

Sexuality – terms and definitions

It is important to accurately respect the words a person uses for themselves.

Note – we each have unique reasons why our identity words have a particular resonance and story attached for us personally.

Aromantic (aro)/ biromantic/ heteroromantic – we have sexual orientations, and we have romantic orientations. Some people’s sexual and romantic orientations don’t match each other. Aro means no romantic orientation, biromantic means romantically attracted to two or more genders, and so forth.

Asexual – (also known as Ace) – a person who experiences no sexual attraction. May still experience romantic love, may enjoy sex for bonding or relational reasons, may have sexual feelings without attraction. Not the same as celibate, ace is an orientation as much as gay or bi. Gray-asexual (limited/rare sexual attraction to others) & demisexual (only attracted when there’s an emotional bond) are under the ace umbrella.

BDSM – (not necessarily LGBT+, but there are crossovers between communities) Bondage, Discipline, Domination, Submission, Sadism & Masochism – A physical, psychological and often but not always sexual power-role-play with consensual participants.

Bi+/bisexual/biromantic – Bi+ is an umbrella term used to describe people who are sexually and/or romantically attracted to people of more than one gender. Bisexual is also understood as an umbrella term. The bisexual community have long recognised the existence of more than two genders. A bisexual person does not necessarily experience equal or constant levels of attraction to all genders. Pansexual, polysexual, heteroflexible, homoflexible and omnisexual are all under the bi+ umbrella.

Butch/masc/femme/fem – used within the LGBT+ community to describe people who present in typically masculine or feminine ways, but with different cultural, in-community meaning than heterosexual masculinity or femininity. Not the same as being trans. E.g. a woman, can be butch while identifying 100% as a woman. NB: butch/masc/femme/fem can also describe aspects of gender identity.

Gay – generally used by men – sexually and/or romantically attracted only to people of the same gender.

GRSD – a term used mostly by therapists and some academics for all “Gender, Romantic, and Sexual Diversity” it is less useful for community organising because it covers all kinds of diversity rather than centring specific marginalised groups.

Homosexual – a term only used in scientific circles, it is now offensive to use informally. Use lesbian or gay instead.

Homosocial/ heterosocial – we also can have social orientations. Although most people have friends of different genders, some people will only have friends of their own gender, or not of their own gender.

Kink – a colloquial term for BDSM but also more broadly a word for someone's (generally unusual) sexual tastes or fetishes.

LGBT+ – (also LGBTQ+, LGBTIQA, QUILTBAG) – umbrella terms that seek to describe a diverse community, but often fall short of representing its complexity.

Lesbian – women who are sexually and/or romantically attracted only to other women. Some women prefer “gay woman”, use the term the person identifies with.

Pan/pansexual/panromantic – under the bisexual umbrella, someone who is sexually and/or romantically attracted to people regardless of gender. (NB omnisexual can be used for someone attracted to all genders, polysexual for attraction to many genders)

Queer – once this was a slur, but it has been reclaimed within the LGBT+ community (although some still find it offensive, and it should be used with care). Used as an umbrella term for LGBT+ but also by people who find gender and/or sexuality hard to define. Queer theory is also an academic approach developed in the 1990s.

WSW/MSM – (women who have sex with women/men who have sex with men) – a term used within certain services, e.g. medical environments, that describes a behaviour without using labels people may not identify with. It assumes that not everyone who engages in certain behaviours will necessarily consider themselves to have an *identity* as a result of those behaviours. I.e. not all men who have sex with men would consider this makes them gay or bi, which is an identity word rather than a mere description of what somebody *does*.

NB: sexual and gender diversity has existed throughout history and in all cultures, but different cultures will have different terms and cultural approaches, which may not easily translate into the way we currently frame things. Much of this diversity was stigmatised and erased by colonialism. Keeping an open mind and being prepared to learn are always essential.