

Sexual identity and gender identity glossary

THE MCGILL DAILY

The following is a glossary of some basic terms used in describing gender and sexual identity.

These meanings, however, are continually changing and are used differently by different individuals in different contexts. The definitions assume the existence of only two sexes and genders which many people consider closely related or overlapping. In this way, they may present a limited view of a much richer reality.

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

Androgyny: The quality of simultaneously exhibiting "masculine" and "feminine" characteristics.

Bigendered: One who switches between masculine and feminine gender roles periodically.

Biphobia: The oppression or mistreatment of bisexuals, especially by lesbians and gay men.

Bisexual: One who has significant sexual attractions to members of both the same and the other sex, or who identifies as members of the bisexual community.

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.

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.

Drag: 1. Clothes, often unusual or dramatic, especially those considered appropriate to the other sex. 2. Can be applied to any recognizable "look" (e.g. "I see you are in corporate drag today.")

Dyke: Reclaimed derogatory slang. Refers to lesbians and bisexual women.

F2M: 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 "feminine" or "girlish" dress and behaviour.

Gay: One who has significant sexual and romantic attractions primarily to members of the same sex, or who identifies as a member of the gay community. Can refer to gay males or both gay males and lesbians. Although some use the term gay community to refer to all sexual minorities, lesbians and bisexuals often do not feel included by it.

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: Rules assigned by society, that define what clothing, behaviours, thoughts, feelings, relationships, etc. are considered appropriate and inappropriate for members of each sex. What is considered "masculine," "feminine," or "neutral" varies according to location, class, occasion, and numerous other factors.

Genetic female (GF): One who was considered female from birth,

regardless of one's present sex or gender identity.

Genetic male/man (GM): One who was considered male from birth, regardless of one's present sex or gender identity.

Heterosexual (het): One who has significant sexual and romantic attractions primarily to members of the other sex.

LGBO

Heterosexism: The assumption that identifying as heterosexual and having sexual and romantic attractions only to members of the opposite sex is good and acceptable, and that other sexual identities and attractions are bad and unacceptable. The assumption that anyone whose sexual orientation is not known must be straight.

Homophobia: Originally, a fear of sexual attraction to the same sex. Developed into a term describing all aspects of the oppression of lesbians, gays, and bisexuals (sometimes does not include bisexuals).

Homosexual: Formal or clinical term for gay, usually meaning gay male, but can refer to lesbian or bisexual. Homosexual and homosexuality are terms often associated with the proposition that same gender attractions are a mental disorder (homophilia). The terms are distasteful to some people.

Hormone therapy: Used to change secondary sex characteristics, including breast size, weight distribution, and facial

hair growth.

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.

M2F: Male to female. Used to specify the direction of a sex or gender role change.

Monosexual: One who has significant sexual and romantic attractions primarily to members of one sex (i.e. straight, gay, lesbian). Someone who is not bisexual.

(To be) Out: To be open about one's sexual identity with someone or in a situation.

(To) Out (someone): 1. To disclose a second person's sexual identity to a third person, particularly without the second person's permission. 2. To disclose one's own sexual identity, sometimes inadvertently.

Queer: Reclaimed derogatory slang for the sexual minority community (e.g. Queer Nation). Not accepted by all the sexual minority community, especially older members.

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

sexual partners belong to.

Sexual identity/minority community: A formal term which includes lesbians, bisexuals, gays, and sometimes members of the gender community. Members of the sexual minority community usually do not identify as members of the gender community.

Sexual reassignment surgery

(SRS): A surgical procedure which changes one's primary sexual organs from one sex to another (i.e. penis to vagina or vagina to penis).

Stonewall: A pivotal event in 1969, which basically involved queers revolting against discrimination, that many attribute to having spurred the modern queer movement.

Straight: Colloquial for heterosexual. Because straight has connotations of "unadulterated," "pure," and "honest," some members of the sexual minority 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 find it distasteful.

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 sexual reassignment surgery, Hormone therapy, electrolysis, additional surgery, and other treatments that change secondary sex characteristics.

Transvestite (TV): One who mainly cross-dresses for pleasure in the appearance and sensation. The

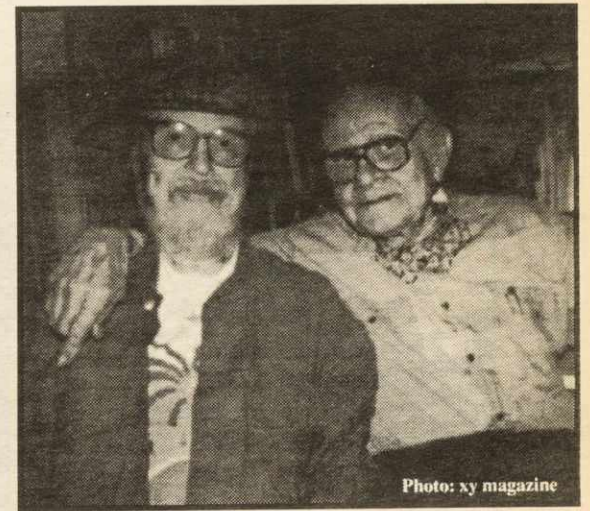


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pleasure may not be directly erotic. May feel comfortable in a focused transgender role while cross-dressed. May occasionally experience gender dysphoria.

10 myths about bisexuality debunked

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1. MYTH: A bisexual is someone who is sleeping with both a man and a woman — right now.

FACT: Bisexual people have the potential to feel sexually attracted to, and fall in love with, members of either sex. This does not mean that bisexual people need to have two lovers in order to feel fulfilled. Bisexual people lead a variety of sexual lifestyles, from dating both men and women at the same time, to being monogamous. Bisexuality is an orientation that allows people to be open to a variety of sexual experiences, whether acted upon or not.

2. MYTH: Bisexuals are promiscuous.

FACT: As a group, bisexuals are no more promiscuous than any other group of people. They are just as likely as someone who is heterosexual or homosexual to be involved with many people, and as capable of being monogamous.

3. MYTH: All bisexuals are attracted to the same thing in both their male and female partners.

FACT: Many bisexuals are attracted to different things in men and women. "I like women because they are women and I like men because they are men. I used to think that the feelings were the same but they're not; not to me at least. The chemistry, the lovemaking, the communication is totally different. They're both wonderful, and they're both part of me."

But some bisexuals do look for the same character traits in both male and female partners.

4. MYTH: When bisexuals look for a partner, they don't care if their lover is male or female.

FACT: Most bisexuals tend to favour one gender over another at different times in their lives. They recognize, however, that they are attracted to both men and women, and can fall in love with an individual of either gender at any given time.

5. MYTH: Bisexuals are sexually confused, they don't know what they want. They are sexually "troubled".

FACT: Bisexuality is as valid a sexual identity as any other. Bisexuals are not sexually confused. They know exactly who they are. When they are looking for a partner, they might be looking for a man or a woman, depending on what their needs at the moment are.

6. MYTH: When bisexuals marry or date someone from the opposite sex, they are no longer bisexual.

FACT: Bisexuals do not give up their identity when they fall in love with someone. Many people identify as bisexual for their entire lives, regardless of the gender of their partner. However, a person's sexuality can change with time. He or she may be more attracted to one gender at one time, and to another at other times. Someone who is bisexual (i.e. attracted to both genders) may not remain so his or her

entire life. A bisexual may, at some point, shift his or her sexual identity to a monosexual one. That does not mean that they were never really bisexual in the first place, only that they have changed.

7. MYTH: When bisexuals are not in a same sex relationship, they are enjoying "heterosexual privilege".

FACT: One can argue that it is easier to date a member of the opposite sex since society accepts, and even praises you. However, when dating a member of the opposite sex, bisexuals have to fight for their identity to be recognized by the straight community (which will assume heterosexuality). They also have to fight biphobia in the lesbian and gay communities.

8. MYTH: Bisexuals are really straight people trying to be trendy (because everyone knows being queer is "in")

FACT: Being bisexual isn't easy. The heterosexual community discriminates against bisexuals for being queer, while the homosexual community stigmatizes bisexuals for their "heterosexual side". Bisexuals are as likely to be harassed by homophobic people as they leave a gay bar, or walk hand-in-hand with a same-sex partner. There is also an incredible amount of biphobia in the gay and lesbian communities, which sometimes regards bisexuals as homosexuals on their way to "fully coming out". Bisexuals have to fight to gain

acceptance in both the gay and straight communities.

9. MYTH: Bisexuals are really gays/lesbians, they're just coming out of the closet in stages.

FACT: Some gays or lesbians will come out of the closet as bisexual before realizing that they are homosexual. This does not mean that all people who identify as bisexual will eventually declare that they are monosexual. Bisexuality, as a sexual identity, exists and stands on its own.

10. MYTH: Everyone is inherently bisexual.

You will not automatically "become" bisexual as the result of a brief attraction, acted upon or not, to a member of the same/opposite sex. Even though statistically, a vast majority of people have felt some brief attraction to members of both sexes, it does not mean that everyone is bisexual.

Bisexuality, as the term is used here, is an identity. It is an acceptance of a potential to have sexual and romantic relations with members of either gender. Brief attractions do not change someone's conceptions of what a partner is to them. Differences do exist between people in terms of sexual orientations, and attractions. These differences should be recognized.

With excerpts from the McGill Student Health services pamphlet on Bisexuality and Free Your Mind, by Ellen Bass and Kate Kaufman, Published by HarperPerennial, 1996.