

# UNDERSTANDING THE COMPONENTS OF WHO WE ARE AS SEXUAL AND GENDERED PEOPLE

(This is an expanded version of the text on the group's CORE DOCUMENT)

1. **SEX:** willful behavior that is intended to lead to sexual arousal.  
**SEX** is something that people **DO**.
2. **BIOLOGICAL GENDER:** Refers to whether a person is biologically male, female, or some combination of both ("intersexed"), as determined by the interplay of chromosomes, hormones and anatomy.  
**BIOLOGICAL GENDER** is something that people **HAVE**.
3. **GENDER ROLES:** refer to those traits, characteristics, values, interests, behaviors, etc., expected of a person because of his or her biological gender.  
**GENDER ROLES** are things people **ENACT**.
4. **GENDER IDENTITY:** refers to the gender with which an individual self identifies or experiences him/herself to be.  
**GENDER IDENTITY** is something people **EXPERIENCE** internally.
5. **SEXUAL ORIENTATION:** refers to whether an individual is romantically, affectionately, physically, and sexually attracted to individuals of the same (homo) gender, different (hetero) gender, or both (bi).  
**SEXUAL ORIENTATION** has to do with to whom people are **ATTRACTED**.

In regard to a particular individual, **SEXUAL ORIENTATION** may be fluid or contradictory in relation to a number of different variables: behaviors, fantasies, self perception, self acceptance, presentation to others, and/or situational factors. For example, an individual may perceive and present herself as "straight," but at times may engage in sexual behaviors with other females or have predominantly female oriented sexual fantasies.

6. **SEXUAL IDENTITY:** a less precise term that is understood and used differently by different people, including experts in the field of sexuality. Two common definitions:
  - The sexual orientation an individual perceives him or herself to be, or identifies with.
  - An individual's combined self-perception in regard to sexual orientation and gender identity.
7. **TRANSSEXUAL:** an individual who experiences profound discordance between his or her sexual anatomy and gender identity. Some transsexuals undergo "sexual reassignment surgery" to restructure their body so that it more closely corresponds to the gender they experience themselves to be. Transsexuals who undergo a "gender transition" are referred to as MTF (male to female) or FTM (female to male). They may also be referred to as "transgendered."

- 8. TRANSGENDER:** a less precise term that is understood and used differently by different people, even by experts in the field of sexuality. Three common definitions:
- A synonym for “transsexual.”
  - A catch-all expression for anyone who “gender bends,” or who lives outside society’s preconceived rules regarding gender/sex.
  - An individual who experiences no psychic discomfort with his or her body but wishes to live in the world as the other gender (original meaning).
- 9. TRANSVESTITE:** a less precise term. Three common definitions:
- Someone who “cross dresses” for a particular purpose independent of sexual orientation or gender identity issues.
  - Someone who profoundly enjoys/finds deep satisfaction in the experience of dressing publicly and privately in the clothing typically assigned to the other gender.
  - Someone who is capable of becoming aroused sexually only while wearing the clothing (often underwear) worn by the other gender.
- 10. PANSEXUALITY:** aesthetic attraction, romantic love, and/or sexual desire toward people regardless of their gender identity or biological sex.
- 11. ASEXUAL:** refers to a person who is not attracted to either gender.
- 12. LGBTQQ:** “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Questioning, or Queer.”
- The word Lesbian refers only to women, while “gay” is used to refer to women and men. Transgendered is used here as a synonym for transsexual. “Questioning” refers usually to youth who in the process of sorting out their sexual orientation or gender identity. “Queer” is a catch-all term referring to anyone whose behavior, gender identity, or sexual orientation falls outside society’s stereotypical understandings of sex or gender (also referred to as “gender/sexual non-conforming behavior”). It may also be used to make a political statement—a linguist “act of defiance,” so to speak, against society’s rigidity and judgmentalism.

Adapted from: *Sex and Sensibility*, Deborah M. Roffman,

# **DEFINITIONS: HETEROSEXISM AND HOMOPHOBIA**

## **HETEROSEXISM**

- The conscious or unconscious assumption that all people are and/or *should be* heterosexual
- The belief that heterosexuality is superior (morally, ethically, scripturally, socially, emotionally, etc.) to homosexuality.
- Prejudicial attitudes or discriminatory acts against lesbian and gay individuals which follow from the above beliefs.

## **INSTITUTIONALIZED HETEROSEXISM**

- Embedded philosophy, policies, assumptions, norms, and/or practices within an institution which presume that everyone in the community is and/or should be heterosexual.

## **PSYCHOLOGICAL HOMOPHOBIA**

- An irrational/dread fear or hatred of lesbian and gay individuals derived from a highly personalized and phobic reaction to the concept of homosexuality; people who are psychologically homophobic exhibit a range of anti-gay attitudes and behavior as a psychological defense against the dread fear that they themselves are—or will be perceived by others as—gay.

## **INTERNALIZED HOMOPHOBIA**

- The internalization within a gay individual of society's irrational fear/dread/hatred of homosexuality.

## **SOCIAL HOMOPHOBIA**

- An individual's dread fear that others will perceive him or her as gay.
- Individuals who are socially homophobic may engage in a range of anti-gay behaviors as a buffer against being identified as or perceived to be gay.

## **CULTURAL HOMOPHOBIA**

- The irrational/dread fear or hatred of lesbian and gay individuals based on the belief that they are *inherently* bad, sick, immoral, unnatural, perverted, dangerous, contagious, and/or predatory.
- Often implied as well is that homosexuality is a conscious choice and/or the result of a pathological upbringing or a genetic or biological abnormality.

## **INSTITUTIONAL HOMOPHOBIA**

- The dread fear that if the *issue* of homosexuality gets "out" within the institution, "all hell will break loose."

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