

Terminology: what we mean when we say...

Sexual Orientation vs. Gender Identity

- **Sexual Orientation:** Refers to one's degree of attraction, both emotionally and sexually, to people based on their gender/gender identity. Although the usual terms are "straight", "gay", "lesbian" and "bisexual", some individuals may identify their sexual orientation in unique ways that span the established categories.
- **Gender Identity:** Refers to one's core sense of identity in terms of maleness and/or femaleness. Some people think of this as a continuum, whereas others think of people as either male or female. Gender identity is a separate issue from sexual orientation.

Sexual Orientation Terms

- **Lesbian:** Term used to describe women who are attracted to other women both emotionally and sexually. **NOTE:** Some lesbians prefer to refer to themselves as **gay women** rather than as lesbian.
- **Gay:** Term used to describe men who are attracted to other men both emotionally and sexually.
- **Bisexual:** Term used to describe individuals who are attracted to people of either sex both emotionally and sexually.
- **Heterosexual (of "straight"):** Term used to describe people who are attracted to individuals of the other gender both emotionally and sexually.

Gender Identity Terms

- **Transgender:** An umbrella term that can include all individuals who do not fit traditional gender roles. Can include butch women, femme men, drag queens/kings, cross-dressers, and transsexual individuals.
- **Transsexual:** Term used to refer to an individual who identifies as a member of the gender other than the one they were assigned at birth or than they appear to fit biologically. Transsexual individuals may dress/live as the gender they feel themselves to be, and may take hormones and undergo surgeries to cause their physical bodies to more accurately reflect how they feel themselves to be in terms of their gender identity – but not all do.
- **Cross-dresser (or Transvestite):** As person, usually a man, who enjoys wearing clothing usually associated with the opposite sex – for fun, erotic, or other reasons. Contrary to common misunderstanding, most cross dressers are heterosexual and they are not transsexual.

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Additional Terms :

- **LGBT Community or Culture:** Individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender (LGBT) may be involved to a greater or lesser degree with a variety of established gay/queer communities / cultures. LGBT communities have their own history, terminology, arts, event, customs and traditions – and provide members with camaraderie, support, and validation.
- **Dyke/Fag/ Tranny:** Some individuals may choose to refer to themselves by these reclaimed terms as a source of empowerment. Generally speaking, however, it is not a good idea for someone who is straight to use these terms unless a previous request has been made by a G/L/B/T individual.
- **Homosexual:** This is the historical medical term for people who are attracted to members of their own gender, and was used as a diagnosis. Therefore, most gay/lesbian people find it negative, clinical, and dehumanizing -- and prefer to be called lesbian or gay. Some individuals, however, may choose to refer to themselves as “homosexual.”
- **Queer:** Some G/L/B/T individuals use this term to identify themselves and their culture. This word has been reclaimed by G/L/B/T people to be inclusive of bisexual and transgender people and to demonstrate a sense of empowerment and community. Some gay and lesbian people do not use or like this term, however. It is not advised for straight people to use this term unless a G/L/B/T person requests that you use this term with them.
- **Intersex (formerly called “hermaphrodite”):** Refers to people born with genitals that are anatomically partly male and partly female, or indeterminate. Intersex people may be of any sexual orientation and any gender identity.