

CHAPTER 2

Sexual Orientation: Stories and Definitions

Key Questions

1. Considering everything you read about gender identity and gender expression in Chapter 1, what are your ideas about sexual orientation and its relationship to gender identity and gender expression?
2. Think about yourself and where you grew up. How have your cultural surroundings influenced your thoughts and ideas about sexuality and sexual orientation? Have you considered the ways that other cultures might think about sexual orientation?
3. Now, when you think about sexuality and sexual orientation, what words and definitions come to mind?
4. In what situations do you think sexual orientation becomes important?

Chapter Overview

Chapter 2 builds on the definitions of and stories about sex, gender, gender identity, and gender expression from Chapter 1. In this chapter, you will focus on exploring how sex and gender are related to a person's sexual orientation. You have already learned that gender often is discussed within a binary. In numerous mainstream contemporary cultures, many people also think of sexual orientation within a strict *heterosexual/homosexual binary*. You may have already studied gender and sexual orientation within different historical or cultural contexts, or your personal experiences may have taught you that sexual orientation does not adhere to this binary. The early part of this chapter explores the ways that *heterosexual* and *homosexual* become set against one another and defined (incorrectly) as the only two possibilities for sexual orientation. You will learn how these labels, and the preconceptions that accompany them, become very limiting. Then you will explore numerous sexual orientations and the ways that sexual orientation intersects with other identities, including gender, race, socioeconomic status, culture, religion, and geographic location, in the twenty-first century.

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