

Definitions – a primer**

Sex is assigned at birth and determined usually by our external, physical bodies. Are our genitals clearly male or female? Additional sex markers include our chromosomes and our internal and external reproductive organs. Some people also use *sexed bodies* to describe our physical sex. Some key points to make in this definition are:

- People often use *male* or *female* to express physical sex. As intersex children can attest, though, our biology is not always so binary or polarized.
- Sex and gender are often conflated. While sex and gender may be congruous for a majority of people, for some they are not.

Intersex children are born with chromosomal and/or reproductive differences. They may have an extra or missing chromosome, have some elements of both male and female reproductive systems (for example, one testicle and one ovary), or have genitals that do not appear clearly male or clearly female at birth.

Gender is an ascribed social status assigned at birth, which is congruent with the sex also assigned at birth; but may or may not be congruent with the anatomical sexual identifiers.

Gender Identity is an inner psychological sense of oneself as a man or a woman, both, neither, or something else. This term refers to the gender with which one identifies regardless of one's assigned sex at birth.

Gender Expression is the communication of gender through behaviors (e.g. our dress, mannerisms, speech patterns, etc) and appearance (e.g. clothing, hair, accessories, etc.) culturally associated with a particular gender. Societal definitions of gender influence these communications.

Gender Dysphoria is the term for the clinical symptoms of excessive discomfort, confusion, pain, and anguish from feeling an incongruity with the gender assigned to one at birth (Israel & Tarver, 1997; Lev, 2004). Gender dysphoric young people often suppress and hide these feelings from others. Not all transgender youths or adults experience gender dysphoria.

Transgender: An umbrella term that describes people whose gender identity or gender expression differs from expectations associated with the sex assigned to them at birth. This term may include pre-operative transsexuals, post-operative transsexuals, non-operative transsexuals, cross-dressers, androgynous people, gender benders, drag kings, and drag queens. Transgender people may be heterosexual, bisexual, gay, lesbian, or asexual. Gender variance in children may forecast a same-sex sexual orientation or transgenderism (with or without gender dysphoria), or may simply indicate variance in gender expression.

- A **transgender woman** or **transgender girl**, also sometimes referred to as a **male-to-female** or **MTF** transgender person, is someone who identifies as female but was assigned “male” at birth. Conversely, a **transgender man** or **transgender boy**, also sometimes referred to as a **female-to-male** or **FTM** transgender person, is someone who identifies as male but was assigned “female” at birth.

Transgender people live and express their gender and identities in diverse ways, including:

- **Crossdressers** occasionally dress in clothing more common to another gender for: relaxation; catharsis; sexual pleasure; to express more feminine or masculine sides of themselves; and for any other number of reasons. Many crossdressers report that they are not interested in transitioning to a different gender.
- **Transsexuals** are people whose gender identity does not match expectations associated with the sex assigned to them at birth. Transsexuals may or may not opt to transition to another sex via medical treatments and may or may not live full time in the gender expression congruous with their identity. For those individuals who *are* interested in sex reassignment, medical treatment may be financially impossible since it is rarely covered by insurance. Often, people who are able to live consistent with their gender identity full time will opt for some form of hormonal therapy to support a congruent gender expression.
- **Genderqueer** is a term describing people who identify not as male or female, but as in-between or beyond the binary. Genderqueer youths are more likely to reject the idea that there are only two genders.

Gender Identity Disorder: A strong, persistent desire to be the opposite sex, as well as a persistent discomfort about one's anatomical sex or a sense of inappropriateness in the gender role corresponding to one's anatomical sex. Note that this is a diagnosis in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM-IV). Some people oppose classification of transgender identity as a disorder, while others recognize the advantages of having explicit standards of health care for transgender individuals. NASW NCLGBT Issues recommends that Gender Identity Disorder be removed from a mental health diagnosis. For more information: <http://www.socialworkers.org/diversity/new/lgbtq/51810.asp>)

Sexual Orientation is defined by whom you are emotionally, romantically, and erotically *attracted to*, for the most part and over a period of time. It exists on a continuum of feelings and attractions, and is not necessarily congruent with behavior. Some key points to make in this definition are:

- Most youths in early adolescence have a wide and confusing range of feelings. This is totally normal. Sexual orientation is about whom you are attracted to *for the most part and over a period of time*.
- Sexual behavior and sexual orientation are not the same thing. Most people, for example, know whom they are attracted to long before they act on those attractions. In addition, an individual's sexual behavior and sexual orientation are not always congruent. Some LGBTQ youths may act out sexually with the opposite sex to hide or deny their same sex feelings. Some youths may engage in same sex behavior when their underlying attractions are toward the opposite sex.

Some of the terms associated with sexual orientation include:

Heterosexual, Straight: People whose overall attraction is for members of a different gender.

Homosexual, Gay, Lesbian, Same Gender Loving; Two Spirit: People whose overall attraction is for members of the same gender. Same Gender Loving emerged in the late 1980's and may be used most often by People of Color; Two Spirit emerged from First People or Native Americans Traditions and has in various contexts been used to describe people who have same sex attractions and people who take on cross-gendered roles within the community.

Bisexual, Pansexual: People who are attracted to members of the same and other genders. Note that individuals may vary in the degree of attractions toward other or the same genders. Other terms which may be in use in your community might include: Not-Straight; Queer, Non-Labeling; Asexual (people who are not sexually attracted to others). (Bogaert, Anthony F. 2004)

Questioning: Some youths identify as questioning when they are unsure of where their primary attractions lie.

LGBTQ: This is an acronym that stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning/Queer.

Heterosexism: The institutionalized assumption that everyone is heterosexual, and that heterosexuality is inherently superior to and preferable to homosexuality or bisexuality.

Homophobia-Biphobia-Transphobia: The irrational fear or hatred of, aversion to, or discrimination against, homosexuals, bisexual, or transgender people and behavior.

Internalized Homophobia Biphobia Transphobia: The experience of shame, aversion, or self-hatred in reaction to one's own attractions or gender identity.

**Citation: Training Curriculum for Child Welfare Services with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) Youth in Out-of-Home Care. (2009). National Association of Social Workers: Washington DC

This project was made possible with the generous support of the Tides Foundation's Out-of-Home Youth Fund. The Fund focuses on improving the lives of LGBTQ youths living in foster care, in the juvenile justice system, and on the streets. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and Lambda Legal are deeply grateful for Tides' support of their work.