinking of most human behaviours as appropriate to one sex and not appropriate to another, toward thinking of most human behaviours as appropriate to both sexes and both genders.

A gay-identified white male gathered definitions in this article from Europe. In other parts of the world and other communities than those I am familiar with, the same terms may mean different things, and other terms may be used for the same and other important meanings.

Despite these caveats, many people may find the terms listed here useful in varying degrees for describing their experience, if only as a starting point for describing how their view of the world differs from that represented here.

Sexual Identity and Gender Identity are similar in some ways and very different in others. Both refer to how one thinks of a person. The existence and perpetuation of gender and sexual identities is based in the historic and continuing oppression (systematic mistreatment condoned by society as a whole) of people do not conform to certain aspects of society's gender roles. Gender roles refer to the clothing, behaviours, thoughts, feelings, relationships, etc. that are considered appropriate or inappropriate for members of each sex.

However, sex, gender identity, and sexual identity refer to different aspects of oneself. Therefore, one may be any combination of sex (male/female), gender (masculine/feminine), and sexual identity (straight, bisexual, lesbian/gay.) In recent history, people oppressed on the basis of different sexual identities (bisexuals, lesbians, gay men) and people oppressed on the basis of gender identity have formed communities, which are partly separate, and partly overlapping with one another. Because of this historic separation, someone who is a member of one of these communities does not necessarily understand and prioritise the issues of others of these communities. One who belongs to more than one of these communities may feel welcome in both, but usually neither addresses all one's needs or the way that one's needs from different communities overlap or interact.

Gender identity refers to how one thinks of one's own gender: whether one thinks of oneself as a man (masculine) or as a woman (feminine.) Society prescribes arbitrary rules or gender roles (how one is supposed to and not supposed to dress, act, think, feel, relate to others, think of oneself, etc.) based on one's sex (whether one has a vagina or a penis.) These gender roles are called feminine and masculine. Anyone who does not abide by these arbitrary rules may be targeted for mistreatment ranging from not being included in people's circle of friends, through the cold shoulder, snide comments, verbal harassment, assault, rape, and murder based on one's (perceived) gender identity.

Sexual identity refers to how one thinks of oneself in terms of whom one is sexually and romantically attracted to, specifically whether one is attracted to members of the same gender as one's own or the other gender than one's own. Society prescribes arbitrary rules that one should be sexually and romantically attracted to members of the other gender than one's own, and should not be attracted to members of the same gender as one's own. Anyone who does not abide by these arbitrary rules may be targeted for mistreatment ranging from not being included in people's circle of friends, through the cold shoulder, snide comments, verbal harassment, assault, rape, and murder based on one's (perceived) sexual identity. (See homophobia and biphobia.) When one's sex and one's gender identity are different, one may base one's sexual identity on either one. Alternatively, one may have two sexual identities, one as a man and one as a woman.

These are terms often used within the sexual identity and gender identity communities. Self-identification terms are often spelled with initial caps (e.g. Queer, Bisexual) to emphasize that they refer

to how one thinks of oneself, rather than how someone else labels one. (For instance, researchers often classify bisexual-identified women and men as lesbians and gay men and transvestites as transsexuals, obscuring important distinctions.)

- Bigendered: One who switches between masculine and feminine gender roles from time to time.
- Biphobia: The oppression or mistreatment of Bisexuals, especially by lesbians and gay men. (See homophobia.)
- Bisexual: One who has significant sexual and romantic attractions to members of both the same and the other sex, or who identify as members of the bisexual community. Derogatory terms include the same terms as are applied to lesbians and gay men. Derogatory terms from lesbians, gay men, and some heterosexuals: fence sitter, AC/DC, double-gaited, confused.
- Boy: 1. A young male. 2. Colloquial term for masculine. Often used to specify gender of clothes. Boy has often been used as a condescending term for a man (especially a man of colour), and is therefore distasteful to many people. (See girl.)
- Butch: 1. Masculine or macho dress and behaviour, regardless of sex or gender identity. 2. A sub-identity of lesbian or gay, based on masculine or macho dress and behaviour. (See femme.)

- Camp: To joke or playact exaggerated masculine or feminine behaviours for others' entertainment. Especially men exhibiting exaggerated feminine behaviours. Also to camp it up.
- Come out: 1. To disclose one's own sexual identity to another. 2. To discover that one's own sexual identity is different than previously assumed. 3. To deal with one's own and others' reactions to the discovery or revelation of one's sexual identity. 3. Sometimes applied to disclosure of other information than one's sexual identity.
- Cross Dresser (CD): One (regardless of the motivation) who wears clothes, makeup, etc. which are considered (by the culture) appropriate for the other sex but not one's own.
- Drag (In Drag): 1. Clothes, often unusual or dramatic, especially those considered appropriate to the other sex. 2. Can be applied to any recognizable "look." 3. In drag: Wearing clothes of the opposite sex.
- Drag Queen: A M->F transvestite who employs dramatic clothes, make-up, and mannerisms, often for other people's appreciation.
- Dyke: Reclaimed derogatory slang. Refers to Lesbians, or to Lesbians and Bisexual women.
- F->M: Female to male. Used to specify the direction of a sex or gender role change.
- Femme: 1. Feminine or effeminate dress and behaviour, regardless of sex or gender identity. 2. A sub-identity of lesbian or gay, based on masculine or macho dress and behaviour. (See butch.)
- Female: One who has a vagina.
- Female Impersonator (FI): A male who, on specific occasions, cross dresses and employs stereotypical feminine dialogue, voice, and mannerisms for the entertainment of other people.
- Feminine: The gender role assigned to females.
- Fetishistic Transvestite: A Transvestite who consistently eroticises Cross Dressing. May also eroticize fantasies of gender/sex change.
- Gay (man/male) (community): One who has significant sexual and romantic attractions primarily to members of the same sex (as oneself), or who identifies as a member of the gay community. Sometimes refers only to gay males, sometimes only to gay males and lesbians. Although some people use the term gay (community) to refer to all sexual minorities (or the sexual minority community), Lesbians and Bisexuals often do not feel included by it. Derogatory slang includes: queer, faggot.
- Gender (identity): A psychological gender role. Masculine or feminine.
- Gender (identity) community: People who identify as transvestite, transsexual, or transgendered, or as members of the gender community. Members of the gender community do not necessarily identify as members of the sexual minority community. (See transgender community.)

- Gender dysphoria (GD): Unhappiness or discomfort experienced by one whose sexual organs do not match one's gender identity.
- Gender neutral: Clothing, behaviours, thoughts, feelings, relationships, etc. which are considered appropriate for members of both sexes.
- Gender role: Arbitrary rules, assigned by society, that define what clothing, behaviours, thoughts, feelings, relationships, etc. are considered appropriate and inappropriate for members of each sex. Some clothing, behaviours, etc. are considered appropriate for members of both sexes. Which things are considered masculine, feminine, or neutral varies according to location, class, occasion, and numerous other factors. (See masculine, feminine, and gender neutral.)
- Genetic Boy (GB): Colloquial term for Genetic Male. (See boy.)
- Genetic Male/Man (GM): One who was considered male from birth, regardless of one's present sex or gender identity.
- Genetic Female/Woman (GF/GM): One who was born female, regardless of one's present sex or gender identity.
- Genetic Girl (GG): Colloquial term for Genetic Female. (See girl.)
- Girl: 1. A young female. 2. Colloquial term for feminine. Often used to specify gender of clothes. Girl has often been used as a condescending term for a woman, and is therefore distasteful to many people. (See boy.)
- Hermaphrodite: One who has both a penis and a vagina.
- Heterosexual (het): One who has significant sexual and romantic attractions primarily to members of the other sex (than oneself.) (See straight.)
- Heterosexism: The assumption that identifying as heterosexual and having sexual and romantic attractions only to members of the other sex (than oneself) is good and acceptable, and that other sexual identities and attractions are bad and unacceptable. The assumption that anyone is straight whose sexual orientation is not known, usually coupled with a "blindness" to the existence and concerns of LesBiGays.
- Homophile (community): Obsolete term for gay male (community.)
- Homophobia: Originally, an irrational fear of sexual attraction to the same sex. Developed into a term for the oppression of Lesbians and Gay men, and later into a term for all aspects of the oppression of Lesbians, Gay men, and Bisexuals (sometimes does not include bisexuals.) This oppression ranges from not including LesBiGays in one's circle of friends and media reports on and representations of society, through the cold shoulder, snide comments, verbal harassment, assault, rape, and murder based on the target person's (perceived) sexual identity. (See also Biphobia.)

- Homophobe: One who is afraid of or oppresses people because one (perceives them to) have sexual and romantic attractions to members of the same sex.
- Homosexual: Formal or clinical term for gay, usually meaning gay male, sometimes meaning LesGay, and occasionally meaning LesBiGay. Homosexual and homosexuality are often associated with the proposition that same gender attractions are a mental disorder (homophilia), and are therefore distasteful to some people.
- Identify/ied (as): To think of oneself as having a particular sexual identity or gender identity. [I identify as a bisexual. I am bi-identified.] To emphasise that an identity term refers to one's internal reality, as opposed to what others think or observe of one, self-identify is sometimes used.
- Identity: How one thinks of oneself. One's internal self, as opposed to what others observe or think about one. (See Label.)
- Label: How someone else sees or thinks of one. (See identity.)
- Lesbian: A woman who has significant sexual and romantic attractions to members of the same sex, or who identifies as a member of the lesbian community. Bisexual women often do not feel included by this term. Derogatory slang: dyke, lesbo.
- LesBiGay (community): Contraction of "lesbian, bisexual, and gay." Colloquial term for the sexual minority community or its members. Often spelled with capital "B" and "G" to prevent misinterpretation as "lesbian and gay." (See sexual minority/identity community.)
- LesGay: Contraction of "lesbian and gay." Sometimes used to mean LesBiGay, but bisexual women and men often do not feel included by this term.
- M->F: Male to female. Used to specify the direction of a sex or gender role change.
- Male: One who has a penis.
- Male Impersonator: A female who, on specific occasions, cross dresses and employs stereotypical masculine dialog, voice, and mannerisms for the entertainment of other people.
- Masculine: The gender role assigned to males.
- Monogendered: One who is comfortable in only one gender role. (Do people actually use this, or is it just a syntactic extension of bi-gendered?)
- Monosexual: One who has significant sexual and romantic attractions primarily to members of one sex. Straight, Gay, Lesbian. Someone who is not Bisexual.
- Neuter: 1. One who has neither a penis nor a vagina. 2. Occasionally used to mean androgenous.

- Other sex/gender: The other sex or gender than the reference person's own.
- (to be) Out: To be open about one's sexual identity with someone or in a situation. (See come out.)
- Out [someone]: 1. To disclose a second person's sexual identity to a third person, especially without the second person's permission. 2. To disclose one's own sexual identity, sometimes without choosing to do so. (See come out.)
- Primary sex organs: Penis (male) or vagina (female.) (See female, male, hermaphrodite, neuter.)
- Queer: 1. Reclaimed derogatory slang for the sexual minority community (e.g. Queer Nation.) Not accepted by all the sexual minority community, especially older members. 2. Sometimes used for an even wider spectrum of marginalized or radicalized groups and individuals.
- Same sex/gender: The same sex or gender as the reference person's own.
- Self-identify/identity as: See identify as and identity.
- Sex: Male or female, depending on one's primary sex organs.
- Sex role: See gender role.
- Sexual identity: How one thinks of oneself, in terms of being significantly attracted to members of the same or the other sex. Based on one's internal experience, as opposed to which gender one's actual sexual partners belong to. (See sexual orientation/preference.)
- Sexual identity/minority community: The community of people who have significant sexual and romantic attractions to members of the same sex, or who identify as a member of the sexual minority community. A formal term which includes LesBiGays and sometimes members of the gender community. Members of the sexual minority community usually do not identify as members of the gender community.
- Sexual orientation/preference: How one thinks of her/himself, in terms of being significantly attracted to members the same or the other sex. Sexual orientation emphasizes that some people feel that one has no control or influence over the development of one's sexual and romantic attractions or one's sexual orientation. Sexual preference emphasizes that some people feel that one does or should have some control or influence over the development of one's sexual and romantic attractions or sexual one's orientation.
- Sexual Reassignment Surgery (SRS): A surgical procedure which changes one's primary sexual organs from one sex to another (penis to vagina or vagina to penis.)

- SRS: Colloquial for Sexual Reassignment Surgery.
- Straight: Colloquial for heterosexual. Because straight has connotations of "unadulterated," "pure," and "honest," some members of the sexual identity community object to the implication that one who is not straight is "bent," "adulterated," "impure," or "dishonest." Straight has connotations of "narrow," "straight-laced" or "conservative," and some heterosexual-identified people object find it distasteful.
- Transgender community: Formal term for gender community.
- Transgendered (TG): One who switches gender roles, whether just once, or many times at will. Inclusive term for transsexuals and transvestites.
- Transsexual (TS): One who switches physical sexes (usually just once, but there are exceptions.) Primary sex change is accomplished by surgery. (See SRS.) Hormone therapy, electrolysis, additional surgery, and other treatments can change secondary sex characteristics.
- Transvestite (TV): One who mainly cross dresses for pleasure in the appearance and sensation. The pleasure may not be directly erotic. It may be empowering, rebellious, or something else. May feel comfortable in a focused transgender role while crossdressed. May occasionally experience gender dysphoria.