

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation refers to an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic and/or sexual attractions. A person's sexual orientation is independent of their gender identity. Sex is usually determined by biological factors such as a person's reproductive organs, genes, and hormones. Sex, like gender, is not a binary concept.

While reporting one's sexual orientation is not a typical demographic requirement, for those conducting research where sexuality may be relevant, expanding upon one's knowledge of different types of sexualities is essential in promoting an inclusive environment for participants.

The following are 9 major types of sexual orientations:

1. Asexual:

Asexual individuals are people who have no interest in or desire for sexual activity. They may or may not be in a relationship and differ from celibates in that celibates refrain from sexual activities of their own volition.

2. Autosexual:

Autosexuality, also known as autoeroticism, is when sexual pleasure is derived from stimulating one's own body.

3. Bisexual:

Bisexual individuals are attracted to people of one's same sex and of the opposite sex.

4. Demisexual:

Demisexual refers to someone who is halfway between sexual and asexual. Demisexual individuals are those who require a strong emotional bond before becoming sexually involved with someone. They cannot be moved by an initial attraction.

5. Gray-asexuality:

Gray-asexuality or “gray-A” refers to the gray area between sexuality and asexuality. It is a term used to describe people who identify as asexual but don’t fit into the main types of asexuality. The term is intentionally vague to accommodate the people who fall somewhere between asexual and sexual.

6. Monosexual (heterosexual/homosexual):

Monosexuality refers to a preference for only one gender. It could be heterosexual (attraction to the opposite sex) or homosexual (attraction to the same sex).

7. Pansexual:

Pansexuality refers to sexual attraction to people of all genders, as well as transgendered, transsexual, androgynous, and gender-fluid individuals.

8. Queer:

Queer is often used to express a spectrum of identities and orientations that are counter to the mainstream. Queer is often used as a catch-all to include many people, including those who do not identify as exclusively straight and/or folks who have non-binary or gender-expansive identities.

9. Questioning:

Questioning describes people who are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Examples:

The following are examples of ways to ask about social identities. This list is not exhaustive, and each example has limitations. Researchers must carefully consider the complexities of the social identities participants will be asked to disclose, and carefully consider the cultural context in which the research is being conducted. These considerations will impact how the following questions should be framed.

Example A: What is your sexual orientation? Please leave blank if you prefer not to say: _____

Example B: What is your sexual orientation? Check all that apply:

Asexual

Bisexual

Gay

Lesbian

Pansexual

Queer

Questioning

Straight

Prefer to self-describe: _____

Prefer not to say

Additional Resources:

[Human Rights Campaign – Coming Out](#)

[SDSU Pride Center Resources](#)

[The Trevor Project](#)

References:

Accord Alliance. (2013). *What are the differences between sex, gender, and sexual orientation?*

American Psychological Association. (2008). *Answers to your questions for a better understanding of sexual orientation and homosexuality.*

Human Rights Campaign. (n.d). *Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Definitions.*

Planned Parenthood. (n.d.). *Sex and gender identity.*