



QUEER CAFÉ LGBTQ INFORMATION NETWORK

Sexual Orientation



Sexual Orientation is an enduring emotional, romantic, sexual, or affectional attraction that a person feels toward another person. A person might have an attraction for someone of the same sex (homosexual, gay, lesbian), or the opposite sex (heterosexual, straight), or both sexes (bisexual).

--Gay: A man who is romantically/sexually attracted to or intimately involved with other men (same sex).

--Lesbian: A woman who is romantically/sexually attracted to or intimately involved with other women (same sex).

--Bisexual: A person who is romantically/sexually attracted to or intimately involved with both men and women (both sexes).

--Heterosexual (Straight): A person who is romantically/sexually attracted to or intimately involved with members of the opposite sex.



According to the American Psychological Association, sexual orientation also refers to a person's sense of "personal and social identity based on those attractions, behaviors expressing them, and membership in a community of others who share them."



Sexual orientation describes an enduring pattern of attraction to the opposite sex, the same sex, or both sexes, and the genders that accompany them. These attractions are generally subsumed under heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality. Asexuality (the lack of romantic or sexual attraction to others) is sometimes identified as the fourth category.

The term sexual preference overlaps with sexual orientation, but is distinguished in psychological research. A person who identifies as bisexual, for example, may sexually prefer one sex over the other. However, the term "sexual preference" suggests a degree of voluntary choice. This is disputed in terms of sexual formation, as consensus among scholars is that sexual orientation is not a choice. There is no simple, single cause for sexual orientation that has been conclusively demonstrated, but research suggests that it is by a combination of genetic, hormonal, and environmental influences, with biological factors involving a complex interplay of genetic factors and the early uterine environment. Research over several decades has demonstrated that sexual orientation ranges along a continuum, from exclusive attraction to the opposite sex to exclusive attraction to the same sex.



Sexual orientation indicates who we are erotically attracted to. And it falls along a continuum. The ends of this scale are labeled "attracted to women" and "attracted to men." In the mid-range is

bisexuality; there are also people who are asexual (attracted to neither men nor women). We tend to think of most people as falling into one of the two extreme categories (attracted to women or attracted to men), whether they are straight or gay, with only a small minority clustering around the bisexual middle. However, Kinsey's studies showed that most people are in fact not at one extreme of this continuum or the other, but occupy some position between.