



Gender & Sexuality - Key Terms & Concepts

WHAT IS THIS?

As part of our continued growth, we are constantly looking for ways to better understand ourselves and each other. With thanks to our friends at the General Council Office of the United Church of Canada for their resources, we invite your reflection on the following terms and concepts around gender and sexuality. Some may be very familiar, some may be completely new to you. For some it may be overwhelming, for others, too simplistic. What we know for sure is that words are powerful. We hope that this document will enable us all to have deeper conversation and understanding. If you would like a digital copy, please email Pam at pam.rocker@hillhurstunited.com

DISCLAIMER ABOUT DEFINITIONS

Language has power and is constantly changing. The following list of terms and definitions is designed to empower you with language and concepts that will help you better understand discussions of gender and sexuality. Many of these terms are self-identifications; they will mean something different to each individual who identifies with the term. It is important to note that for the most part, these terms are based in Western understandings of gender and sexuality and consequentially do not speak to the experiences of many cultures. Remember not to apply labels onto other individuals and that identities are fluid and contextual (just because someone shares part of their identity with you does not mean they are comfortable with you sharing it with others).

SEXUALITY

sexual orientation (also known as sexuality): refers to a person's emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and sexual attraction

straight/heterosexual: a male-identified person who is attracted to female- identified people, or a female-identified person who is attracted to male- identified people

lesbian/gay/homosexual: a person whose primary sexual and/or emotional, spiritual, and intellectual attraction is to a person of the same gender

bisexual: In order to reflect an understanding that there are more than two genders, some bisexual communities have defined bisexuality as "a person who is sexually, and/or emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually attracted to both their own gender and people of other genders." However, a popular understanding of bisexual is "an individual of any gender who is attracted to both men and women."

queer: a term that may include lesbians, gays, bisexuals, trans people, and other people who challenge the heterosexist and cissexist boundaries of sexual orientation, sex, and gender. The term is also used as an insult. It is also used frequently as an affirmative political and/or identity statement, and it describes a school of thought called queer theory.

asexual: a person who does not experience sexual attraction or desire. This person may or may not have spiritual and emotional attraction to others.

pansexual: someone who identifies as being attracted to all gender identities or for whom gender is not a consideration when choosing a romantic or intimate partner.

LGBTQQI2S: an acronym used to denote identities of individuals and groups; can be understood to be inclusive of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans/transgender/transsexual, queer, questioning, intersex, and two-spirited. Depending on the community, or the group of people being addressed, various formations of the acronym may be used, such as LGB or LGBTQ.

GENDER

gender identity: a self-determined identity that reflects an individual's personal understanding of gender in regard to their own embodied experiences gender presentation/expression: how a person chooses to express their gender to others (through clothing, behaviour, etc.)

cisgender: a term that describes individuals whose gender identity is the same as the gender they were assigned at birth

trans/transgender: an umbrella term whose meaning remains in flux. The term is used to refer to a person who has a gender identity that is different from the gender they were assigned at birth, and/or expresses their gender in ways that differ from societal expectations for men and women. Trans people may identify with any sexual orientation. Trans is often used as a substitute for transgender, to include people of a wider variety of gender identities who may not feel comfortable adopting the term transgender.

transsexual: someone who is transitioning from male-to-female or female-to-male, or someone for whom the gender they were assigned at birth does not match their felt or lived gender. Trans or transgender may also be used with this latter meaning.

transitioning: Transgender/transsexual men (sometimes called FTMs— female-to-male) and women (MTFs—male-to-female) may often decide to undergo a transitioning process that can include sexual reassignment surgery (SRS) and/or hormone replacement therapy (HRT). They may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, and/or queer. It is important to note that not all individuals who transition identify as transgender/transsexual feel that FTM or MTF labels reflect their experience with their gender.

two-spirited or two-spirit: First Nations people who fulfill one of many mixed or cross-gender roles found traditionally among many Indigenous groups. A direct translation of the Ojibwe term Niizh manidoowag, two-spirited or two-spirit is usually used to indicate a person whose body simultaneously houses a masculine spirit and a feminine spirit. However, not all First Nations or Aboriginal people are always comfortable using this term.

queer: a term that may include lesbians, gays, bisexuals, trans people, and other people who challenge the heterosexist and cissexist boundaries of sexual orientation, sex, and gender. The term is also used as an insult. It is also used frequently as an affirmative political and/or identity statement and it describes a school of thought called queer theory.

intersex: an umbrella term describing people born with sex anatomy resulting in neither purely male nor female bodies (internal and/or external). There are over 30 variations of sex anatomy. We're usually taught that sex is merely black and white, "male" or "female," but that's simply not true. There are a lot of awesome gray areas in the middle that could make someone intersex!

agender: Some agender people feel that they have no gender identity, while others feel that agender is itself a gender identity. This is similar to and overlaps with the experience of being gender neutral or having a neutral gender identity.

non-binary: a catchall term for those who do not identify as a man or woman

bigender: someone who identifies as having two gender identities

genderfluid: refers to those whose gender identity and expression are fluid and change depending on personal circumstance and desire

genderqueer: someone who does not necessarily identify as a man or a woman, may identify as both a man and a woman, or identifies outside the confines of traditional Western ideas of gender

questioning: a word often used by youth who are in the process of coming out or are still discerning their sexuality, gender identity, or sexual orientation

cross dresser: a person who on occasion deliberately dresses in clothes traditionally associated with a gender different than they were assigned at birth, and takes on the social behaviours associated with the gender being portrayed. A person who cross-dresses does not necessarily identify as trans, but is fulfilling other needs or desires.

drag kings and drag queens: individuals who present larger-than-life images of men (kings) and women (queens), exaggerating sexual stereotypes for entertainment
androgynous, gender blender, gender bender: individuals who challenge cisnormative gender binary boundaries through their gender presentation

TRANS GRAMMAR

Trans and cis are considered adjectives that can describe an aspect of someone's gender identity. Therefore, the spelling of trans man/men and trans woman/women should always have a space between the two words. Trans women are still women and trans men are still men, and failing to include a space between these words may communicate otherwise.

Trans is an adjective that can describe an element of someone's gender identity. Therefore it is incorrect to speak of "transgendered" individuals or use the term transgender as a verb (i.e., transgendering).

Gender neutral pronouns are the most effective way to ensure that individuals of all genders feel included when discussing hypothetical situations. Commonly used gender neutral pronouns are they/them/theirs.

Example 1: "Do you have a brother or sister? How old is he or she?" can be said as: "Do you have a sibling? How old are they?"

Example 2: "That stranger looked upset. I hope they are alright and someone has helped them."

The Importance of Creating a Culture that Honours Self-Identification - Using Correct Pronouns

The cultural visibility of the transgender, genderqueer and gender nonconforming community has expanded the way that we view gender. And while general awareness about gender diversity has increased, there are still some technical aspects that many people continue to struggle with, chief among those being the use of gender-neutral pronouns. How can we be part of the solution?

You can't always know what someone's gender pronoun is by looking at them. We seek to embrace the fact that gender is not a binary, and that many people identify with gender neutral pronouns such as "they". It is a privilege to not have to worry about which pronoun someone is going to use for you based on how they perceive your gender. Discussing and correctly using gender pronouns sets a tone of respect and allyship and can truly make all of the difference, by affirming self-identification and self-expression. (Written with resources from Gender Neutral Pronouns article on Motto.)

Gender Pronouns

Please note that these are not the only pronouns. There are an infinite number of pronouns as new ones emerge in our language. Always ask someone for their pronouns. For more information go to transstudent.org/graphics.

Subjective	Objective	Possessive	Reflexive	Example
She	Her	Hers	Herself	She is speaking. I listened to her. The backpack is hers.
He	Him	His	Himself	He is speaking. I listened to him. The backpack is his.
They	Them	Theirs	Themselves	They are speaking. I listened to them. The backpack is theirs.
Ze	Hir / Zir	Hirs / Zirs	Hirself / Zirself	Ze is speaking. I listened to hir. The backpack is zirs.

DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICES

lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer discrimination: takes many forms; exists between and within individuals, and across institutions and cultures. It is most commonly referred to as homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism. It is manifested through the denial of human rights, through processes of silencing, exclusion, and ostracization, and through violence and verbal abuse that can be experienced daily.

heterosexism: the assumption by individuals, institutions, and societal customs that everyone is heterosexual. It is also the belief that the normal, natural, healthy, and mature way for humans to bond sexually, affectionately, and emotionally is with a partner of the opposite sex. Heterosexism is the systemic societal promotion of heterosexuality, and the simultaneous stigmatization of all other sexual orientations.

cissexism: the assumption by individuals, institutions, and societal customs that everyone is cisgender and adheres to the gender binary. It is also the belief that the normal, natural, healthy, and mature way for humans to express their gender is by upholding the norms of the gender an individual was assigned at birth. Cissexism is the systemic societal promotion of cisgender identities, and the simultaneous oppression of folks with trans identities.

lesbophobia/homophobia/queerphobia: conscious or unconscious hatred of, fear of, and discrimination against lesbians and gay men. It is based in a belief system and set of priorities that assert heterosexuality as “normal” and superior, and view homosexuality/queerness as deviant, abnormal, criminal, or sinful. Lesbophobic, homophobic, and queerphobic feelings can be described as fear, hatred, disgust, etc.

biphobia: conscious or unconscious hatred of, fear of, and discrimination against people who are bisexual. Experienced in not only the heterosexual but also the lesbian and gay communities, it is often characterized by a lack of understanding and invisibility of bisexuality as a valid sexual orientation.

transphobia: conscious or unconscious hatred of, fear of, and discrimination against individuals who do not conform in appearance and/or identity to cishnormative or “traditional” conceptions of gender. Experienced in both the heterosexual and lesbian/gay/bisexual communities. Typically demonstrated through disrespect, denial of rights and needs, and often harassment and violence. As with heterosexism, transphobia can be personal or systemic, overt or covert, and intentional or unintentional.

transmisogyny: understood as “sexism that specifically targets those on the trans female/trans feminine spectrums. It accounts for why MTF spectrum trans people tend to be more regularly demonized and ridiculed than their FTM spectrum counterparts, and why trans women face certain forms of sexualization and misogyny that are rarely (if ever) applied to non-trans women.”²

1. *Source: Inter/Act, <http://interactyouth.org/post/97343969730/want-to-support-us-check-out-our-used-with-permission>.*

2. *Source: Julia Serano, [Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity](#) (Seal Press, 2007). Used with permission.*

For more information on the terms and definitions provided, please contact Jordan Sullivan at jsullivan@unitedchurch.ca