

A Family's Guide to Sexual & Romantic Orientation

Basic Terminology - Sexual Orientation & Romantic Orientation

Sexual Orientation

The pattern of one's inclination or capacity to develop intimate sexual/physical relationships with people, experienced in varying degrees (from none, little-to-none, to intense).

How do I talk about this?

"I am gay. I am Lesbian. My daughter is bisexual."

Examples of Sexual Orientations (not an exhaustive list):

- **Asexual** - A sexual orientation in which they may have little to no interest in having sex, even though many may desire emotionally intimate relationships.
- **Bisexual** - A person whose primary sexual and affectional orientation is toward people of the same and other genders, or towards people regardless of their gender. Some people may use bisexual and pansexual interchangeably.
- **Demisexual** - Demisexuality is a sexual orientation in which someone feels sexual attraction only to people with whom they have an emotional bond.
- **Gay** - A sexual orientation toward people of the same gender.
- **Pansexual** - A person who has capacity for romantic, sexual or affectional desire for people of any gender.

Romantic Orientation

The pattern of one's inclination or capacity to engage in romantic intimate behavior with people (e.g. dating, relationships, marriage), experienced in varying degrees (from none, little-to-none, to intense). Often wrongfully conflated with sexual attraction or platonic attraction.

How do I talk about this?

"I am homoromantic. I am biromantic. I am polyromantic."

Examples of Romantic Orientations (not an exhaustive list):

- **Aromantic:** individuals who do not experience romantic attraction toward individuals of any gender(s). Sometimes shortened to aro.
- **Biromantic:** romantic attraction toward people of both the same and a different gender
- **Heteroromantic:** romantic attraction toward person(s) of a different binary gender
- **Homoromantic:** romantic attraction towards person(s) of the same gender
- **Panromantic:** romantic attraction towards persons of every gender(s)
- **Gray-romantic:** individuals who do not often experience romantic attraction
- **Demiromantic:** an individual who does not experience romantic attraction until after a close emotional bond has been formed. Demiromantic folks may choose to further specify the gender(s) of those they are attracted to (e.g. demi-homoromantic).

In understanding identities and attractions, it is important to remember that orientation and attraction do not necessarily define or predict behavior, and vice versa.

More On Asexuality

An asexual person is someone who does not experience sexual attraction. Unlike celibacy, which people choose, asexuality is an intrinsic part of who we are. Asexuality does not make someone's life any worse or any better, they just face a different set of challenges than most sexual people. It is also worth noting that it is a sexual orientation and different from celibacy, in that celibacy is the choice to refrain from engaging in sexual behaviors and does not comment on one's sexual attractions. There is considerable diversity among the asexual community; each asexual person experiences things like relationships, attraction, and arousal somewhat differently.

Heterosexism

The assumption that all people are or should be heterosexual. Heterosexism excludes the needs, concerns, and life experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer people while it gives advantages to heterosexual people. It is often a subtle form of oppression, which reinforces realities of silence and erasure.

Queer

Queer is a term for people of marginalized gender identities and sexual orientations who are not cisgender and/or heterosexual. Historically, queer has been used as an epithet/slur against people whose gender, gender expression and/or sexuality do not conform to dominant expectations. For some, this reclamation is a celebration of not fitting into norms/being “abnormal” and is a radical and anti-assimilationist stance that captures multiple aspects of identities, beyond just being used as a sexual orientation. Some folks use queer as a proud identifier, and others still consider it a slur, depending on their personal regional, age, and cultural contexts, or how the word has been used against them. We suggest not using the word “queer” to describe someone unless you’ve heard them use it for themselves first.

Frequently Asked Questions

Are gender identity and sexual orientation the same?

Simply put, nope! People often wrongfully conflate gender and sexual orientation. Anyone of any gender can identify with any sexual or romantic orientation. Gender refers to how we see ourselves, while sexual orientation describes our attraction to others.

Isn't romantic attraction and sexual attraction the same thing?

While we are often taught that people must be sexually attracted to those they are romantically attracted to and vice versa, this is not the case for many people. In understanding identities and attractions, it is important to remember that orientation and attraction do not necessarily define or predict behavior. Sexual identities and romantic identities are not linked and therefore a person could be asexual, aromantic, neither, or both asexual and aromantic. Similarly, someone may be sexually attracted to one gender, and romantically attracted to another gender.

What happens if my student experiences homophobia, biphobia, or transphobia on campus?

Unfortunately, we live in a homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic world. However, no one deserves to experience bias or discrimination, and the Pride Resource Center can help you get the support you need if you do experience bias on campus or beyond. If you experience bias due to your perceived or actual sexual orientation, romantic orientation, gender identity or expression, race or religion, there are resources to help you. For more information about who you can contact for support or to report an incident visit [CSU's Incidents of Bias reporting](#) through the Office of Support & Safety Assessment.

Is it possible to be asexual & identify as lesbian, gay, or bi?

Yes, it is. Asexuals experience little to no sexual attraction, but some experience romantic attraction, which can be directed towards people of all genders. Some asexuals therefore identify as gay or lesbian asexuals, while others identify as straight asexuals; others are open to prospective partners of all genders, and still others don't want romantic relationships with anybody at all.

Why can't I refer to my LGBTQIA+ student as “homosexual”?

Because of the clinical history of the word "homosexual," it is aggressively used by anti-gay extremists to suggest that gay people are somehow diseased or psychologically/emotionally disordered – notions discredited by the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association in the 1970s. Please also avoid using "homosexual" as a style variation simply to avoid repeated use of the word "gay."

How do I best support my student when they come out?

For some people in our lives it can be easy telling them you're gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer, meanwhile with others it can be anxiety inducing to disclose such personal identities. If your student decided to come out, it is worth acknowledging that many reactions come from fear and information. Fear of what they will face in society, fear that they may have done something wrong as a parent, fear of what community members will think of your family or your child. It is also important to listen closely to your student regarding how they're feeling and experiencing their thoughts. This can be an overwhelming experience so ensuring they feel supported is key. We often recommend parents to refrain from asking an abundant amount of questions to help relieve the situation and to set up a time later to talk more about it if they're open to it. [Strong Family Alliance](#) is a national organization also helpful for parents engaging, supporting, and uplifting their LGBTQ+ child.