



Gender Positive Alliance

Factsheet – gender identity and expression

Learn more about identity and expression here:

<https://www.npr.org/2021/06/02/996319297/gender-identity-pronouns-expression-guide-lgbtq>
<https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-preventing-discrimination-because-gender-identity-and-gender-expression/3-gender-identity-and-gender-expression>

Introduction

Let's start with the basics. Your **biological sex** is determined by your genes, anatomy, and hormones, usually at birth. People are typically **AMAB** (assigned male at birth) **AFAB** (assigned female at birth) or could be **intersex** (having sex characteristics not typical of either biological male or female, or of both).

Gender is influenced by biology, culture, society and local norms – in other words, the stories about males, females and others that you learn as you grow. **Gender roles** and **gender norms** are society's informal expectations of people who are male, female or others. This includes what behaviours are considered acceptable for each gender, what roles in the house and what jobs, what clothing and things like hair styles or makeup you wear. For a very simplistic image of gender norms think about birthday cards for mums vs dads and how different they are!

Gender norms include stereotypes of masculine or feminine behaviour, but can also be very nuanced. For example nowadays lots of women are managers, engineers, scientists, and men are nurses, counsellors and carers. This is different to traditional gender roles, and shows how these evolve over time.

The detail – identity

Gender identity is how you feel about yourself, in your own body, in terms of your unique and individual sense of being male, female, or anywhere along the gender spectrum.

How you relate to your gender will change and grow as you have different experiences, and often comes more into focus as we go through puberty.

Most people have a pretty firm sense of their gender identity as being a boy or a girl from a very young age. If their gender identity matches their biological sex they are **cisgender**. If their gender identity is different to their biological sex then they are under the **transgender** 'umbrella'.

Transgender is used as an umbrella term which includes people who are non-binary, genderfluid, genderqueer and more, as well as specifically referring to people whose biological sex is the opposite of their gender identity – for example, being assigned male at birth but identifying as female.

The detail – expression

Gender expression is more a case of how you present yourself to the world, and how this relates to your gender. That includes your behaviour, hairstyles, makeup, clothes, voice and even the kind of language you use.

There are so many ways to express your gender that people's gender identity might not always seem to match their gender expression. For example, a woman might identify as female, but enjoy wearing trousers and baggy t-shirts, with short hair, and appear more androgenous or even more masculine.

Why does it matter?

Understanding how gender identity and expression affect how a person lives in the world is important because it helps us see, firstly how brave it is to go against societal expectations, and also the obstacles they face in terms of discrimination.

Throughout history progress has been made when people challenge norms, but this is rarely easy or without hardship. Transgender people have rights in law, but are often not treated equally in society, such as limited access to healthcare, and many obstructions to getting the support they need such as people doubting their gender identity. This can cause distress and mental health issues.