

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation is defined as “an enduring emotional, romantic, sexual, or affectional attraction toward others. It is easily distinguished from other components of sexuality including biological sex, gender identity (the psychological sense of being male or female), and the social gender role (adherence to cultural norms for feminine and masculine behavior).”

Traditional sexual orientation has been divided into three categories: homosexual, bisexual and heterosexual. Although not all people identify with one of these categories, preferring other more inclusive terms such as poly-sexual, or preferring not to identify.

- **Homosexuality** refers to individuals who are attracted to people of the same gender. The term “gay” can refer to men or women who are attracted to the same sex but generally refers to men, whereas lesbian only refers to women attracted to other women.
- **Bisexuality** refers to individuals who are attracted to both genders. Some people find the term bi confining, as it implies being only attracted to two genders, excluding some members of the trans community. Terms like **polysexual** (attracted to many genders) and **pansexual** (attracted to all genders, or gender blind) may be used instead.
- **Heterosexuality** refers to individuals who are attracted to the opposite sex (men attracted to women and vice versa), and is sometimes called “straight.”

Sexual orientation is a widely debated topic and there are numerous theories about the origins of a person’s sexual orientation. Most scientists today agree that sexual orientation is most likely the result of a complex interaction of environmental, cognitive and biological factors. Most people know of their sexual orientation at an early age (“I remember liking boys/girls since I was 3 or 4”).

Sexual orientation should be distinguished from sexual behavior. Sexual behavior are the sexual acts people engage in alone or with others and may not correlate or match-up with a person’s sexual orientation. For example, a man may have some sexual experiences with other men as well as women but he may only identify as a straight male.

Sexual behavior is often described along a continuum. Kinsey developed a 7-point scale of heterosexuality and homosexuality. People could rank from “exclusively heterosexual” to “exclusively homosexual” to anywhere in between. And a person’s rating could change over time as experiences accumulated.

For example, a person might have all heterosexual experiences for the first twenty years of life and then have ten years of homosexual experience. By the same token, a person might have all homosexual encounters for twenty years and then have heterosexual activity.

You can learn more about the scale - See more at: <http://kinseyconfidential.org/resources/gender-sexual-orientation/#sthash.wqPrBJSf.dpuf>