

# Notes on Gender Diversity

**Gender:** The wide set of characteristics that are constructed to distinguish between two historically-limiting, institutionally-recognized sexes: male and female.<sup>1</sup>

**Gender Identity:** Can refer to a person's identification as, for example, trans, genderqueer, gender nonconforming, trans man, genderfluid, cis man, trans woman, cis woman, nonbinary, which may or may not correspond to the sex assigned to them at birth.

**Gender Expression:** Generally refers to the external characteristics, behaviors, and/or presentation in relation to one's gender identity. Gender expression may be socially defined as, for example, androgynous, feminine, masculine, etc. Gender can be expressed through any number of ways, e.g. speech, mannerisms, clothing, sharing one's gender identity with family, name and/or sex on legal documents, pronouns, hormone therapy, and surgery. Not all people can express their gender as desired due to concerns of safety and/or finances.

**Gender can be fluid and changing, and can be affirmed and/or expressed in many ways.** For many people—of all gender identities—gender expression, identity, and self-understanding can change over time.

**Sex:** Generally refers to a person's sex (e.g. female, intersex, male, etc.) assigned to them at birth by a physician. Many factors influence conceptions of “biological” sex, such as internal and external genitalia, hormones, and chromosomes. Even within categories of “male” and “female,” every human expression of sex is in some way biologically variant from the next.

**There are more than two sexes.** Between 0.05% and 1.7% of the population is born with intersex traits. Intersex people are born with sex characteristics (including genitals, gonads and chromosome patterns) that do not fit typical binary notions of male or female bodies.<sup>2</sup>

**Sex assigned at birth and gender identity are not necessarily the same.** Sex assigned at birth, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, hormonal makeup, physical anatomy, and/or how one is perceived in daily life are not necessarily related.

Please Note: While potentially helpful, it's not always meaningful to disentangle sex, gender identity, and/or gender expression as concepts. These terms, like other identity-related terms, should be understood within the context of an individual's understanding and experience of them. (e.g. A trans person who was assigned male at birth may identify as female despite normative assumptions of what types of bodies are categorized as female.)

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<sup>1</sup> NYC Anti-Violence Project, *Glossary of Terms*  
[http://avp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2007\\_AVP\\_Glossary\\_of\\_Terms.pdf](http://avp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2007_AVP_Glossary_of_Terms.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Free & Equal, United Nations for LGBT Equality, Intersex Fact Sheet  
[https://unfe.org/system/unfe-65-Intersex\\_Factsheet\\_ENGLISH.pdf](https://unfe.org/system/unfe-65-Intersex_Factsheet_ENGLISH.pdf)

**Cisgender (or cis):** Someone whose gender normatively aligns with the sex to which they were assigned at birth and (generally) does not identify as trans (e.g. a person was assigned male at birth and identifies as a man).

**Transgender (or trans):** A term that can be used by a person who is not cisgender, and/or whose gender, in some way, does not normatively align with the sex they were assigned at birth (e.g. a person was assigned female at birth, identifies as a man, and expresses gender androgynously). Trans can be an umbrella term which includes agender, genderqueer, and gender non-conforming, for example.

**Labels can be useful and/or limiting to how someone describes their experience.** Labels or identity terms can be useful for folks to describe their experiences, to find community and resources specific to them, and/or to validate their identities. Labels can also be limiting, and some folks may not use them. They may feel that their identities are too nebulous or fluid to pin down with a specific term or that no terms work for them.<sup>3</sup> When describing someone's identity, reflect the identity terms that they've used or offered for themselves.

## Resources

- Harvard College Office of BGLTQ Student Life  
FAQs for students who identify as trans, genderfluid, gender non-binary, or who are considering a gender transition:  
[bgl tq.fas.harvard.edu/trans-resources](https://bgl tq.fas.harvard.edu/trans-resources)
- Trans Task Force  
Harvard student organization for people with feelings about gender, especially trans and questioning students, to discuss, build community, and organize trans activism.  
Sign up to get involved: [tinyurl.com/TTF2018](https://tinyurl.com/TTF2018)
- Transcend Group at Harvard Counseling and Mental Health Services  
[huhs.harvard.edu/services/counseling-and-mental-health/group-counseling-workshops](https://huhs.harvard.edu/services/counseling-and-mental-health/group-counseling-workshops)
- Fenway Health (Boston-area health care for the LGBT community) [fenwayhealth.org/](https://fenwayhealth.org/)
- GLAAD Transgender Resources [www.glaad.org/transgender/resources](https://www.glaad.org/transgender/resources)
- Trans 101 [trans101.org.au/pdf/Trans101-PDF-Web.pdf](https://trans101.org.au/pdf/Trans101-PDF-Web.pdf)
- Transgender Law Center [transgenderlawcenter.org/](https://transgenderlawcenter.org/)
- Trans Women of Color Collective [www.twocc.us/](https://www.twocc.us/)
- Trans Student Educational Resources [www.transstudent.org/](https://www.transstudent.org/)

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<sup>3</sup> Abridged from LGBT Equality Alliance: <https://www.lgbteachesco.org/labels-lgbt-meaning/>