

# Language and Definitions Surrounding Gender, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression

## Gender

refers to the social, cultural, and psychological expectations and stereotypes about behaviours, actions and roles associated by society. It encompasses expectations, roles, and behaviors that societies often assign based on perceived biological sex. Gender roles and norms vary widely across cultures and time periods. Gender does not equal sex assigned at birth.

## Sex Assigned at Birth

refers to the classification of people as male, female, or intersex, usually assigned at birth based on physical traits. This process is not always straightforward—intersex individuals demonstrate the natural diversity beyond binary categories. The phrase “assigned at birth” highlights that this classification is made by medical professionals and may not align with a person’s lived experience of gender.

## Gender Identity

is a person’s internal sense of their gender—male, female, both, neither, or anywhere along the spectrum. It may or may not align with sex assigned at birth and is distinct from sexual orientation. Gender identity is not visible unless shared and includes a wide range of diverse identities. Everyone has a gender identity.

## Gender Expression

is how a person presents their gender through appearance, behavior, voice, or actions. This can include clothing, hairstyle, pronouns, and names, and may or may not align with societal expectations. Everyone has a gender expression.

## Genderqueer/Gender Non-Conforming/Gender Fluid

are terms that describe identities and expressions that challenge or exist outside traditional gender norms. These identities defy the binary concept of "male" and "female," emphasizing the vast spectrum of gender diversity.

## Non-Binary

Non-binary is a gender identity outside the male/female binary. A person may identify as both, neither, or a unique identity. It is an inclusive term that reflects diverse gender experiences.

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## Trans/Transgender

refers to individuals whose gender identity does not align with the sex they were assigned at birth. It is an umbrella term that describes people with diverse gender identities and gender expressions that do not conform to stereotypical societal gender norms. Being trans is not defined by medical interventions, physical appearance, or adherence to societal expectations—it's about living authentically in one's true gender.

## Intersex

is a term used to describe a person born with reproductive systems, chromosomes and/or hormones that are not easily characterized as male or female. Historically, intersex individuals have often been assigned male or female at birth through medical interventions or societal pressures, disregarding their unique physical traits and autonomy, which can lead to physical harm, emotional distress, and the erasure of their identities. Intersex highlights the natural diversity in biological sex beyond the binary.

## Cis/Cisgender

Cisgender refers to people whose gender identity aligns with the sex assigned at birth. For example, someone assigned female at birth who identifies as a woman. While cisgender people often face fewer challenges than transgender people, the term helps contextualize diverse gender identities.

## Two-Spirit / Indigiqueer

Two-Spirit is an Indigenous term used by some First Nations communities to describe people who embody both masculine and feminine spirits or hold unique cultural roles within their community, such as healers or mediators. The term was created in 1990 at an inter-tribal conference in Winnipeg to unify the diverse sacred genders recognized across Indigenous nations and to replace the offensive term “berdache.” Two-Spirit reflects spiritual, cultural, and gender identity, and is distinct from Western LGBTQIA+ concepts. Only Indigenous people of the Americas can identify as Two-Spirit, as it honors pre-colonial understandings of gender and resists colonial erasure. Two-Spirit is also distinct from Indigiqueer, which celebrates sexual and romantic orientation and gender in relation to indigeneity, though a person may identify as both (Indigenous Pride LA, 2025).