

Terms Related to Gender & Gender Identity

Main Concepts

Sex Assigned at Birth: Refers to anatomical, physiological, genetic, or physical attributes that define if a person is male, female, or intersex. These include genitalia, gonads, hormone levels, hormone receptors, chromosomes, genes, and secondary sex characteristics. Sex is often confused or interchanged with gender, which is thought of as more social and less biological, though there is some considerable overlap.

Gender: A set of social, psychological, or emotional traits, often influenced by societal expectations, that classify an individual as male, female, a mixture of both, or neither.

Gender identity: One's deeply held core sense of being male, female, some of both, or neither. One's gender identity does not always correspond to sex assigned at birth. Awareness of gender identity is usually experienced as early as 18 months old and reinforced in adolescence.

Gender expression: The manner in which a person communicates about gender to others through external means such as clothing, appearance, or mannerisms. The important thing to recognize is that an individual's gender expression does not automatically imply one's gender identity.

Concepts related to Gender Identity

Assigned gender: The gender that is assigned to an infant at birth based on the child's genitalia and other visible physical sex characteristics.

Affirmed gender: The gender by which one wishes to be known. This term is often used to replace terms like "new gender" or "chosen gender," which imply that the current gender was not always a person's gender or that the gender was chosen rather than simply in existence.

Transgender: Sometime shortened to "trans." A term describing a person's gender identity that does not necessarily match their assigned sex at birth. Other terms commonly used are "female to male" (FTM), "male to female" (MTF). Transgender people may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically to match their gender identity. This word is also used as a broad umbrella term to describe those who transcend conventional expectations of gender identity or expression.

Cisgender: A term used to describe an individual whose gender identity aligns with the one typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth.

Terms Related to Orientation

LGBTQIA: An acronym that collectively refers to individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, and asexual.

Sexual orientation: Emotional, romantic, or sexual feelings toward other people. People who are straight experience these feelings primarily for people of a different gender than their own. People who are gay or lesbian experience these feelings primarily for people of the same gender; people who are bisexual experience these feelings for people of different genders, though not always at the same time, and people who are asexual experience no sexual attraction at all. Sexual orientation is part of the human condition, while sexual behavior involves the choices one makes in acting on one's sexual orientation. One's sexual activity does not define who one is with regard to one's sexual orientation; it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

Lesbian: A woman who is emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to other women. People who are lesbians need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

Gay: The adjective used to describe people who are emotionally, romantically, or physically attracted to people of the same gender (e.g., gay man, gay people). In contemporary contexts, "lesbian" is often a preferred term for women, though many women use the word "gay" to describe themselves. People who are gay need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

Bisexual: An individual who is emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to the same gender and different genders. Sometimes stated as "bi."

Pansexual: A person whose emotional, romantic, and/or physical attraction is to people of all gender identities and sexes.

Asexual: An individual who does not experience sexual attraction. There is considerable diversity among the asexual community; each asexual person experiences things like relationships, attraction, and arousal somewhat differently. Asexuality is distinct from celibacy or sexual abstinence, which are chosen behaviors, while asexuality is a sexual orientation that does not necessarily entail either of those behaviors.

Questioning: A term used to describe those who are in a process of discovery and exploration about their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or a combination thereof.

Same-Gender Loving: A term sometimes used by members of the African-American/Black community to express a sexual orientation (gay/bisexual) without relying on terms and symbols of European descent.

Queer: A term used by some people—particularly youth—to describe themselves and/or their community. Reclaimed from its earlier negative use, the term is valued by some for its defiance, by some because it can be inclusive of the entire community, and by others who find it to be an appropriate term to describe their more fluid identities. Traditionally a negative or pejorative term for people who are gay, “queer” is still sometimes disliked within the LGBTQIA community.

Out: Describes people who openly self-identify as LGBTQIA in their private, public, and/or professional lives.

Closeted: Describes a person who is not open about their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Coming out: For most people who are LGBTQIA, the process of self-acceptance that continues throughout one’s life, and the sharing of the information with others. Sometimes referred to as “disclosing” by the transgender community. There are many different degrees of being out: Some may be out to friends only, some may be out publicly, and some may be out only to themselves. It’s important to remember that coming out is an incredibly personal and transformative experience. Not everyone is in the same place when it comes to being out, and it is critical to respect where each person is in that process of self-identification. It is up to each person, individually, to decide if and when to come out or disclose. Coming out is also a continual process as one meets new people, starts a new job, etc.

Outdated and Offensive Terms

Homosexual: An outdated clinical term often considered derogatory and offensive, as opposed to the preferred terms, “gay” and “lesbian.”

Lifestyle: A negative term often incorrectly used to describe the lives of people who are LGBTQ. The term is disliked because it implies that being LGBTQIA is a choice.

Sexual Preference: The term "sexual preference" is typically used to suggest that being lesbian, gay or bisexual is a choice and therefore can and should be "cured." *Sexual orientation* is the accurate description.

Definitions from PFLAG <http://community.pflag.org/glossary>

Transition: A term sometimes used to describe the process—social, legal, or medical—one goes through to discover and/or affirm one’s gender identity. This may, but does not always, include taking hormones; having surgeries; and changing names, pronouns, identification documents, and more. Many individuals choose not to or are unable to transition for a wide range of reasons both within and beyond their control.

Gender-affirming surgery: Surgical procedures that help people adjust their bodies in a way that more closely matches their innate or internal gender identity. Not every transgender person will desire or have resources for surgery. This should be used in place of the older and often offensive term “sex change.” Also sometimes referred to as sexual reassignment surgery (SRS), genital reconstruction surgery, or medical transition.

Gender Pronouns: A gender pronoun is the pronoun or set of pronouns that an individual would like others to use when talking to or about that individual. In English, the singular pronouns that we use most frequently are gendered, which can create an issue for transgender and gender-nonconforming people, who may prefer that you use gender neutral or gender-inclusive pronouns when talking to or about them. In English, the most commonly used singular gender-neutral pronouns are Ze/Hir/Hirs. Some also use They/Their/Theirs as gender-neutral singular pronouns.

Misgender: To refer to someone, especially a transgender person, using a word, especially a pronoun or form of address, which does not correctly reflect the gender with which they identify.

Concepts related to Gender

Gender binary: The concept that there are only two genders, male and female, and that everyone must be one or the other. Also implies the assumption that gender is biologically determined.

Gender spectrum: The concept that gender exists beyond a simple “male/female” binary model, but instead exists on an infinite continuum that transcends the two. Some people fall towards more masculine or more feminine aspects, some people move fluidly along the spectrum, and some identify off the spectrum entirely.

Gender expansive: Also “gender creative,” (or medically, “gender variant”). An umbrella term sometimes used to describe children and youth that expand notions of gender expression and identity beyond what is perceived as the expected gender norms for their society or context. Some gender-expansive individuals identify with being either male or female, some identify as neither, and others identify as a mix of both. Gender-expansive people feel that they exist psychologically between genders, as on a spectrum, or beyond the notion of the

male and female binary paradigm, and sometimes prefer using gender-neutral pronouns.

Agender: A person who does not identify with any gender.

Gender neutral: Not gendered. Can refer to language (including pronouns), spaces (like bathrooms), or identities (being genderqueer, for example).

Concepts related to Biological Sex

Intersex: Individuals born with ambiguous genitalia or bodies that appear neither typically male nor female, often arising from chromosomal anomalies or ambiguous genitalia. In the past, medical professionals commonly assigned a male or female gender to the individual and proceeded to perform surgeries beginning in infancy and often continuing into adolescence, before a child was able to give informed consent. Formerly the medical terms “hermaphrodite” and “pseudo-hermaphrodite” were used; these terms are now considered neither acceptable nor scientifically accurate.

Outdated and Offensive Terms

Hermaphrodite: An outdated medical term used for people who were intersex; now considered offensive and also medically inaccurate.

Transvestite: This is an outdated and problematic term due to its historical use as a diagnosis for medical/mental health disorders.

Transsexual: A less frequently used—and sometimes misunderstood—term (considered by some to be outdated or possibly offensive, and others to be uniquely applicable to them) which refers to people who are transgender who pursue medical interventions as part of the process of expressing their gender.

Transgendered: An offensive term that can imply that something happened to the person to make them become transgendered. Instead, use the word transgender, which should always be used as an adjective e.g. “a transgender person” rather than “a transgender.”

Definitions from PFLAG <http://community.pflag.org/glossary>