

“Never Gets Old” Glossary

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Ageism in approaches to sexuality is quite common, with health carers and adult educators often lacking competencies to address sexuality, gender and diversity in elders (Ezhova et al. 2020: 9–14). The resulting ageist stereotypes can be internalised by older people themselves which can thus negatively affect their well-being (Flesia et al. 2023: 2, 11). For example, the stereotype that older people do not or should not have an interest in sexuality can be believed by older people themselves if health professionals frequently imply so or express surprise or uncomfortableness when the topic comes up. To improve this situation the Never Gets Old project aims to promote an inclusive care to sexuality and diversity in terms of sexual orientation and gender identity of older adults in health carers and adult educators. We also want to help older adults in their ability to advocate for their right to a high-quality health care. The project aims to include minorities such as for example lesbian and gay elders, as these groups face additional challenges to access an inclusive health care free of discrimination (Ezhova et al. 2020: 14).

To make the project easier to understand and provide easy access to the subject matter, we would like to provide a brief glossary of the terms that we frequently use in the project. It is important to note that these are current definitions that we obtained from glossaries as well as other sources and that they can change over time and generations and vary depending on individual understandings. Glossaries we used for reference are from the textbook “LSBTIQ* and Age(ing)” (Zeyen et al. 2020: 222-226) and from the journal article “An LGBT/Queer Glossary” (Chase and Ressler 2009).

Ageism

The systematic disadvantages and discrimination based on the perceived age of a person (no matter if the person is younger or older).

Bisexual

A person who is sexually and/or romantically attracted to not only one gender but two. For example, this person can feel attraction to men and women. This term defines the sexual orientation of a person.

Cis

Comes from Latin meaning “on this side of” in contrast to trans meaning “across/beyond”. Sometimes used before the words woman and man (cis-woman, cis-man) to indicate that the speaker refers to people who identify with their gender at birth, i.e. who are not trans.

Coming-out

Describes the decision of an LGBTIQ person to tell others about their identity. For example, a gay man telling others about his sexual orientation for the first time. As people are constantly meeting new people in their lives and living and working in different contexts, coming out is not a onetime decision. Rather, depending on the context and personal preference, the decision is made repeatedly throughout life and is therefore a process that takes place over a lifetime. A distinction can also be made between internal and external coming out. Internal coming out refers to recognising and accepting one's own wishes and orientations, while external coming out refers to communicating these to other people.

Diversity

People combine various social characteristics within themselves. These characteristics include differences in gender, ethnicity, but also social class, disability, age, sexual orientation and gender identity. If these characteristics occur in a group of people in a variety of forms, this can also be described as diversity. For example, a study that deals with sexuality is more diverse if it also takes homosexuality and bisexuality into account than one that only researches heterosexual people.

Gay

A man who is romantically and/or sexually only attracted to other men. Is in some instances used as an umbrella term for LGBTIQ people in general. Sometimes used as a homophobic insult, but many gay men now use it confidently as a self-description, reappropriating it and giving it a positive connotation.

Gender expression

Describes the way people express their gender identity. For example, a trans man may already be aware of his identity internally but may not yet express it externally. This expression is often carried out through behaviour and clothing associated with the social norms of a particular gender.

Gender identity

The personal sense of belonging to a gender. This can be the gender registered at birth or a different one. For example, a person may have been registered as female in the birth certificate but later identifies as male and perhaps goes through the bureaucratic process of changing their official documents or follow up with medical interventions.

Heteronormativity

The assumption that heterosexuality is the norm and that deviations are abnormal and strange. This can have systemic effects if institutions or individuals only consider heterosexual individuals and their needs and representation in their decision-making. This can make other sexualities invisible and causes less social inclusion of non-heterosexual people. For example, if a medical practitioner offers sexual health guidance exclusively to heterosexual individuals and provides no counsel to homosexual individuals, resulting in suboptimal healthcare for the latter, this can be characterised as heteronormative.

Heterosexual

A person who is only romantically and/or sexually attracted to people of the opposite gender, for example a woman who is only attracted to men.

Homophobia

Discriminating attitudes and/or behaviours towards homosexual people or those who are assumed to be homosexual even if they might not be. The issue also encompasses the devaluation of attributes that are often stereotypically associated with homosexual individuals within society. For instance, a man who displays behaviour that is seen as feminine by societies norms (like e.g. painting nails) yet is not homosexual can also be subject to devaluation, because feminine behaviours in men is often a stereotype attributed to gay men. Therefore, homophobia also limits the freedom of action of heterosexual people.

Homosexual

Someone who is solely romantically and/or sexually attracted to people of the same gender. For example, a man who feels exclusively attracted to other men could identify as homosexual and/or gay and a woman who feels exclusively attracted to other women could identify as homosexual and/or more specifically lesbian (Oxford University Press 2025).

Intersex

A person that is born with reproductive or bodily anatomy that does not fit the typical standards for female or male bodies. Some people use “inter” or other gender identities to identify their own gender while other people who are born with intersex characteristics might still identify as a man or a woman, only with a difference in their anatomy.

Lesbian

A woman who is solely romantically and/or sexually attracted to other women. Sometimes used as a homophobic insult, but many lesbian women now use it confidently as a self-description, reappropriating it and giving it a positive connotation.

LGBTIQ

An acronym for “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer/Questioning”

Minority-Stress

The physical and mental health problems that can come from living in a society that discriminated against ethnic, racial, sexual and gender minorities as well as people belonging to other minorities like disabled people or people who belong to a lower social class. There are a few things that can cause minority stress. For example, experiencing prejudice, discrimination, harassment, or verbal or physical violence, expecting or experiencing rejection by others, concealing one's minority identity and internalising negative societal attitudes about one's social group that results in a negative self-view. To be more likely to experience this higher rate of stress leads to a higher risk to mental and physical stress-related disorders. This term was first used in 1995 by the social psychologist Ilan H. Meyer (American Psychological Association 2023).

Non-binary

The term refers to an individual's self-identification that does not align with the conventional binary gender division of male and female. This term refers to a gender identity.

Pansexual

People for whom the gender of the other person plays no role in their sexual and/or romantic attraction. Compared to a bisexual person who is for example only attracted to men and women, pansexual people may also be attracted to people who use other gender identities such as non-binary.

Queer

A term for people who differ from the norm in their sexual orientation or gender identity. Also used by people who do not want to use a fixed definition for their own identity. Originally, queer was a derogatory term used as an insult meaning ‘strange’ or ‘weird’. Nowadays it has largely been reappropriated in a positive way, but it is important to note that many older people in English speaking countries have experienced this term negatively and therefore do not feel comfortable to use it.

Questioning

A person who is not yet sure about their sexual orientation or gender identity and is in the process of finding out.

Sexual Health

The World Health Organisation WHO defines it as: “A state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled.” (World Health Organization: WHO 2019)

Sexual Orientation

An umbrella term for lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual etc. It describes which type of people someone feels attracted to.

Sexual Rights

“The fulfilment of sexual health is tied to (World Health Organization: WHO 2019) the extent to which human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled. Sexual rights embrace certain human rights that are already recognized in international and regional human rights documents and other consensus documents and in national laws. Rights critical to the realization of sexual health include:

- the rights to equality and non-discrimination
- the right to be free from torture or to cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment
- the right to privacy
- the rights to the highest attainable standard of health (including sexual health) and social security
- the right to marry and to found a family and enter into marriage with the free and full consent of the intending spouses, and to equality in and at the dissolution of marriage
- the right to decide the number and spacing of one's children
- the rights to information, as well as education
- the rights to freedom of opinion and expression, and
- the right to an effective remedy for violations of fundamental rights.” (World Health Organization: WHO 2019)

Sexuality

“A central aspect of being human throughout life encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is

experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors.” (World Health Organization: WHO 2019)

Third Age

The period of your life between middle age (typically after employment) and old age, when you are still active e.g. as a volunteer.

Transgender

An individual who identifies as a gender that is different from the gender that was registered in their birth certificate. In some cases, individuals may undergo hormonal or surgical interventions to align their bodies with their gender identity and change their official documents and name.

Transphobia

Discriminating attitudes and/or behaviours towards transgender people or those who are assumed to be transgender even if they might not be.

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