



MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Te Manatū Whakahiato Ora

SELECTED GLBTI* DEFINITIONS

These definitions are a guide only. Please note that the meanings of terms are often contested and tend to change over time. The terms are often used or interpreted differently depending on the individual or context.

Sex and Gender Related Definitions

Sex	Sex is the physical aspect of identity, classified as male or female or intersex on the basis of biological make up, such as external genitals, reproductive organs, hormones and/or chromosomes.
Gender	Gender is commonly understood as a social aspect of identity, generally classified as male or female. It is a cultural construction of what it means to be a man or a woman, including roles, expectations and behaviour.
Gender identity	Gender identity is an aspect of identity that can be understood as the psychological sex. It is an individual's internal sense of being male or female or something other or in between. It may or may not correspond to a person's physical sex. A person's sexual orientation cannot be assumed on the basis of their gender identity.
Gender expression	Gender expression refers to how an individual expresses themselves by way of external characteristics and behaviours (such as clothing and body language) that are socially defined as being either masculine or feminine.
Transgender	The term transgender is used by different groups in different ways. It is often used as a catch-all umbrella term for a variety of people who feel that the sex they were assigned at birth is a false or incomplete description of themselves. Transgendered people may or may not use some form of medical intervention to better align their physical sex with their gender identity, and may or may not have any interest in such a procedure. Gender reassignment services are some times called gender realignment by trans people. They include but are not limited to hormone treatment and surgeries, such as mastectomy and genital reconstruction. The term transgender can include a number of sub-categories, including, among others, transsexuals, cross-dressers, transvestites, genderqueer and consciously androgynous people. The adjective "trans" is increasingly preferred as a general term, for example "trans person". If a gender term is also used, this refers to the person's gender identity, eg a "trans man" was born in a body defined as female but identifies as male.

* GLBTI is used here to refer to a group of identities including gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, takatāpui, intersex, fa'afafine, queer and questioning people, and to others who do not fit into heterosexual or gender norms. Another common abbreviation is LGBT.

Transsexual	<p>Transsexualism is usually understood as the enduring, pervasive, compelling desire to live in the sex opposite to the one a person was born in.</p> <p>A common way of describing this is the image of a transsexual as a woman trapped in a man's body or vice versa.</p> <p>“FtM” is sometimes used for a trans man / ‘female to male’, ie a person who was born in a female body/sex but has a male gender identity. An equivalent Māori term is tangata ira tane. “MtF” is sometimes used for a trans woman / ‘male to female’. Equivalent Māori terms are whakawahine, hinehi, hinehua. Many people prefer the terms male or female, in line with their gender identity.</p> <p>The process transsexual people go through to live in their gender identity is called transitioning.</p> <p>Pre-operative transsexuals have not had surgery to align their physical sex with their gender of identity. Post-operative transsexuals have had gender reassignment/ alignment surgery. Post-operative transsexuals can have their birth records altered by Births Deaths and Marriages to record their changed sex and have passports issued accordingly.</p> <p>Some transsexuals may not be interested in, or able to have surgery, but may take other steps, such as using hormones. They may identify as ‘non-operative’.</p>
Fa’afafine	<p>Fa’afafine is a Samoan term that literally means “like a woman”. Fa’afafine is often used to refer to people born male who express feminine gender identities in a range of ways, but is sometimes used more broadly refer to all Pacific people who do not identify with or live according to common understandings of their birth gender. Sometimes the term ‘third sex’ is used.</p> <p>Other similar Pasifika terms include Fakaleiti (Tongan), Akava’ine (Cook Islands Māori), Fiafine (Niuean), Vaka sa lewa lewa (Fijian).</p>
Genderqueer	<p>Genderqueer is a term some people use to describe themselves who do not conform to or agree with traditional gender norms and who express a gender identity that is neither completely male nor female. Some may identify as gender neutral or androgynous.</p>
Intersex	<p>Intersex people are born with any of a number of physical variations that means they do not fit expectations of either male or female physical sex (eg they have genitals that are atypical, XXY chromosomes, etc). Intersex anatomy is not always visible at birth, and may become apparent at puberty, later or not at all. Surgery is performed on some intersex infants and children to physically align them with the sex they are assigned. This practice is criticised, particularly by intersex people. A child’s sex assignment may not match the gender identity the person develops as they grow up. This can mean that some intersex people can face gender identity issues similar to a transgender person.</p>
Disorders of Sex Development (DSD) Variations of Sex Development (VSD)	<p>Disorders of sex development (DSD) is a term that has recently appeared in some medical contexts in place of ‘intersex’.</p> <p>There is opposition to use of the term DSD from some intersex people who disagree with its medicalisation, and in particular, the reference to ‘disorders’.</p> <p>Variations of Sex Development (VSD) is an alternative to DSD proposed by human sexuality expert Professor Milton Diamond.</p>

Sexual Orientation Related Definitions

Sexual orientation	<p>Sexual orientation denotes the direction of a person’s sexuality relative to their own sex. It is usually classified according to the sex or gender of the people an individual finds sexually attractive. This can relate to a psychological component (the direction of sexual/romantic desire), a behavioural component (the sex of sexual/romantic partner/s) and/or an individual's social identity (group membership/identification).</p> <p>Sexual orientation is usually categorised as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • homosexual (directed at the same sex) • heterosexual (directed at the opposite sex) • bisexual (directed at both sexes, sometimes abbreviated to ‘bi’). <p>Some people always identify with one sexual orientation, whereas others may change their primary orientation and the meaning they give it in a quite fluid way at times or throughout their life course.</p>
Gay	Gay can refer to homosexual/same-sex attracted women and men, but is more often used in relation to males.
Lesbian	Lesbian is used exclusively in relation to homosexual/same-sex attracted women.
MSM	The abbreviation of “men who have sex with men”, MSM is used to include both gay and bisexual men and men who identify as heterosexual or otherwise but who at least occasionally engage in sexual activities with other men. Commonly used in the context of sexual health.
Asexuality	Asexuality is an absence of sexual attraction or desire. It is sometimes described as a fourth type of sexual orientation, ie one that is not directed at anyone. Some, however, do not define it as an orientation, stating that asexual people can form emotional romantic attachments, which can be heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual in orientation.

Terms referring to both gender identity and sexual orientation

Coming out	<p>Coming out (of the closet) or being out refers to disclosing one’s same-sex sexual attraction or one’s non-conforming gender identity. Coming out is usually a complex and dynamic process, often said to begin with coming out to oneself, ie acknowledging one’s identity, usually following a period of questioning. People must often continue to make the choice whether to out themselves in most new situations. Staying “in the closet”, and allowing or even fostering other people’s assumptions of heterosexuality or gender identity, is often an attempt to avoid homophobia or transphobia.</p> <p>A person can come out as trans before or while transitioning, and afterward to those unfamiliar with their previous sex.</p>
Takatāpui	The traditional meaning of takatāpui is ‘intimate companion of the same sex’. Many Māori people have adopted this term to describe themselves, instead of or in addition to terms such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer or trans. It refers to cultural <i>and</i> sexual/gender identity. Also spelt takataapui.
Queer	<p>Queer has been used as a derogatory term for gay and lesbian people in particular. Although some people continue to reject the term, it has recently been reclaimed and used in a positive sense by some to describe sexual orientation and/or gender identity or gender expression that does not conform to heteronormative expectations.</p> <p>It is sometimes used as an umbrella term for same-sex attraction and</p>

	<p>gender/sex diversity, including but not exclusive to people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, takatāpui, fa'afafine, intersex or somewhere in between. This is more common among youth.</p> <p>It is sometimes used to express rejection of traditional gender categories and distinct sexual identities such as lesbian, gay, bi, and straight (heterosexual).</p>
Sexual minority	<p>Sexual minority is sometimes used to refer to groups that do not fit dominant heterosexual and/or gender identity norms. It is seldom used as a self-definition.</p>

Other Useful Terms

Heteronormativity	<p>Heteronormativity refers to the reinforcement of certain beliefs by many social institutions. These beliefs include that people fall into two distinct and complementary categories, male and female, and that sexual relations are normal only when between people of different sexes. This ties in with beliefs that each sex has certain natural roles in life. Thus, it is assumed that sex, gender identity and gender roles should always align to either all-male or all-female norms, and heterosexuality is the only 'normal' sexual orientation.</p> <p>The norms this term describes or criticizes might be overt, covert, or implied. Heteronormativity can be expressed in the (often subconscious) assumption that everyone is heterosexual, and the attitudes associated with that. For instance, when a woman refers to a partner, many people will ask, "What's his name?" assuming a heterosexual relationship. Nevertheless, these people may not have anything against same-sex relationships.</p> <p>Heteronormativity can stigmatize alternative concepts of both gender and sexuality and make some types of self-expression more difficult.</p>
Heterosexism	<p>Heterosexism is a predisposition to heterosexuality as 'normal', which is biased against other forms of sexual orientation. This is not the same as homophobia, but is rather the discrimination against non-heterosexual people due to cultural bias. It often occurs through omission and/or distortion of non-heterosexual realities, eg in media.</p> <p>Heterosexism is structurally reinforced where institutions privilege heterosexual orientation. For example, where legislation, policies and/or practices link certain rights (eg marriage, partner entitlements) to being in an opposite-sex relationship.</p>
Homophobia	<p>Homophobia is the fear of, or aversion to homosexuality or those perceived to be homosexual, often resulting in discriminatory behaviour, i.e. treating people negatively on the basis of this perceived trait. Although individual, it can also support structural discrimination. In turn, stereotypes and negative messages about homosexuality cultivate homophobia.</p> <p>Homophobia can be internalized, leading people to fear or hate their own feelings of same-sex attraction and damaging their self-esteem.</p>
Transphobia	<p>Similar to homophobia, transphobia is the fear of, or aversion to trans people or those perceived to not fit accepted male-female gender norms. Transphobia can also be internalised.</p>
Biphobia	<p>Similar to homophobia, biphobia is the fear of, or aversion to bisexuality or those perceived to be bisexual. Biphobia can be expressed by gay men and lesbians as well as by straight people.</p>