

QUEER: AN OVERVIEW

Gender as well as sexual norms reflect a particular point in time; they reveal the hegemonic discourse(s) that shaped a cultural moment. Discourse, however, produces a veneer of objective truth. The first usage of 'queer' in reference to sexuality can be traced back to around the time of Oscar Wilde's trial. It was a demeaning descriptor that signaled the gradual pathologization of homosexuality. While the term has been reclaimed by the LGBTQIA+ community, its harrowing history accounts for its ambivalent reception in the 20th and 21st century.

LESBIAN & GAY

Lesbian: A term used to describe women who are romantically and/or sexually attracted to other women. Frequently used alternatives are gay woman and woman of same-sex desire.

Gay: A popular umbrella term as well as a descriptor for men who are romantically and/or sexually attracted to other men.

BISEXUAL

Bisexuality describes romantic and/or sexual attraction to more than one gender. It is not synonymous with polyamory or 'questioning'. Bisexuality is heavily stigmatized and those who identify as bisexual or biromantic are often accused of being promiscuous and/or indecisive, even within the LGBTQIA+ community. Bisexuality is a lived reality and cannot be converted into a percentage.

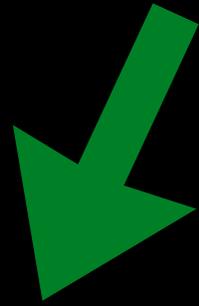
ASEXUAL & AROMANTIC

Asexual: Asexuality is a spectrum. It might signal that someone experiences no sexual attraction, but it can also be used to describe a person who experiences sexual desire under a specific set of conditions (demisexuality).

Aromantic: Refers to someone who does not experience romantic feelings.

TRANSGENDER

Describes a person whose gender identity does not align with the sex they were assigned at birth. Some transgender people may choose to start taking hormones and/or undergo gender-affirming surgeries.



Intersex: Not to be confused with non-binary or transgender. Intersex people possess primary/secondary sex characteristics that do not align with the gender binary.

Cisgender: Someone whose gender matches the sex they were assigned at birth.

NON-BINARY

Refers to someone whose gender identity does not correspond to the male/female binary. Although the terms are not synonymous, some non-binary people may choose to identify as trans.

AN EXPLANATION...

SEX

Assigned at birth based on primary and secondary sex characteristics. Traditionally, these markers have been conceptualized as affirming a male/female binary. However, while physiological variations do exist, the binary classification of sex based on so-perceived fixed sex characteristics does not hold up upon further scrutiny.

GENDER

While related, gender and sex should not be used interchangeably. Gender is a construct that is produced and then *continuously reproduced* by a person's socio-cultural environment. It serves as a vehicle for essentialist discourses that shape self-perception and self-expression. This fiction of fundamental differences – of “naturally derived” social roles – fortifies hegemonic masculinity.

SEXUALITY

A broad term that goes beyond sexual preference; it subsumes romantic attraction. It can intersect with a person's gender identity (e.g., lesbians who prefer he/him pronouns), but is still a distinct category. A person can identify as biromantic and asexual; sexuality is as much of a spectrum as gender.

AGENDER & GENDERFLUID

Agender: Not synonymous with non-binary, which signals detachment from the gender *binary*. While some may use both labels to describe their relationship with gender, agender is a detachment from *gender itself* – it is the non-existence of gender/a gender identity.

Genderfluid: People who identify as genderfluid do not experience gender as a set identity. Their gender identity is subject to constant change – it is *fluid*.

PERCEPTION & LANGUAGE

It is important to use language that reflects the inherently arbitrary and artificial nature of gender. One is not born female; *one is assigned female at birth*. Language is always in flux and should be updated alongside our understanding of gender, sex, and sexuality. Our perception of a person's gender identity might not align with their actual gender identity. That makes it our responsibility to create a space where self-expression is encouraged, not punished. It is important to move away from traditional (gender) models that have shaped our understanding, associations, and expectations of what certain labels entail. This requires a constant process of self-reflection and self-correction – an unceasing process of learning.