

## **Introduction to Sexual and Gender Minority Terms:**

### **Past, Present, and Future Usage**

by Terence Friedrichs

Increasingly, gifted sexual- and gender-minority youth are approaching their parents, both to explain themselves and to ask their parents specific questions about gender and sexual orientation. Parents who have some knowledge of their gifted children's increasingly varied sexual- and gender-minority terms certainly are positioned to better support these children's developing senses of self (Manzella, 2014). To facilitate this key parental knowledge, we present here a brief glossary of terms. We show the evolution of terms, from what parents may have learned decades ago about youths' orientations and identities, to what children often bring forward today to discuss with their parents. In addition, we discuss how parents' knowledge of each term can not only affirm their gifted children but can also build broader, helpful affirmations in the world in which those children live.

*Lesbian and gay* students have been defined historically in terms of their sexual attractions to members of the same genders (Lesbian Herstory Project, 1974- ; Teal, 1971), while *bisexual* youth have been known mostly for their attractions to members of both genders (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953). However, all three of these groups increasingly are being defined in terms of their self-identifications, and their public identities, as persons with these attractions (Bisexual Resource Center, 2004; Leck, 2005; Savin-Williams, 2006). In the future, the public identities of gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth may prove instructive, or even liberating, to straight as well as to sexual-minority students, all of whom may thereby learn more about the nature and frequency of same-sex attractions.

*Transgender* students traditionally have been labeled by outward behaviors, such as dressing or speaking in the manner of the gender to which they were not physically assigned at birth (Benjamin, 1966). More recently, transgender youth have been viewed as those who identify with the gender that differs from that to which they were physically assigned at birth (Beemyn, 2014). In the future, transgender youth may help to educate adults and gifted youth on the ways in which females may sometimes identify strongly with males, and males may sometimes identify powerfully with females.

*Pangender* youth have also been defined in prior years in terms of their sexual attractions to different genders, attractions which may change back and forth among the genders (World Health Organization, 1992). Recently, these youth have been viewed not just for their shifting attractions but also for their fluid identifications between males, females, and sometimes other genders (Levitt, 2014). In the future, pangender students may serve as a highly instructive example of many humans' fluidity in gender identities.

*Agender* students historically have been viewed as "asexual," or as not being particularly sexually attracted to either males or females (Meyer, 1998). They now may be seen as identifying with neither males nor females (Agender New Zealand, 2014). These youths' lack of identification may prove instructive to some children who cannot declare themselves as males or females, or as members of any gender or sexual orientation group at all.

*Intersex* youth, once known as "hermaphrodites," previously were viewed simply as persons with body parts of both genders (Goldschmidt, 1923). Today, researchers and practitioners are encouraged to look more completely at how intersex students acquire gender identities and how they look at life (Intersex Society of North America, 2008). In the future,

intersex youth may well educate us, through their experiences with varied human bodies, feelings, and identities, about the complex identities that can accompany those bodies.

Thus, youth (and adult) terms related to sexual and gender minorities have morphed over time. In the United States, in recent decades, these terms generally have challenged readers to become more analytical about the varied realities involved in sexual and gender minorities' thinking and feeling. Future possibilities for progress -- for both sexual and gender minorities and for our knowledge about them -- may rest partly with our own abilities to learn from these persons' journeys and to see how those journeys may be similar to our own.

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