

47 Terms That Describe Sexual Attraction, Behavior, and Orientation

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Why does it matter?

Sexuality has to do with the way you identify, how (and if) you experience sexual and romantic attraction, and your interest in and preferences around sexual and romantic relationships and behavior.

Who your sexual or romantic partner is at a given moment in time doesn't define this part of who you are. Sexuality can be fluid. It can change in different circumstances or over time.

Observing patterns in sexual and romantic attraction, behavior, and preferences over time is one way to better understand your sexual identity or romantic orientation.

Familiarizing yourself with language that describes different types of sexual and romantic feelings and orientations will help you, your partners, and your friends navigate and understand the many ways people experience and identify their sexuality.

Terms A–C



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Allosexual

A word and category describing those who experience sexual attraction. Use of this term helps normalize the experience of people on the [asexual](#) spectrum and provides a more specific label to describe those who aren't part of the asexual community.

Allosexism

This refers to norms, stereotypes, and practices in society that operate under the assumption that all human beings experience, or should experience, sexual attraction.

Allosexism grants privilege to those who experience attraction and leads to prejudice against and erasure of asexual people.

Androsexual

A term used to communicate sexual or romantic attraction to men, males, or masculinity. This term intentionally includes attraction to those who identify as men, male, or masculine, regardless of biology, anatomy, or sex assigned at birth.

Asexual

Someone who identifies as a member of the [asexual](#) community experiences little or no sexual attraction to others of any gender. Asexuality is a broad spectrum. People who identify as asexual may also identify with one or more other terms that can more specifically capture their relationship to sexual attraction.

Also referred to as “aces,” some people who are asexual do experience romantic attraction to people of one or multiple genders. Some asexual people may also engage in sexual activity.

Aromantic

A romantic orientation that describes people who experience [little or no romantic attraction](#), regardless of sex or gender.

Autosexual

A person who's sexually attracted to themselves. Someone's desire to engage in sexual behavior such as masturbation doesn't determine whether they're autosexual.

Authoromantic

A romantic orientation that describes a person who's romantically attracted to themselves. People who identify as authoromantic often report experiencing the relationship they have with themselves as romantic.

Bicurious

This refers to people who are questioning or [exploring bisexuality](#), often due to a curiosity about one's romantic or sexual attraction to people of the same or different genders.

Bisexual

A sexual orientation that describes people who experience sexual, [romantic](#), or emotional attractions to people of more than one gender.

Also referred to as “bi,” [bisexual](#) typically includes individuals who are attracted to a variety of people, with genders that are similar to and different than their own.

Biromantic

People [who experience](#) romantic attraction, but not sexual attraction, to people of more than one gender.

Closeted

Closeted, or the state of being “in the closet,” describes people [in the LGBTQIA+ community](#) who don’t publicly or openly share their sexual identity, sexual attraction, sexual behavior, gender expression, or gender identity.

Closeted is often understood as the opposite of “out” and refers to the metaphorical hidden or private place an LGBTQIA+ person comes from in the process of making decisions about disclosing gender and sexuality.

Some people may be out in certain communities but closeted in others due to fear of discrimination, mistreatment, rejection, or violence.

Coming out

A phrase that refers to the process of being open about one’s sexuality and gender. For many LGBTQIA+ people, “coming out” isn’t a one-time event but a process and series of moments and conversations.

Also described as “coming out of the closet,” this process can include:

- sharing about a same-gender or similar-gender sexual or romantic attraction or experience
- identifying as LGBTQIA+
- disclosing one’s specific gender identity, gender expression, or sexual or romantic orientation

Some LGBTQIA+ people decide to keep their sexuality, gender, or [intersex](#) status private, while others decide to share these things with loved ones, acquaintances, or the public.

The process of coming out or the state of being out is a source of self-acceptance and pride for many (but not all) LGBTQIA+ people.

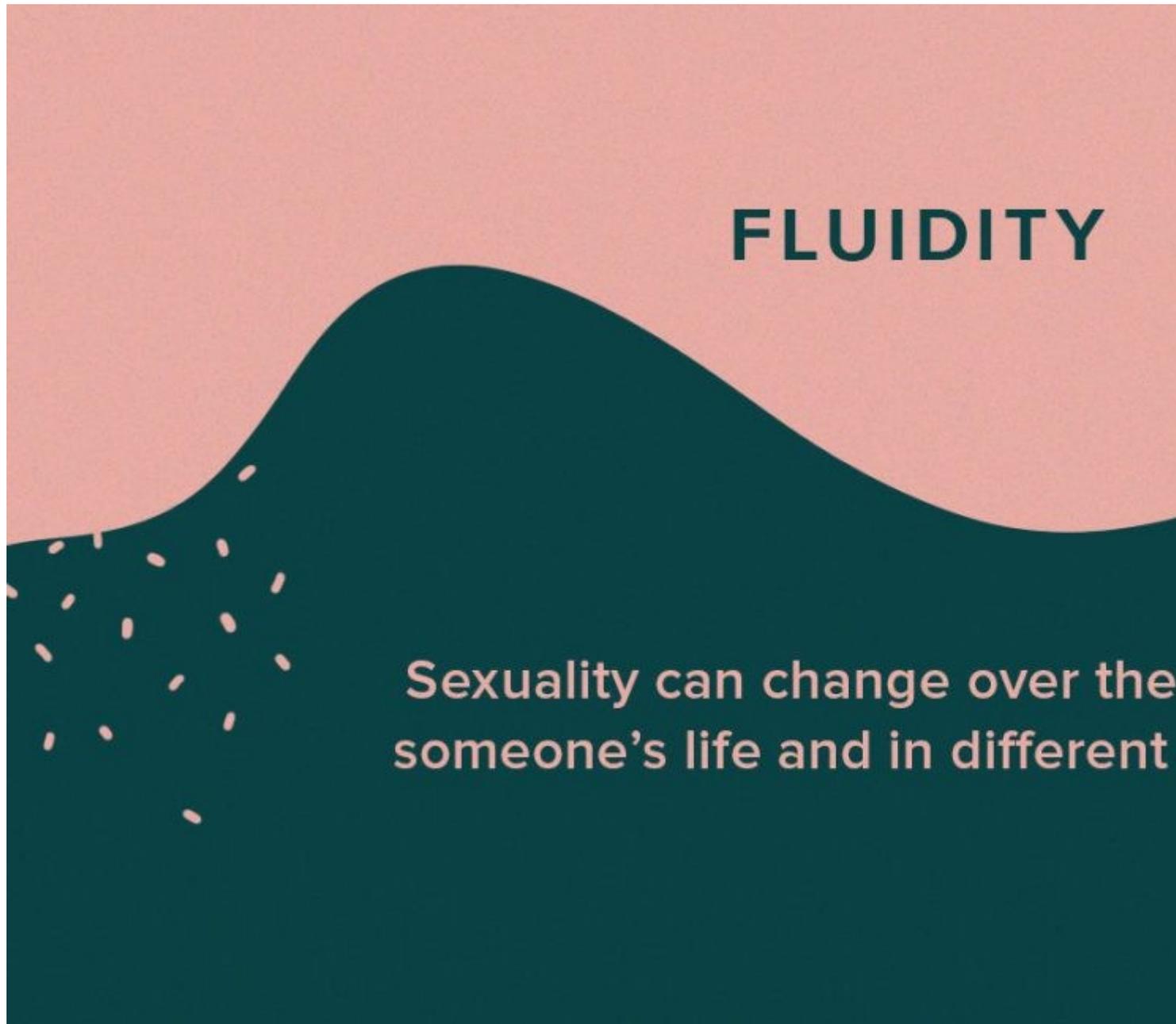
However, it’s important to remember that each person’s coming out experience is different, and the act of coming out can be hard and emotional.

The decision to come out is deeply personal. Each person should make decisions about disclosing sexuality and gender in their own time and manner.

Cupiosexual

Cupiosexual describes asexual people who don’t experience sexual attraction but still have the desire to engage in sexual behavior or a sexual relationship.

Terms D–L



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Demisexual

On the asexual spectrum, [this sexual orientation](#) describes people who experience sexual attraction only under specific circumstances, such as after building a romantic or emotional relationship with a person.

Demiromantic

This romantic orientation describes people who experience romantic attraction only under specific circumstances, such as after building an emotional relationship with a person.

Fluid

This term refers to the fact that sexuality, sexual attraction, and sexual behavior can change over time and vary based on circumstances.

It's used to describe people who experience shifts in their sexuality, sexual attraction, or sexual behavior in different situations or throughout the course of their lifetime. You may hear someone describe their sexuality as fluid.

Gay

A term that describes people who experience sexual, romantic, or emotional attraction to people of the same or a similar gender.

Some gay-identified women prefer the term "lesbian," while others prefer "queer" or "[gay](#)." It's also best to ask which word or term someone uses to describe themselves.

The fields of medicine and psychology previously referred to this sexual orientation as homosexual. "Homosexual" is now viewed as an outdated and offensive term and shouldn't be used to refer to LGBTQIA+ people.

Graysexual

[Graysexual](#) is used to acknowledge the gray area on the sexuality spectrum for people who don't explicitly and exclusively identify as [asexual](#) or [aromantic](#).

Many people who identify as graysexual do experience some sexual attraction or desire, but perhaps not at the same level or frequency as those who identify their sexuality as being completely outside of the asexual spectrum.

Grayromantic

A romantic orientation that describes individuals whose romantic attraction exists in the gray area between romantic and [aromantic](#).

Many people who identify as grayromantic do experience some romantic attraction, but perhaps not at the same level or frequency as those who identify their sexuality or romantic orientation as something other than asexual.

Gynesexual

A term used to communicate sexual or romantic attraction to women, females, or femininity.

This term intentionally includes attraction to those who identify as women, female, or feminine regardless of biology, anatomy, or the sex assigned at birth.

Heterosexual

A term that describes people who experience sexual, romantic, or emotional attraction to people of the “opposite” gender (e.g., male vs. female, man vs. woman) or a different gender.

Both [cisgender](#) and transgender-identified people can be heterosexual. This sexual orientation category is commonly [described as straight](#).

Homosexual

An outdated term rooted in the fields of medicine and psychology that refers to people who experience sexual, romantic, or emotional attraction to people of the same or a similar gender.

Lesbian

A woman or female-identified person who experiences sexual, romantic, or emotional attraction to people of the same or a similar gender. However, it’s important to note that not all lesbians are female-identified; some define their identity as more nonmale or femme than female or feminine.

Some people who are lesbians may also refer to themselves as gay or queer, while others prefer the term lesbian.

LGBTQIA+

The acronym that often describes people who don’t identify as exclusively heterosexual or exclusively [cisgender](#).

The letters in the LGBTQIA+ acronym stand for lesbian, gay, [bisexual](#), transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, and [asexual](#).

The + symbol in LGBTQIA+ refers to the fact that there are many sexual orientations and gender identities that are part of the broader LGBTQIA community but aren’t included as part of the acronym.

Libidoist asexual

A term used to describe an asexual person who experiences sexual feelings that are satisfied through self-stimulation or [masturbation](#).

This term acknowledges that, for some people, acting on libido or sexual feelings doesn’t necessarily involve sexual behavior with others.

Terms M–P



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Monosexual

A broad sexual orientation category that includes people who experience romantic or sexual attraction to people of one sex or gender. Monosexuality typically includes those who are exclusively heterosexual, gay, or lesbian.

Non-libidoist asexual

Referring to an identity on the asexuality spectrum, a non-libidoist asexual is someone who doesn't experience any sexual feelings or has an active sex drive.

Omnisexual

Omnisexual is [similar to pansexual](#) and can be used to describe people whose sexuality isn't limited to those of a particular gender, sex, or sexual orientation.

Pansexual

A [term that describes](#) people who can experience sexual, [romantic](#), or emotional attraction to any person, regardless of that person's gender, sex, or sexuality.

Panromantic

A [term that describes](#) people who can experience romantic, or emotional (but not sexual) attraction to any person, regardless of that person's gender, sex, or sexuality.

Polysexual

A term that describes people with a sexual orientation that involves sexual or romantic attraction to people with varying genders. Polysexual orientations include [bisexuality](#), [pansexuality](#), omnisexuality, and queer, among many others.

Pomosexual

A term used to refer to people who reject sexuality labels or don't identify with any of them. Pomosexual is not necessarily an identity.

Passing

Passing refers to society's perceptions and assumptions of someone's sexuality or gender.

Specifically, this term is most commonly used to discuss the frequency and extent to which an LGBTQIA+ person is perceived as or assumed to be [straight or cisgender](#).

It's important to note that some LGBTQIA+ people have the desire to pass while others do not. In fact, the act of being perceived as straight or cisgender can be a source of discomfort and discrimination for some people in the LGBTQIA+ community.

Terms Q–Z



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Queer

An umbrella term that describes people who aren't exclusively heterosexual. The term "[queer](#)" (the Q in LBGTQIA+) acknowledges that sexuality is a spectrum as opposed to a collection of independent and mutually exclusive categories.

Use of the word opens up options beyond lesbian, gay, and bisexual to people who don't fit neatly into these categories or prefer a category that isn't dependent on [sex and gender](#).

While this term once had negative and derogatory connotations, queer has resurfaced as a common and socially acceptable way for LGBTQIA+ people to refer to themselves and their community.

Despite its growing use, some people still have negative associations with the word and don't want to be referred to in this way. Queer, like all terms describing sexuality, should be used sensitively and respectfully.

Questioning

The process of being curious about or exploring some aspect of sexuality or gender. Questioning can also be used as an adjective to describe someone who's currently [exploring their sexuality](#) or gender.

Romantic attraction

The experience of having an emotional response that results in the desire for a romantic, but not necessarily sexual, relationship or interaction with another person or oneself.

Some people experience romantic attraction but don't experience sexual attraction.

Romantic orientation

Romantic orientation is an aspect of self and identity that involves:

- how you identify
- the way you experience romantic desire (if you do)
- the gender(s) or sex(es) of the people you engage in romantic relationships with (if any)
- the gender(s) or sex(es) of the people you are romantically attracted to (if any)

Sapiosexual

A word used to describe those who experience attraction based on intelligence, rather than sex or gender.

Sexual attraction

Sexual attraction refers to experiencing sexual desire or arousal in relation to another person or group of people.

Sex-averse

Sex-averse describes those who are on the [asexual](#) spectrum and are averse to or extremely disinterested in sex or sexual behavior.

Sex-favorable

On the spectrum of asexuality, sex-favorable is viewed as the "opposite" of sex-repulsed and describes those who are asexual, and in certain situations can have favorable or positive feelings toward sex.

Sex-indifferent

Sex-indifferent describes those who are on the asexual spectrum and feel indifferent or neutral about sex or sexual behavior.

Sexual orientation or sexuality

Sexual orientation or sexuality is an aspect of self that involves:

- how you identify
- the way you experience sexual or romantic desire (if you do)
- the gender(s) or sex(es) of the people you engage in sexual or romantic activity with (if any)
- the gender(s) or sex(es) of the people you are attracted to (if any)

Sexuality can change over the course of someone's life and in different situations. It's understood to be a spectrum instead of a series of mutually exclusive categories.

Sex-repulsed

Similar to sex-averse, sex-repulsed is on the spectrum of asexuality and describes those who are asexual and are repulsed by or extremely disinterested in sex or sexual behavior.

Skoliosexual

A sexual orientation [that describes](#) people who are sexually attracted to those with non-cisgender gender identities, such as people who are [nonbinary](#), [genderqueer](#), or trans.

Spectrasexual

A term that describes people who are sexually or romantically attracted to multiple or varied sexes, genders, and gender identities, but not necessarily all or any.

Straight

Also known as heterosexual, straight describes people who experience sexual, romantic, or emotional attraction to people of the "opposite" gender (e.g., male vs. female, man vs. woman) or a different gender.

People who identify as [cisgender](#) and transgender can be [straight](#).

The bottom line

It's OK to feel unsure or overwhelmed by all of the terms we now have to describe sexual and romantic orientation, attraction, and behavior.

Expanding the language you use to describe your sexuality can provide important guidance, validation, and access to community while on your journey of sexual self-discovery and satisfaction.



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