

Sexual Minority Youth



John Steever, MD*, Jenny Francis, MD,
Lonna P. Gordon, MD, PharmD, Janet Lee, MD

KEYWORDS

- LGBT or GLBT youth • Sexual minority youth • Adolescent sexuality
- Adolescent mental health • Transgender youth
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth • Homophobia • Health disparities

KEY POINTS

- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth are a diverse population that faces a unique set of challenges to their health and well-being.
- Medical personnel need to be culturally sensitive to these youth in order to provide high-quality medical and mental health care.
- Sexual minority youth are at a higher risk for depression, family rejection, sexually transmitted infection acquisition, poor school performance, substance use, and other threats to physical health.
- Homophobia and minority stress status are the main threats to LGBT youth mental health.
- Providers caring for sexual minority youth should not make assumptions about behaviors and risks based only on youth stated sexual or gender orientation.
- Despite challenges to their mental and physical health, most LGBT youth are able to overcome these challenges and lead rich and productive lives.

INTRODUCTION

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals have been present in human society as far back as recorded history.^{1–3} References to same-sex relationships can be found on ancient Japanese and Chinese pottery. Ancient Greek artwork often depicts same sex couples. Certain cultures acknowledge the presence of a *third gender*, or transgendered individuals, in their histories. Several Native American tribes use the term *Two Spirited* to refer to individuals whose gender identity does not match their physical body.⁴

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Department of Pediatrics, Mount Sinai Adolescent Health Center, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, Second Floor, 312-320 East 94th Street, New York, NY 10128, USA

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: john.steever@mountsinai.org

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LGBT TERMINOLOGY

Sexual orientation refers to an individual’s pattern of emotional and physical attraction to others (Tables 1–3). *Homosexuality*, commonly known as *gay*, refers to a persistent sexual and emotional attraction to members of one’s own gender. *Gay* can be an umbrella term for both homosexual men and women, but the term *lesbian* refers to women only. *Bisexuals* represent those individuals attracted to both men and women in varying degrees. The term *LGBT* refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. Sometimes a *Q* is added to represent either *questioning* or *queer*. The term *sexual minority youth* (SMY) is an alternative to LGBT and includes those that decline categorization. The term *queer*, previously a derogatory term, refers to both sexual

Table 1 Common terms used to describe LGBTQ youth	
Term	Definition
Sexual minority	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer
Sexual orientation	An individual's pattern of emotional attractions to others that involve complex components of fantasies, feelings, and cultural affiliations
Gender identity	Inner knowledge of being male or female, usually established by the time an individual is aged 3 to 4 y
Gender role	Outward expression of maleness or femaleness
Gender variance	Behavioral pattern not typical of one's assigned gender based on biological sex
Lesbian	Female who identifies her primary sexual and loving attachments as being predominantly female
Gay male	Male who identifies his primary sexual and loving attachments as being predominantly male
Bisexual	Female or male who identifies her or his primary sexual and loving attachments as being with both sexes
Homosexual	An individual whose patterns of sexual and emotional arousal are toward members of the same sex (eg, gay, lesbian)
Heterosexual	An individual whose pattern of sexual and emotional arousal is toward members of the opposite sex (eg, straight)
Heterosexism	The societal construct that equates heterosexuality as the expected normal
Transgender male	An individual, born female, whose internal gender identity is male
Transgender female	An individual, born male, whose internal gender identity is female
Transvestite	An individual who derives sexual pleasure or comfort from dressing in clothing of the opposite sex; behavior often independent of the individual's sexual orientation
MTF	Male to female, also called transfemale
FTM	Female to male, also called transmale
WSW	A female who has sexual contact with other females, whether or not she identifies as lesbian or has sexual contact with males
MSM	A male who has sexual contact with other males, whether or not he identifies as gay or has sexual contact with females
Butch	Masculine in appearance and manner
Femme	Feminine in appearance and manner
Queer	Originally derogatory, now reclaimed to describe individuals who reject mainstream cultural norms of sexuality and gender

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