

## The Complexity of Human Sexuality: Some Concepts and Terms

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*Those of us who have grown up influenced by western European cultures tend to think of sexuality in binary terms: people are either male or female, boy or girl, man or woman, and should aspire to be masculine or feminine accordingly. We also tend to think of sexuality in terms of individual choice. However, the last half-century of scientific and social scientific research has demonstrated that human sexuality is more complex than this: its different dimensions are not binary but more like a spectrum, and there are many biological, environmental, and social factors that shape every aspect of our sexuality. Here are a few terms used to describe this complexity. Note that there is no universally agreed upon terminology; we should be sensitive to personal preference. See [glaad.org/reference/lgbtq](http://glaad.org/reference/lgbtq); [glaad.org/reference/transgender](http://glaad.org/reference/transgender); [apa.org/topics/lgbt/](http://apa.org/topics/lgbt/).*

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**biological sex:** assigned at birth on the basis of external anatomy; really, a combination of chromosomes, hormones, internal and external reproductive organs, and secondary characteristics

**male:** presents with typically male biological traits (XY chromosomes, testes, penis, higher testosterone levels, etc.)

**female:** presents with typically female biological traits (XX chromosomes, ovaries, vulva, higher estrogen levels, etc.)

**intersex:** presents with ambiguous or dual biological traits (e.g. XYY chromosomes, mixed or underdeveloped genitalia); sometimes referred to as DSD (“differences of sex development”)

**sexual orientation:** enduring patterns of emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction to people of a particular sex or sexes

**gay:** biologically male, identifies as a man, attracted to other biological males/men; sometimes used for either men or women (“gay man,” “gay woman”)

**lesbian:** biologically female, identifies as a woman, attracted to other biological females/women

**heterosexual (“straight”):** biologically male, identifies as a man, attracted to biological females/women; *or* biologically female, identifies as a woman, attracted to biological males/men

**bisexual (“bi”):** biologically male, identifies as a man, attracted to either biological males/men or biological females/women; *or* biologically female, identifies as a woman, attracted to either biological males/men or biological females/women

**asexual (“ace”):** does not experience sexual attraction

**sexual behaviour:** actions typically understood as being intimate, erotic, or reproductive in nature

**gender identity and expression:** identity: internal sense of sexual identity in relation to social expectations; expression: external manifestations of identity (e.g. name, pronouns, clothing, roles)

**cisgender (“cis”):** gender identity/expression matches assigned biological sex

**transgender (“trans”):** gender identity/expression differs from assigned biological sex

**man/woman:** gender identity and expression matches conventional expectations of masculine/feminine

**non-binary, genderqueer:** gender identity and/or gender expression differs from man/woman binary

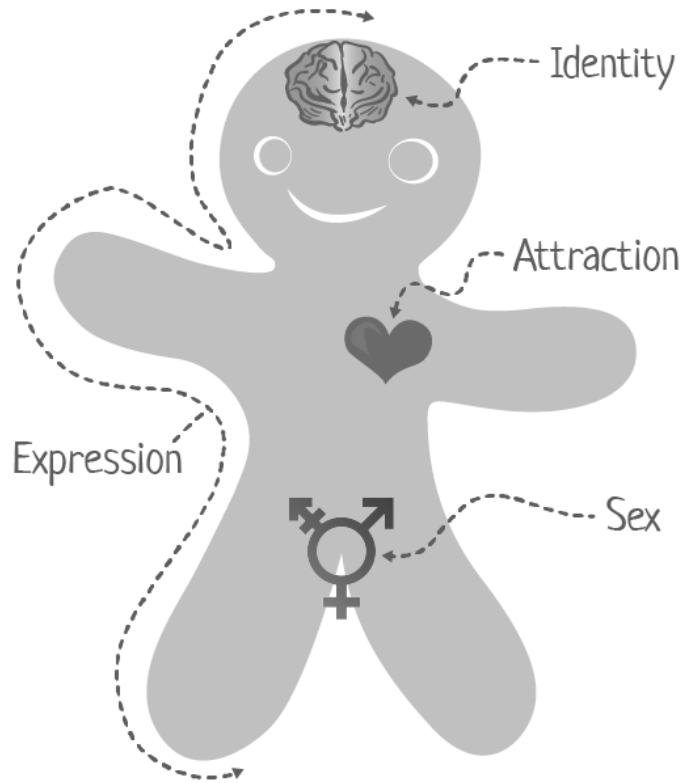
**gender non-conforming:** gender expression differs from conventional expectations of masculine/feminine

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*Various terms are used to describe collectively all people who are not cisgender and heterosexual (“cishet”). GLAAD.org recommends “LGBTQ”; alternatives are “LGBT” or “GLBT.” “LGBTQ+” is sometimes used, as are longer acronyms such as “LGBTQIA+.” “GSRD” (gender/sexual/relationship diverse) is becoming more common. “Queer” (or “queer folx”) is sometimes used collectively in this way, though some prefer to keep “queer” as a reference to gender only.*

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# The Genderbread Person v4 by its pronounced METROsexual.com



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



**Gender Identity**

- ⊘ → Woman-ness
- ⊘ → Man-ness



**Gender Expression**

- ⊘ → Femininity
- ⊘ → Masculinity



**Anatomical Sex**

- ⊘ → Female-ness
- ⊘ → Male-ness

Identity ≠ Expression ≠ Sex  
Gender ≠ Sexual Orientation

Sex Assigned At Birth  
 Female  Intersex  Male



**Sexually Attracted to...** and/or (a/o)

- ⊘ → Women a/o Feminine a/o Female People
- ⊘ → Men a/o Masculine a/o Male People



**Romantically Attracted to...**

- ⊘ → Women a/o Feminine a/o Female People
- ⊘ → Men a/o Masculine a/o Male People

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For a bigger bite, read more at [www.genderbread.org](http://www.genderbread.org)