

“What the heck are all these letters?”
“How am I supposed to keep track when the rules keep changing?”
“I’m afraid I’ll say something stupid or rude because I’m not sure how to use the terms.”

LGBTQ and You – an Introductory Glossary of Terms and Usage

It is very challenging to enter into any conversation when we don’t have the right words. Most of us were not taught these terms and concepts, so it takes some effort to learn them! Thank you for making the effort to understand some of what’s going on in this part of our culture and community. Learning this vocabulary is an important way of showing hospitality and respect to others.

The first thing to get one’s head around is that the following five terms all refer to different but related aspects of human sexuality. Human beings are complex, and every human being has all five of these characteristics.

1. Sex / physical sex / biological sex
2. Gender Identity
3. Gender Expression
4. Sexual Orientation
5. Sexual Behavior

1. Sex or Anatomical Sex– refers to biological characteristics. These include internal and external body parts, body chemistry, hormones, and chromosomes. Our dominant culture (western, Euro-American) generally assumes there are just 2 sexes: male and female. But over time, science has shown that this is not actually the case. (There are other cultures in which it’s long been accepted that there are more than 2 sexes.)

In fact, somewhere between .05%-2%¹ of the population has some mix of biological characteristics that don’t fit into this binary either/or of male/female. (It’s about as common as having red hair: 1%-2% of the population.)

Babies born with a mix of these characteristics, or ambiguous characteristics (since some do not emerge until puberty) were once referred to as “hermaphrodites”. This term has fallen out of use and is now considered offensive. **Intersex** is now the preferred term for individuals who have some non-binary mix of biological sex characteristics.

¹ American Journal of Human Biology, Am. J. Hum. Biol. 12:151–166, 2000. © 2000 Wiley-Liss, Inc.
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/>

2. Gender Identity – This is about how a person feels inside, about who they are: feminine, masculine, neither, or both. Since ideas about gender change over time and culture, this can be a confusing thing to talk about. Most people, from a very young age, clearly identify “I’m a girl.” or “I’m a boy.” About .05%-.06%² however, feel like the gender they were assigned at birth doesn’t fit them. It doesn’t feel right. A mistake was made, and it’s not really who they are.

Putting sex and gender identity together, we get these Terms for Gender Identity:

cis-gender – (pronounced “*sis-gender*”) refers to someone whose sex (as assigned at birth) and gender identity match

transgender or **trans** – refers to someone whose sex (as assigned at birth) and gender identity are not a match. A trans person may or may not be choosing to take steps to alter their biological characteristics. It is a mistake to assume that everyone who is trans is interested in or will pursue medical intervention.

queer or **genderqueer** – these are tough terms for people who are over age 35 or so. The word “queer” used to be used only as a slur to insult people who did not conform to gender norms. However, in recent decades, the word “queer” has been reclaimed and now serves as an umbrella term. For many people, saying, “I’m queer,” is the simplest (and least invasive) way to identify as outside the norms of a binary system that doesn’t include everyone.

3. Gender Expression – how I choose to show up in the world.

Gender expression includes clothing, shoes, jewelry, make up, accessories, hairstyles, language, behavior—even some professions are still considered gendered.

Terms Related to Gender Expression:

male/masculine
female/feminine
non-binary (NB)
gender fluid
gender queer

Gender expression is culturally specific and changes over time and place.

- Example: Tongan men, Indian men, and Scotsmen can wear skirts without threat to their sense of masculinity. In some cultures, skirts are not considered only “feminine” clothing.
- Example: 150 years ago in the United States or England, women wearing pants were scandalous/inappropriate. Women and men ostracized or assaulted women for transgressing that gender expression norm. Now, most women freely

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transgender> - citing Steinmetz, Katy (30 June 2016). [“1.4 Million Americans Identify as Transgender, Study Finds”](#). *Time*. [Archived](#) from the original on 30 June 2016. Retrieved 30 June 2016 and 3 other publications.

wear pants most of the time, and no assumptions about their sexuality or identity are made about it.

Who has freedom to fully "express"?

In dominant American/white culture, women have a *much* larger accepted range in gender expression than men do. Any clothing store testifies to this.

- Example: Women can wear what's traditionally men's clothing (pants, suits, boots, suspenders, fedoras) and still be considered "feminine" or "womanly." However, men and women frequently tease, bully, or physically assault men who transgress the norms of masculine gender expression by wearing traditionally women's clothing or cosmetics, unless it is done as an obvious joke.
- People generally dress to express the gender they are. Depending on a person's physical characteristics, people may or may not perceive a person is "convincing" or "passing". Unless you want to date them, there is no reason you need to know whether a person you encounter is trans, or a masculine-looking woman, or a feminine-looking man, or androgynous. People are people and deserve respect.

Pronouns

- You can generally assume that if someone is wearing traditionally female attire, they are women and prefer to use "she/her" pronouns.
- If you don't know what pronouns someone prefers, it is 100% okay to simply ask them, "What pronouns do you use?" Then use what they tell you.
- If you guess wrong, or forget to use the correct pronoun and the person corrects you, don't make it a big deal. Just apologize, say "thanks" for the correction, (as you would if you called someone "Dan" whose name is "Stan" and he corrected you) and move on.
- Many cultures have gender-neutral pronouns for people, in addition to feminine and masculine. In English, gender-neutral pronouns (it/its) are for objects, not people. So, people who don't identify as a "her" or a "him" are left with "they/them" as the best pronouns we've got right now. Many queer people prefer "they/them" as pronouns. For those who have been used to using they/them only as a plural, this can initially feel strange and takes a lot of practice.

Language changes over time; allowing room for pronouns is a simple act of hospitality. It's worth the effort.

4. Sexual Orientation – The term "sexual orientation" can imply that it's all about sex acts, which is not accurate because even people who are not sexually active still have an orientation. Orientation is really about what happens in our hearts. Orientation is about who I am romantically attracted to, who I fall in love with, who I want to make a home/family with.

Far more complex than two options (heterosexual or homosexual), sexual orientation is

best understood on a spectrum. Very few people are 100% one thing; most of us are more complex, as researchers have continued to discover over the past 70 years.³

“The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects.”
- *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948)

“Many persons do not want to believe that there are gradations in these matters from one to the other extreme.” -*Sexual Behavior of the Human Female* (1953)

Within orientation, there is also the distinction between romantic attraction and sexual attraction. For most of us, these can seem like the same thing, because we experience them in concert. Yet, romantic attraction and sexual attraction for some people function independently. Thus, many of the terms below which you may be familiar with when they end in *-sexual*, can also have the ending *-romantic*, to indicate something different (e.g., *homoromantic*, in addition to *homosexual*; *heteroromantic*, in addition to *heterosexual*).

Terms related to Sexual Orientation

heterosexual, hetero-romantic – attracted to people who are of a different sex

gay – men attracted to men (this term is also used for women attracted to women)

lesbian – woman attracted to women

bisexual, biromantic – attracted to men and women

pansexual, panromantic – attracted to people along the spectrum of gender

asexual, aromantic – not attracted to anyone

queer – don't fit in these categories or prefer the larger umbrella term
(FYI – “gay and lesbian” are preferred terms rather than “homosexuals”)

5. Sexual Behavior

Notice: All of the above differences and complexities exist BEFORE behavior comes into the question. Without anyone touching anyone else, each human being already is/has 1, 2, 3, and 4.

How a person chooses to express their sexuality is also complex, and a personal matter. This is where we get into questions of ethics, right/wrong, power, consent, mutuality, and personal preferences.

We can identify common and consistent values across all orientations, identities, expressions, and biological differences. Such as:

Sexual behavior is positive when it is consensual, mutual, and pleasurable. (Some people choose to have additional criteria, such as marriage.)

Sexual behavior is wrong when it is abusive, coerced, or exploitative.

³ *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior of the Human Female* (1953) are known collectively as the Kinsey Reports. Together, they sold nearly a million copies and were translated in 13 languages. The Kinsey Reports are associated with a change in public perception of sexuality and considered part of the most successful and influential scientific books of the 20th century.

Terms related to Sexual Behavior**celibate** (no sexual partners)**monogamous** (single partner)**polyamorous**, or **poly-** or **poly-am** (multiple partners)**non-monogamous** (multiple partners)**So, what about that acronym again?**

LGBT or LGBTQ or LGBTQIA+ or LGBTQQIA+ or...

Lesbian

Gay

Bisexual

Transgender

Queer or Questioning

Intersex

Asexual

+ plus – making an acronym cover what has taken 5 pages to describe is tough – that’s why this acronym changes over time.

As a way of avoiding the alphabet soup of this abbreviation, many people use the term “queer” as an alternate umbrella term.

Some Important Context and Suggestions for Respectful Interaction with Neighbors***What about surgery and hormones?***

Transgender people have characteristics that don’t match who they are inside. Some trans people go through hormonal treatments and medical procedures to make their bodies more closely reflect their identity. Some trans people do not go through medical interventions. Some prefer to accept themselves as they are, others are limited by the expense, lack of insurance coverage, or lack of providers.

NOTE: People often let their curiosity get ahead of their manners. We do not ask people about their genitalia. It is very rude to ask a trans person about their experience of transitioning (scars, hormone treatments, etc.) or their plans around transitioning. It is private medical information. (Imagine someone asking you about the shape of your penis or vagina in casual conversation. Outrageous, right? None of their business, right? Right. Don’t do that to queer people.)

Shouldn’t everyone just stick with what it says on their birth certificate?

Every year, a percentage of babies are born with ambiguous or intersex characteristics, and as more are identified as puberty hits- somewhere between .05% and 1.7% of the population⁴. (By comparison, having red hair is about 1%-2%.)

⁴ American Journal of Human Biology, Am. J. Hum. Biol. 12:151–166, 2000. © 2000 Wiley-Liss, Inc. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/%28SICI%291520-6300%28200003/04%2912%3A2%3C151%3A%3AAID-AJHB1%3E3.0.CO%3B2-F>

In the U.S., it's been common practice to have doctors and parents guess at a gender for an intersex child and put that sex on the birth certificate. Sometimes, this involves surgical procedures to make the baby's physical characteristics and the choice consistent.

Increasingly, the ethics of this are being called into question. Many parents and medical professionals feel that it's not their right to make those decisions for someone else. Instead, they find it better to wait, let the child grow up, discover what changes emerge in puberty, and see what they would like to do about changes in their body.

If it's all so personal and private, why do we have to talk about it/hear about it so much?

Because it's currently legal to discriminate against LGBTQIA+ people, and that injustice needs to be changed. Queer people have struggled for many years to have the right to live their lives without fear, shame, harassment, persecution, and prosecution.

While some civil rights have been secured, the queer community is more likely to experience harassment, violence, homelessness, job discrimination, housing discrimination and religious rejection than non-queer people.

The equal right to civil marriage is a powerful victory, but it is certainly not the end of the struggle for freedom and equality.

Religion & LGBTQIA+ people

As has been true during previous struggles for equality and inclusion (the proper role of women, people of color, left-handed people), religious people continue to disagree about this human difference.

Many Christians believe LGBTQ+ people are simply an example of God's love of variety in creation (and are therefore accountable to the same ethical and religious requirements as those heterosexual people). Other Christians believe these differences are inherently sinful (and therefore require correction, rather than affirmation).

As a denomination, The United Methodist Church has been split about this for over 45 years. Our global Book of Discipline contains self-contradictory statements about human sexuality, the sacred worth of each human being, and equality of access to ministry of Christ's church.

The Pacific Northwest Annual Conference, and the Western Jurisdiction of The UMC, have clearly and decisively sided **for the inclusion and affirmation** of LGBTQ+ people as members, leaders, and clergy. There are, however, individual United Methodists, some congregations, and some clergy in our area who do not agree with the majority.

Bonus Question: What's "Drag"? (Drag Queen/Drag King)

Drag is a kind of performance art. It's time-honored form of theater that plays with gender expression and heightened gender stereotypes. There are many genres of drag. Drag queens are the most well-known—there's a TV competition show called *RuPaul's Drag Race* that's in its 10th season.

Drag queens are people, usually male or trans, who dress in women's clothing and often act with exaggerated and stereotypical femininity with a primarily entertaining purpose. They often exaggerate make-up for dramatic, comedic, and/or satirical effect. The term "female impersonator" is no longer used.

Drag kings are mostly female or trans performance artists who dress in masculine drag and personify male gender stereotypes as part of an individual or group routine.

Although stereotypes abound, it's not really safe to assume you know much about someone who performs drag...because it's *a performance*.

Drag performers may be lesbian, bisexual, transgender, cis-gender, bisexual, genderqueer, or otherwise part of the LGBT community. In drag's current expression in the USA, it's generally considered and celebrated as a queer art form.

This glossary was compiled by the Rev. Ann Lock, an Elder in the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference of the UMC. Rev. Lock is a hetero, cis-gender woman who works with congregations that are predominantly heterosexual and cis-gender—therefore this glossary is geared toward that audience. She wrote this guide for the local United Methodist congregation she serves to help them engage in conversation in a respectful way.

Everything Rev. Lock knows about these topics was gained due to the generosity and painstaking work of queer people and their allies in the movement to understand and love all members of God's family. Rev. Lock and has been actively involved in educating herself and working for justice and inclusion since 2000. Any errors or glaring omissions are entirely her own.

In addition to the footnoted studies, a great deal of this information was created by or informed by:

<https://www.genderbread.org/>

<https://www.genderspectrum.org/explore-topics/>

<https://www.queertheology.com/resources/>

<https://gaycenter.org/>

<https://rmnetwork.org/>

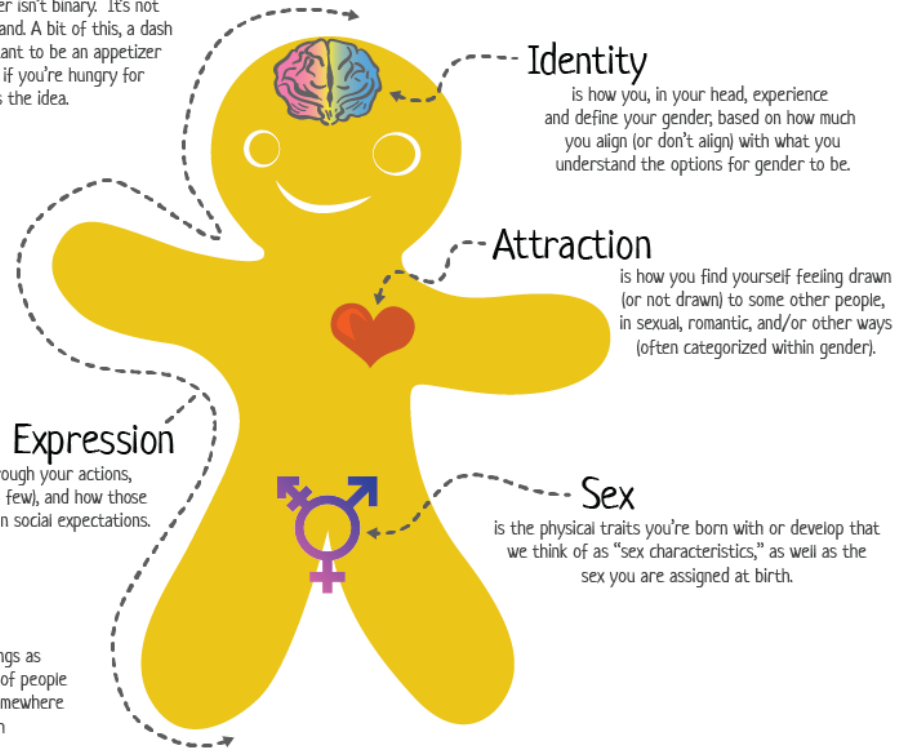
<http://whosoever.org/bible/index.shtml>

<http://www.freedomtomarry.org/pages/Why-Marriage-Matters>

The Genderbread Person

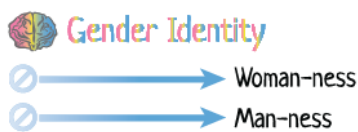
by its pronounced **METROsexual** .com

Gender is one of those things everyone thinks they understand, but most people don't. Gender isn't binary. It's not either/or. In many cases it's both/and. A bit of this, a dash of that. This tasty little guide is meant to be an appetizer for gender understanding. It's okay if you're hungry for more after reading it. In fact, that's the idea.



We can think about all these things as existing on continuums, where a lot of people might see themselves as existing somewhere between 0 and 100 on each

⊖ means a lack of what's on the right side



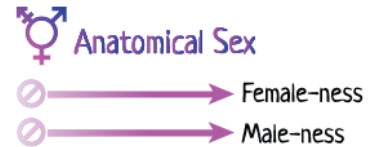
personality traits, jobs, hobbies, likes, dislikes, roles, expectations

common GENDER IDENTITY things



style, grooming, clothing, mannerisms, affect, appearance, hair, make-up

common GENDER EXPRESSION things



body hair, chest, hips, shoulders, hormones, penis, vulva, chromosomes, voice pitch

common ANATOMICAL SEX things

Identity ≠ Expression ≠ Sex
Gender ≠ Sexual Orientation

Sex Assigned At Birth
 Female Intersex Male
 Typically based solely on external genitalia present at birth (ignoring internal anatomy, biology, and change throughout life), Sex Assigned At Birth (SAAB) is key for distinguishing between the terms "cisgender" (when SAAB aligns with gender identity) and "transgender" (when it doesn't).

