

## HANDOUT 4.1: SEXUAL ORIENTATIONS

*Adapted with permission from the UUA website. Find more at [uua.org/lgbtq/identity](http://uua.org/lgbtq/identity)*

This handout provides a non-comprehensive list of ways that people identify their sexual orientation.

A comprehensive list would need to be updated frequently with emerging thought on sexual orientation. If you come across terminology that is not included here, look it up online. There are always new things to learn about sexual orientation!

Even though many people associate the abbreviation LGBTQIA with sexual orientation, it also includes terms related to gender identity. The last four letters stand for *transgender*, *queer* and/or *questioning*, *intersex*, and *ally* and/or *asexual*.

**Asexual (adjective):** Not sexually attracted to anyone and/or having no desire to act on sexual attraction to anyone. Does not necessarily mean *sexless*. Asexual people may experience affectional (romantic) attraction and may engage in sexual activity. Sometimes shortened to *ace*.

**Bisexual (adjective):** Attracted to people of one's own gender and people of other genders. Two common misconceptions are that bisexual people are attracted to everyone and anyone, and that they just haven't "decided what they really are." Often shortened to *bi*. See also *pansexual* and *queer*.

**Gay (adjective):** Primarily or only attracted to people of the same sex. The word is often used specifically about men.

**Heterosexual (adjective):** Primarily or only attracted to people of the sex considered opposite one's own.

**Homosexual (adjective):** Primarily or only attracted to people of the same sex; a synonym for *gay*. The words *homosexual* and *heterosexual* are seen by many today as medicalized terms that should be retired from common use.

**Lesbian (adjective and noun):** A woman who is attracted to women. See also *gay*.

**MSM:** Men who have sex with men. See also *gay*.

**Pansexual (adjective):** Attracted to people regardless of their sex or gender. Alternative terms include *omnisexual* and *polysexual*. See also *bisexual* and *queer*.

**Questioning (adjective):** Unsure of or exploring one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

**Queer (adjective):** (a) Attracted to many genders and sexes, or (b) outside cultural norms for sexual orientation and/or gender identity. *Queer* is also used as an umbrella term for all people with nonheterosexual sexual orientations. Historically, *queer* has been a pejorative term, and for this reason some people dislike its use. However, many

people who consider themselves transgressive and challenging of the status quo have adopted and repurposed this term and wear it proudly.

**Same-gender-loving or same-sex-loving man/woman:** Attracted to people of the same gender or same sex. Terms used in African American communities. See also *gay*.

**Straight:** Primarily or only attracted to people of the sex considered opposite one's own; a synonym for *heterosexual*. Generally used to refer to people whose gender and sexuality are societally normative.