

Fact Sheet:

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Identities and Terminology

Sexuality

Sexuality is the expression of a person's desires, sexual activities, behaviours, characteristics and interpersonal relationships.

Sexuality is not a choice

Identifying as gay, lesbian or bisexual is not a choice. Few people would choose to adopt a sexual identity that is subject to such high levels of discrimination, stigma and social isolation. People attracted to members of the same sex do not consider this a choice. Rather same sex attraction is a sexual, psychological and emotional desire and need. To assert sexuality is a choice will generally cause offence and represents a lack of understanding and knowledge regarding sexuality.

Homosexual

A homosexual is a person whose primary sexual and emotional attraction is toward people of the same sex. The term homosexual or homosexuality, within the gay, lesbian and bisexual community, can also have a clinical connotation that is associated with the pathology of same-sex attraction, and reflects the historical judgements that same sex attraction is an illness. This is generally considered an out-dated term that may cause offence or be considered derogatory.

Queer

Queer is an umbrella term that includes a range of alternative sexualities and gender identities, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT). However not all LGBT people would find this term appropriate or choose to be identified as Queer.

Gay

Gay is a term that primarily describes a man whose primary emotional and sexual attraction is toward other men. However the term is also used to describe both men and women who are attracted to members of the same sex.

Lesbian

A lesbian is a woman whose primary emotional and sexual attraction is towards other women.

Bisexual

A bisexual is a person who is emotionally and sexually attracted to people of both sexes.

Heterosexism

Heterosexism is the belief that everyone is or should be heterosexual, and other types of sexual behaviours are unhealthy, unnatural or a threat to society. Heterosexism also assumes that sex and gender (and the relationship between the two) are fixed and not open to change.

Homophobia

Homophobia is the fear and hatred of lesbian, gay and bisexual people and of their sexual desires and practices.

Caution Against Labelling

Not all people having sex with members of the same sex will identify as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual, nor will they see their sexual practices as being associated with the sexual practices of gay men or lesbians. In this regard it may be more relevant to focus upon an individual's sexual behaviours than their sexual identity.

The following definitions seek to give an overview of the terminology used in reference to Transgender and/or transsexual people. Within the Transgender community there is a variety of identities that transgender/transsexual people will identify with. Transgender may be seen as an umbrella term for people with a sense of gender identity that is outside the social norms of male and female. However the term transgender may also be used to define one's self as transsexual, referring to an individual with gender dysphoria. In relation to the contention between the use of terminology between transgender and transsexual it is most appropriate to ask individuals how they would like to identify.

However people with gender dysphoria very often transition to the opposite sex they were anatomically/physically born with. They live and identify as their true gender identity - a man (female to male) or a woman (male to female). Transgender /transsexual people may wish to identify solely as man or woman and not as transsexual, transgender, F-M or M-F. This is an important part of respecting individuals who have struggled with gender identity issues, and an important aspect of acknowledging that psychologically their gender always has been that of the man or woman they have transitioned to.

Internalised Homophobia

The term Internal Homophobia is associated with the internalised negative attitudes and feelings towards same sex attraction and sexuality held by gay men, men who are having sex with men, lesbians and women who are having sex with women. These values and opinions of same sex attraction are often formed before people realise they are attracted to members of the same sex. Such beliefs are reinforced by social and cultural beliefs, values and representations that consider homosexuality as unacceptable, not 'normal' and wrong.

Women who have sex with Women (WSW)

Women who engage in sexual activity with other women but do not necessarily self-identify as lesbian.

Men who have sex with Men (MSM)

Men who engage in sexual activity with other men, but do not necessarily self-identify as gay.

Gender Identity

A person's sense of identity defined in relation to the categories of male and female.

Gender Identity and Sexuality

It is important to recognise the distinction between Gender Identity and Sexuality. The terms are not synonymous nor are they necessarily inter-related. Many people who are confronting or have confronted gender identity issues take offence at the unnecessary enquiries about, or association of, an individual's sexuality or sexual practices in reference to their gender identity. Sexual diversity exists within the transgender/transsexual community. Transgender/transsexuals may be heterosexual, lesbian, gay or bisexual, however this does not necessarily relate to an individual's gender identity concerns.

Gender Dysphoria

This is a medical term that refers to a person's physical discomfort with their body, caused by their strong gender identification which is opposite to their biological sex. This can result in an individual suffering unusual anxiety, depression or unease. This is also known as Gender Identity Disorder.

Gender Dysphoria or being transgender/transsexual is not a choice: No one chooses to be gender dysphoric, transgender or transsexual. Being Gender Dysphoric or transgender/transsexual is subject to high levels of discrimination, social isolation and very little understanding from the general community. To assert or imply that an individual has chosen to be transgender/transsexual will generally cause offence and represents a lack of understanding of gender identity issues.

Transsexual

This term refers to a person who is born as a biological male or female but has a profound identification with the opposite gender to their biological sex. Transsexuals intend to make or have made the transition to live as the gender that they identify with.

Genderqueer

This is the term for people who actively seek to transcend the system of binary gender in which 'male' and 'female' are the only, and mutually exclusive, options. Some see themselves as having no gender at all (agender or neutrois), as being both at once (bigender or ambigender), as moving between or amongst genders (gender-fluid), or as being some kind of third gender.

Intersex

Intersex is a biological condition where a person is born with reproductive organs and or sex chromosomes which are not exclusively male or female. The previous term for Intersex was hermaphrodite. If the process of sex assignment to an intersex person is not successful, and the wrong sex has been assigned, sex re-assignment surgery may be needed later in life.

Transitioning

Transitioning describes the process of transgender/transsexuals recognising their true gender identity and making steps to adopt the lifestyle and/or physical characteristics of the gender that they identify with. This may involve undertaking hormone therapy and/or sex reassignment surgery. This process often takes some time and it is important for people to be supportive, accepting and non-judgemental while a transgender/transsexual person is in the process of transitioning.

Reassignment Surgery

This is a medical procedure that aligns a transsexual/transgender biological body to the gender they identify with. Reassignment surgery is not always an option for all transsexual/transgender people, usually for medical reasons.

Pre-operative transsexual

A transsexual/transgender person who has not under taken reassignment surgery.

Post-operative transsexual

A transsexual/transgender person who has undertaken reassignment surgery.

Female – Male (F-M) Transsexual

A biological female whose core gender identity is male. Whether F-M is pre-operative or post-operative their identity is that of a male. Many female to male transsexuals/transgender men choose not to undertake the genital reconstruction of plasticity (construction of the penis) as the procedure is not highly successful.

Male – Female (M-F) Transsexual

A biological male whose core gender identity is female. Whether M-F is pre-operative or post-operative their identity is that of a female.

Sistergirls

This term is often used in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to describe biological males who are effeminate, or who live as women and see themselves as akin to women. Sistergirls perform many of the roles of women in the community. Their sexual partners are mainly straight men and they take a usually passive role in sexual activities. Most Sistergirls are respected within their home communities. Not all Sistergirls dress as women. Those Sistergirls who live and dress as women and/or are post-operative are considered to be women by their community. Not all Sistersgirls undergo sex-reassignment surgery.

Cross Dressers/Transvestites

Someone who has an inescapable emotional need to identify as a member of the opposite gender, on a temporary or permanent basis. This is a separate category from transsexual. Cross dressers and Transvestites generally do not have the profound feelings that they have been born into the wrong body in relation to how they psychologically relate to their gender (gender dysphoria) that transsexual's experience.

Transphobia

This is the common term for the fear and hatred of people who are transsexual/transgender.

Internalised Transphobia

Internalised transphobia is associated with the internalised negative attitudes and feelings towards transsexualism/transgenderism, held by transgender/transsexual people. These values and opinions of transgender people and gender identity are often formed before people realise they identify as transgender or have gender dysphoria. Such beliefs are reinforced by social and cultural beliefs, values and representations that consider transgender people as unacceptable, not 'normal' and wrong.

QAHC-RC-201010