



Basic Definitions:

sexual orientation and gender identity

Sexual Orientation

Describes to whom a person is sexually attracted. Some people are attracted to people of a particular gender; others are attracted to more than one gender. Some are not attracted to anyone. Sometimes the term “affectional orientation” is used synonymously to indicate that attraction can be about more than sexual desire.

Asexual ~ not attracted sexually to anyone and/or no desire to act on their attraction to anyone. Does not necessarily mean sexless.

Bisexual ~ attracted to people regardless of gender. A common misconception is that bisexual people are attracted to everyone and anyone. Often referred to as “bi”.

Heterosexual ~ attracted to people of the “opposite gender” (though this assumes there are only two genders, see below). Often referred to as “straight”.

Homosexual ~ attracted to people of the same gender. Often referred to as “gay” for men and sometimes women, and “lesbian” for women only.

Questioning ~ a term used to describe someone, often a youth, who is unsure of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Queer ~ often used as an umbrella term for bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender (BGLT) people as well as an individual identity for those who do not fit sexual orientation and/or gender identity norms in US society. Historically, it has been used as a pejorative term, and its use today is met with disfavor by some and worn proudly by others.

Homophobia ~ The fear of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people (often lumped together). It can result in avoidance, discrimination, and violence against BGLT people.

Biphobia ~ The fear of bisexual people, similar to homophobia, though it often includes the belief that bisexual people don’t exist.

Heterosexism ~ The presumption that everyone is heterosexual and/or the belief that heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality and bisexuality. Often includes the use of power of the majority (heterosexuals) to reinforce this belief and forgetting the privileges of being heterosexual in our society.

