

Sexuality – terms and definitions

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

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 humanity rather than specifying minorities/ marginalised groups

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

Lesbian – women who are sexually and/or romantically attracted only to other women

Bi/bisexual/biromantic – an umbrella term used to describe people who are sexually and/or romantically attracted to people of more than one gender. The bisexual community have long recognised the existence of more than two genders and the definition long ago evolved from a simplistic “bi means two” definition. A bisexual person does not necessarily experience equal or constant levels of attraction to all genders.

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)

Asexual – (also known as Ace) – a person who experiences no sexual attraction to others. 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 a genuine orientation as much as gay or bi

Aromantic (aro)/ biromantic/ heteroromantic – just as we can have sexual orientations, so too can we have romantic orientations. Some people’s sexual and romantic orientations don’t match each other

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.

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 extreme care). Used as an umbrella term for LGBT+ but also by people who find their gender and/or sexuality hard to clearly define

Butch/femme – used within the LGBT+ community to describe people who present in typically masculine or feminine ways. Not the same as being trans. So a woman,

for instance, can be butch while identifying 100% as a woman. NB: butch/femme can also be descriptions of someone's gender identity (or part of it).

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

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

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

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

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. Keeping an open mind and being prepared to learn are always essential.