



The Presbyterian Church in Canada

Definitions of Commonly Used Words in Discussions About Sexuality (from the Report of the Rainbow Communion to General Assembly in 2019)

Asexual

Refers to an individual who does not experience sexual attraction. There is considerable diversity among asexual people. Each asexual person experiences things like relationships, attraction and arousal somewhat differently. Asexuality is distinct from celibacy or sexual abstinence, which are chosen behaviours, in that asexuality is a sexual orientation that does not necessarily entail either of those behaviours.

Attraction

Often referred to as sexual orientation, this classifies a person's potential for emotional, intellectual, spiritual, intimate, romantic and/or sexual interest in other people, often based on their sex and/or gender. Attraction may form the basis for aspects of one's identity and/or behaviour.

Biological sex

Refers to anatomical, physiological, genetic, or physical attributes that define if a person is male, female, or intersex. Based on one's biological characteristics including: chromosomes, genes, hormones, internal and external sex organs, and secondary sex characteristics. Infants are assigned a sex at birth based on their perceived traits. Sex is often conflated or interchanged with the word, gender, which is more social than biological, though there is some overlap.

Biphobia

Fear and/or hatred of bisexuality, often exhibited by name-calling, bullying, exclusion, prejudice, discrimination, or acts of violence towards anyone who is or is assumed to be bisexual or experiences attraction to multiple sexes and/or genders can be the target of biphobia. Bisexual people face a number of false stereotypes and misunderstanding from those who do not identify as bisexual such as: are promiscuous, are unable to remain monogamous or must be with both male and female partners simultaneously. In addition, bisexuality is often misunderstood as a phase or a confused state, with the expectation that a bisexual person will come out as "truly" gay or straight at a later point. Bisexual people are often told to "choose one" gender.

Bisexual

A person who experiences attraction to both men and women. Some bisexual people use this term to express attraction to both their own sex and/or gender, as well as to people of a different sex and/or gender.

Cisgender

Refers to an individual whose gender identity aligns with the one typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth. Without access to the word, cisgender, people have often resorted to language like "real/normal men and women." Cisgender has its origin in the Latin-derived prefix, cis-, meaning "on this side of," which means the opposite of trans-, meaning "across from" or "on the other side of." In the case of gender, cis- describes the alignment of gender identity with assigned sex.

Closeted

Describes a person who is not open about their sexual orientation or gender identity.



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Coming out

For most people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex, the process of self-acceptance that continues throughout one's life, and the sharing of the information with others. Sometimes referred to as "disclosing" by transgender individuals. Coming out can also apply to the family and friends of LGBTQI youth or adults when they reveal to others their connection to an LGBTQI person. There are many different degrees of being out: some may be out to friends only; some may be out publicly; and some may be out only to themselves.

Conversion or reparative therapy

Conversion therapy, or reparative therapy, refers to the pseudoscientific practice that attempts to change the sexual orientation of bisexual, gay and lesbian individuals to heterosexual using psychological or spiritual interventions. The Canadian Psychological Association opposes any therapy with the goal of repairing or converting an individual's sexual orientation, regardless of age. Scientific research does not support the efficacy of conversion or reparative therapy. Conversion or reparative therapy can result in negative outcomes such as distress, anxiety, depression, negative self-image, a feeling of personal failure, difficulty sustaining relationships and sexual dysfunction. There is no evidence that the negative effects of conversion or reparative therapy counterbalance any distress caused by the social stigma and prejudice these individuals may experience.

Gay

The adjective used to describe people who are emotionally, romantically and/or physically attracted to people of the same gender (e.g., gay man, gay people). In contemporary contexts, lesbian is often a preferred term for women, though many women use the term, gay, to describe themselves. People who are gay need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction and self-identification that determine orientation.

Gender

A set of social, psychological and/or emotional traits, often influenced by societal expectations, that classify an individual as man, woman, a mixture of both or neither.

Gender binary

The concept that there are only two genders, man and woman, and that everyone must be one or the other. Also implies the assumption that gender is biologically determined. Does not take into account intersex individuals.

Gender identity

One's deeply held core sense of being a girl/woman, boy/man, some of both or neither. One's gender identity does not always correspond to biological sex. Awareness of gender identity is usually experienced as early as 18 months old.

Heterosexism

Heterosexism is the assumption that heterosexuality is the social and cultural norm as well as the prejudiced belief that heterosexuals, or "straight" people, are socially and culturally superior to LGBTQI people. Heterosexism is the systemic bias which favours heterosexuals and heterosexuality. It stems from the idea that male and female roles, thoughts and expressions are separate and distinct. A common example of heterosexism is assuming that everyone is straight.



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Heterosexual

A person who experiences attraction to people of a different sex and/or gender. Also referred to as “straight.”

Homophobia

Fear and/or hatred of lesbian or gay individuals, often exhibited by name-calling, bullying, exclusion, prejudice, discrimination, or acts of violence towards anyone who is lesbian or gay. In other words, any aversion to those that are not heterosexual.

Homosexual

An outdated clinical term often considered derogatory and offensive, as opposed to the generally preferred terms, gay, lesbian or queer.

Hypocrisy

Behaviour that contradicts what an individual or group claims to believe or feel.

Intersectionality

A lens of analysis of social relations and structures within a given society. The concept of intersectionality recognizes how each person simultaneously exists within multiple and overlapping identity categories (including, but not limited to, ability, attraction, body size, citizenship, class, creed, ethnicity, gender expression, gender identity, race, religion). The ways in which an individual experiences systemic privilege and oppression are impacted by the interplay of these identity categories, depending on how they are valued by social institutions.

Intersex/Differences of sexual development (DSD)

Refers to individuals born with ambiguous genitalia or bodies that appear neither typically male nor female, often arising from hormonal, chromosomal anomalies or ambiguous genitalia. Medical professionals often assign a gender to the individual and proceed to perform surgeries to “align” their physical appearance with typical male or female sex characteristics beginning in infancy and often continuing into adolescence, before a child is able to give informed consent. Formerly, the medical terms, hermaphrodite and pseudo-hermaphrodite, were used; these terms are now considered neither acceptable nor scientifically accurate. Some intersex people identify with their assigned sex, while others do not, and some choose to identify as intersex. Intersex people may or may not identify as trans or transgender.

Lesbian

Refers to a woman who is emotionally, romantically and/or physically attracted to other women. People who are lesbians need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction and self-identification that determine orientation.

LGBTQI

An acronym that collectively refers to individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning or intersex.



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Lifestyle

A term often used negatively to describe the lives of people who are LGBTQI that assumes the way in which LGBTQI individuals live differs significantly from the rest of society.

Out

Generally describes people who openly self-identify as LGBTQI in their private, public and/or professional lives. Sometimes, individuals are outed by others who they may have already come out to. Outing an LGBTQI person without their consent is disrespectful and potentially dangerous for the LGBTQI individual. Some people who are transgender prefer to use the term, disclose.

Polyamory

An umbrella term for various forms of non-monogamous, multi-partner relationships, or non-exclusive sexual or romantic relationships.

Queer

A term used by some people to describe themselves and/or their community. Reclaimed from its earlier negative use, the term is valued by some for its defiance, by some because it can be inclusive of the entire community, and by others who find it to be an appropriate term to describe their more fluid identities. Traditionally a negative or pejorative term for people who are gay, queer is still sometimes disliked by LGBTQI individuals.

Questioning

Describes those who are in a process of discovery and exploration about their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or a combination thereof.

Sexual orientation

Emotional, romantic, or sexual feelings toward other people. While sexual behaviour involves the choices one makes in acting on one's sexual orientation, sexual orientation is part of the human condition. One's sexual activity does not define one's sexual orientation; typically, it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

Straight

See "heterosexual"

The Trans Umbrella

The term, trans, is frequently used as an umbrella term for a variety of other terms, including transgender and transsexual, and can also refer to terms like genderqueer, agender, bigender, Two Spirit, etc. The reality is that for many people their experience of their own gender identity may not align with social expectations based on the sex assigned to them at birth, nor with any gender options available within a binary system.

Transgender

A person who does not identify either fully or in part with the gender associated with the sex assigned to them at birth—often used as an umbrella term to represent a wide range of gender identities and expressions. Transgender has its origin in the Latin-derived prefix, trans-, meaning "across from" or "on the other side of," which is the opposite of cis, meaning "on this side of." In the case of gender, trans-

describes that the gender identity is not aligned with the assigned sex. This is a broad term that can reflect a spectrum of experiences. Many transgender individuals take steps to express their gender identity by changing their style of dress and mannerisms, taking hormone therapy, and/or undergoing gender-affirmation surgery. However, the extent to which they do, if at all, is a personal decision unique to the individual.

Transphobia

Fear and/or hatred of transgender individuals, often exhibited by name-calling, bullying, exclusion, prejudice, discrimination, or acts of violence towards anyone who is or is assumed to be transgender, thought to be transgender, or whose gender expression doesn't conform to traditional gender roles.

Two Spirit

An English umbrella term that reflects the many words used in different Indigenous languages to affirm the interrelatedness of multiple aspects of identity—including gender, sexuality, community, culture and spirituality. Two Spirit people were often accorded special status based upon their unique abilities to understand and move between masculine and feminine perspectives, acting as visionaries, healers and medicine people. Some Indigenous people identify as Two Spirit rather than, or in addition to, identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer.

Some Sources

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