



Terminology Related to Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and More



Gender Identity: One's internal sense of being male, female, neither, both, or another gender. Everyone has a gender identity. For transgender and gender non-conforming people, their sex assigned at birth, or natal sex, and their internal sense of gender identity are not the same.

Table 1: Common Gender Identities

Gender Identity	Definition
Boy/Man	A person who identifies as a boy or man. May present their gender in a masculine manner.
Girl/Woman	A person who identifies as a girl or woman. May present their gender in a feminine manner.
Cisgender	A person whose gender identity and assigned sex at birth align (e.g., man and male.) (Sometimes the shortened "cis" is used.)
Transgender	An umbrella term used to describe people who are not cisgender, who have a gender identity different than their sex assigned at birth. (Sometimes the shortened "trans" is used.)
Transgender Boy/Man	An individual assigned female at birth and identifies as a boy or man. (Other terms used may include: trans guy, trans man, trans boy, or boi.)
Transgender Girl/Woman	An individual assigned male at birth and identifies as a girl or woman. (Other terms used may include: trans woman or trans girl.)
Genderqueer / Non-Binary / Gender Non-Conforming	Terms used to describe people whose gender falls outside of the woman/man gender binary, and includes individuals who identify as both a boy/man and a girl/woman, or as neither a boy/man nor a girl/woman. Individuals in this group may or may not identify with the term "transgender." (Other terms used may include: Gender Fluid.)

Gender Expression/Presentation: Outward manifestations of one's gender identity as presented by one's vocal tenor, body shape, hairstyle, clothing selection, behavior, etc. Many transgender people seek to align their gender expression (how they look) with their gender identity (who they are), rather than with the gender associated with their sex assigned at birth. For example, a transgender man who was assigned female at birth may want to have a masculine gender expression, whereas someone who was assigned female at birth and identifies as genderqueer may want to have a more androgynous (neither masculine nor feminine, or both masculine and feminine) gender expression.





Sex Assigned at Birth: The assignment and classification of people as male, female, intersex, or another sex based on a combination of anatomy, hormones, and chromosomes. Chromosomes are frequently used to determine sex from prenatal karyotyping. However, chromosomes do not determine genitalia in all cases: examples include congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH) and androgen insensitivity syndrome (AIS). Previously known as Intersex or Disorders of Sex Development, CAH and AIS are now called Differences of Sex Development (DSD). The term ‘hermaphrodite’ is outdated and should not be used. In most cases, sex is determined based on external genitalia of the infant at birth.

Pronouns and Names: A patient's name (as opposed to the name assigned at birth) and pronoun that matches their gender identity should be collected on intake forms and used consistently by front desk staff and clinicians during visits, as well as in telephone, email and letter communications as requested by the patient. Name and pronouns may not always appear to match a patient’s gender identity (e.g., a trans woman who uses they/them pronouns), so it is important to ask the patient for the name and pronouns that they use.

Table 2: Common Pronouns

Feminine Pronouns	She, Her, Hers, Herself
Masculine Pronouns	He, Him, His, Himself
Gender Neutral Pronouns	They, Them, Theirs; Ze, Zir, Zirs

Key message: *Standardizing how and when questions are asked will facilitate open communication.*

Sexual Orientation: Sexual orientation is the type of sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction one feels for others, often labeled based on the gender relationship between the person and the people they are attracted to. The terms ‘sexual preference’ and ‘homosexuality’ are outdated and should not be used. Sexual and romantic attraction can be based on a variety of factors including, but not limited to, gender identity, gender expression/presentation, and sex assigned at birth. Knowing a patient’s sexual orientation identity or attractions does not provide detailed information about their sexual behavior. Change in sexual orientation over time is normative for some individuals, particularly adolescents and transgender individuals. It is important to assess sexual orientation based on attractions, sexual behavior, and identity, more than once to capture change in potential risk factors, such as pregnancy or STIs, as well as exposure to stress related to being a sexual minority (i.e., holding a sexual orientation identity other than heterosexual/straight).





Table 3: Common Sexual Orientation Identities

Sexual Orientation	Definition
Asexual	Someone who does not experience sexual attraction. Distinct from celibacy, which is a conscious choice, asexuality is an intrinsic aspect of an asexual person. Just as sexually active individuals have emotional needs, so do asexual individuals. A person who is asexual may experience romantic attraction to others. (Other terms used include: Ace.)
Bisexual	Someone who experiences sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction to people of their own gender as well as toward another gender. (Sometimes shortened to “bi”.)
Gay	A term used to describe (trans or cis) boys/men who are attracted to (trans or cis) boys/men, but often used and embraced by people with other gender identities to describe their same-gender attractions and relationships. Often referred to as ‘homosexual,’ though this term is no longer used by the majority of people with same-gender attractions.
Lesbian	Used to describe (trans or cis) girls/women who are attracted to (trans or cis) girls/women. Often referred to as ‘homosexual,’ though this term is no longer used by the majority of women with same-gender attractions.
Pansexual	Someone who experiences sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction to members of all gender identities/expressions. Although pansexual is similar to bisexual, individuals who use the term “pansexual” often prefer it because it does not reinforce the woman/man gender binary inherent in the term “bisexual”.
Queer	Historically a derogatory term used against LGBTQ people, it has been embraced and reclaimed by LGBTQ communities. Queer is often used to represent all individuals who identify outside of other categories of sexual and gender identity. Queer may also be used by an individual who feels as though other sexual or gender identity labels do not adequately describe their experience.
Straight	A (trans or cis) boy/man or (trans or cis) girl/woman who is attracted to people of the other binary gender than themselves. Often referred to as heterosexual.

Sexual Behavior: Sexual behavior describes the physical acts an individual engages in during sexual intimacy, which do not always align with their sexual orientation identity. Obtaining information about specific sexual practices is crucial to inform appropriate screening, prevention and counseling with respect to STIs, contraception and sexual satisfaction. A good strategy is to ask the patient what body parts they and their partners use when sexually intimate, and to utilize the patient’s own anatomical terms during the discussion.

Key message: *Make no assumptions, and allow your patient to share who they are with you.*

Beyond Basics: Some individuals use additional terms to describe their gender expression or sexual behavior within the gender and sexual identities described above. Such terms/identities include: Butch, Aggressive (or Ag), Femme, Dyke, Masculine of Center, Same-Gender Loving, Top, Bottom, Switch, Bear, Twink, Daddy. Since people may use all sexual orientation and gender terms differently, it’s important to ask patients what a term means to them to understand how they are using it.



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