



Understanding Sex and Gender

Developing an in-depth understanding of Sex and Gender is a key part of fostering and supporting a diverse and inclusive workplace. They are complex topics that require a nuanced approach, and it is particularly important to learn about the diverse terminology and concepts surrounding Sex and Gender.

Biological Sex

Sometimes known as *Assigned Sex*, this is a label given at birth based on medical factors, including physical sex features, hormonal and chromosomal factors. Most individuals are assigned as Male or Female at birth.

When an individual is born with physical, hormonal or genetic features which do not wholly fit Male or Female characteristics, or has a combination of male and female characteristics, these people are known as Intersex. There are many variations of Intersex, and it is used to cover a wide spectrum of characteristics.

Gender and Gender Identity

Whilst a person's assigned sex is medically assigned at birth, gender is a deeply personal matter of identity, and is unique, and intrinsic to, each person. In a binary sense, this refers to individuals identifying as Man or Women, but there are a variety of other identities that individuals can have.

Gender Expression

Gender is something that we express and perform every day through our actions. Gender expression is influenced by our culture and backgrounds, and is reflected through our everyday choices and actions, from what name we use and our mannerisms, to what clothes we wear and what haircut we have. Gender Expression is how we express our unique Gender Identity to the world.

In binary terms, Gender Expression can have either (or both) masculine or feminine traits. Some people choose neither, and can be androgynous or non-binary in appearance.

Gender is more than just identifying as *Male* or *Female*

Gender Identity is multifaceted and nuanced topic. Many people do not identify as simply Male or Female. Other important concepts and identities that are helpful to know when understanding gender include:

- *Transgender individuals*: People who have a Gender Identity which is different from that which was assigned to them at birth (for example, an individual assigned male at birth who identifies as a woman).
- *Gender dysphoria*: This is the condition of having a gender identity that does not align with the biological sex assigned at birth; in this instance, understanding the difference between Sex and Gender is crucial.



- *Gender affirmation (Gender transition)*: This is the process of changing gender presentation and/or sex characteristics to accord with an individual's Gender Identity. This process may or may not involve medical treatment, and as such, every individual's affirmation (transition) will be different and unique to them.
- *Non-binary identities*: This is a catch-all term for people whose Gender Identity lies outside the gender binary, i.e. not exclusively Male or Female. Non-binary people may express a combination of masculinity and femininity, or neither, in their gender expression.

It is also important to understand how traditional binary assumptions and understandings of gender impact individuals who do not fit into that construct.

Society often confuses Assigned Sex with Gender Identity; and whilst they are related, they are not necessarily the same thing. It is important to recognise that not everybody identifies as solely female or male, and many have non-binary gender identities that are just as valid as binary ones.

Sexual Orientation

This refers to the attraction an individual experiences towards another individual, and is not dependent on a person's Biological Sex or Gender Identity. Individuals can be attracted to someone of the opposite or same sex, male, female, non-binary, or can experience no sexual attraction at all. Sexual Orientation is again a complex topic, and encompasses those who have a Straight, Bisexual, Pansexual or Asexual orientation.

Much like Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation is not necessarily binary (ie being attracted to just women, or just men), and needs to be understood as such.