

# UWM LGBT+ Resource Center

An Introduction to Gender Identity & Sexual Orientation

## Sex ≠ Gender ≠ Sexuality

Sex, gender, and sexuality are NOT interchangeable.

They all play specific, equally important roles in the formation of your own self – and we ALL have ALL of them.

## Understanding the Basics

### EVERYONE HAS...

- *A Biological Sex* – what you are assigned at birth. This isn't inherently binary (ex. male and female).
- *A Gender Identity* – who you view yourself as. What gender (if any) you internally feel you are as a person.
- *A Gender Expression* – how you express yourself on the outside. How a person presents their own gender to the world.
- *A Sexual Orientation* – who you are interested in as a potential partner. Who a person is interested in having a romantic, emotional, physical, spiritual, and/or sexual relationships with.

### SEX

- What a person is assigned at birth.
- Comes down to physical characteristics: chromosomes, genitalia, testes/ovaries, hormones (estrogen/testosterone), and then secondary sex characteristics (breasts, body and facial hair, etc.).
- More than 2 sexes in nature: male, female, and intersex.

### GENDER

- The social construction of masculinity and femininity in a specific culture.
- Gender is FLUID.

### SEXUAL ORIENTATION

- A person's enduring physical, romantic, emotional, and/or spiritual attractions.
- Sexual orientation is FLUID.



# Beyond the Basics

## SEXUAL B.I.O.

- **Behavior:** the sexual, emotional, or romantic acts a person is engaging in (who are you doing it with?).
- **Identity:** how a person views their own sexuality and the following self-ascribed label (who do you say that you are?).
- **Orientation:** the direction of romantic, sexual, and emotional attractions that a person experiences (who are you attracted to?).

**AROMANTIC (ARO):** A person who does not experience primary romantic attraction, but might experience sexual/emotional/spiritual attraction.

**ASEXUAL (ACE):** A person who does not experience primary sexual attraction, but might experience romantic/emotional/spiritual attraction.  
\*\* See <http://asexuality.org/home/> for more information.

**BISEXUAL:** A person whose primary sexual and affectional orientation is toward people of similar and other genders, or towards people regardless of their gender. Some people avoid this term because of its implications that there are only two sexes/genders to be sexually attracted to and this reinforces the binary gender system. Others solve this problem by defining bisexuality as attraction to more than one gender.

**DEMISEXUAL:** (Noun) An individual who does not experience sexual attraction unless they have formed a strong emotional connection with another individual (often in a romantic relationship).

**GAY:** A sexual and affectional orientation towards people of the same gender, although most specifically referring to men who are attracted to other men. It has also been used as an umbrella term for multiple genders.

**LESBIAN:** A woman whose primary sexual and affectional orientation is toward people of the same gender.

**PANSEXUAL/OMNISEXUAL/POLYSEXUAL:** A person who is affectionally, emotionally, physically, sexually, and/or spiritually, attracted to people of more than one sex or gender. Used by some people in place of the term bisexual to acknowledge that there are multiple sexes and genders and to help dismantle the binary gender system.

**QUEER:** A term that was originally used as a derogatory slur, but is now being used as an identity as well as an umbrella term to indicate people who transgress culturally imposed norms of heterosexuality and gender traditionalism. Anyone who chooses to identify as such can include, but is not limited to, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, non-labeling people, intersex, asexual people, and anyone else who does not strictly identify as cisgender and heterosexual. This term has different meanings to different people. Some still find it offensive, while others reclaim it to encompass the broader sense of history of the gay rights movement. It can also be used as an umbrella term like LGBT+, as in "the queer community".

**QUESTIONING:** A term used to refer to an individual who is the process of considering or exploring one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

**SAME GENDER LOVING/ATTRACTED (SGL/SGA):** A culturally-affirming term coined by activist Cleo Manago in the 1990s for African American use. It is generally used for gay identities.

**STRAIGHT:** A sexual and affectional orientation towards people of a different gender, generally referring to people of a binary gender attracted to the opposite binary.

\*\* *You may notice that ally is not listed under these terms and definitions. This is because ally is not an identity within the LGBT+ community. Allies, however, are still important to deconstructing social norms that alienate those within the LGBT+ community.*

## GENDER P.I.E.

- **Pronouns:** the set of personal pronouns a person uses. How a person is referred to when not called by name by other people.
- **Identity:** how a person views their gender. How a person views themselves in terms of masculine, feminine, etc.
- **Expression:** how a person conveys their gender to the world. How people express themselves on the outside (not necessarily aligned with a person's gender).

**AGENDER:** An identity that is generally used for the lack of gender, or not on the gender spectrum.

**ANDROGYNE/ANDROGYNOUS/ANDROGYNY:** 1. A person whose biological sex is not readily apparent, whether it be intentionally or unintentionally, and appears to be neither man or woman; 2. A person whose identity is between the two traditional genders; 3. A person who rejects or combines gender roles completely, sometimes may refer to themselves as performing genderf\*ck.

**CISGENDER:** A term for people whose gender identity and/or expression aligns with those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth.

**GENDERQUEER:** An identity that does not conform to conventional gender identities, but can identify with both of the binary, neither, or a combination of genders.

**GENDERFLUID:** An identity that can refer to a gender identity that varies over time, randomly, or depending on the circumstances. People who identify as genderfluid can identify with any identity on the gender spectrum, or even with a lack of gender.

**INTERSEX:** A general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with reproductive or sexual anatomy (including chromosomes and hormones) that don't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male. \*\* Hermaphrodite is an outdated and inaccurate term that has been used to describe intersex people in the past. See <http://www.isna.org/>

**NON-BINARY/GENDER NONCONFORMING (GNC):** An umbrella term used for identities that do not fall within the gender binary. Some may also identify as transgender, others may not.

**PANGENDER/OMNIGENDER/POLYGENDER:** Possessing more than one or all genders. These terms are used specifically to refute the concept of only two genders.

**TRANSGENDER:** An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth, including but not limited to, transsexuals, crossdressers, drag king, drag queen, androgynous people, genderqueers, two-spirit people, and gender non-conforming people. Transgender is a broad term and is good for non-transgender people to use. Some transgender people feel they exist not within one of the two standard gender categories, but rather somewhere between, beyond, or outside of those two genders.

**TWO SPIRIT:** This English term emerged in 1990 to describe Native Americans who fulfill one of many mixed gender roles found traditionally among First Nation peoples. Some Native Americans who are queer or transgender may self-identify as two-spirit, but others may not view this as a transgender identity. Many Native American Nations have three, five, or even seven genders. "Two-Spirit" is the closest English term that is appropriate to refer to these gender traditions among indigenous peoples. Historically, different tribes have specific titles for different kinds of two-spirit people. This term is not meant to be translated into Native American Languages; rather it is a reflection of the rich history of diversity and acceptance in many First Nation traditions.

**XUEER:** While pronounced like "queer", this is an identity primarily found in Latinx and Chicaxx communities in the Southwestern U.S. This identity distances itself from the white-centric definition of "queer" that excludes socio-economic-race concerns.

*Sources Adapted with permission from Marquette University Gender and Sexuality Resource Center (2016).*

\*\* This list is nonexhaustive. This is a small handful of the diversity of gender and sexuality--language is continuously changing. These definitions vary according to economic background, race, age, and culture.