



Fact Sheet:

Knowing the difference between sex and gender

The terms sex and gender are often confused or used interchangeably, but they are not the same and it's important to know the difference.



How do we define sex?

In this context we are referring to biological sex not sexual activity.

Biological sex is about body parts. It is a label given to people when they are born and is typically categorised into three categories: female, male and intersex. A person's sex refers to their biological and physiological features such as:

- Reproductive organs
- Chromosomes
- Hormones

Intersex is an umbrella term used for people born with natural variations in their anatomy, reproductive organs or chromosomes that do not fit the traditional definitions of female and male.

There is a lot more to being a person than the sex assigned at birth and a person's sex can be different to their gender.

"It can be helpful to think of sex as a biological characteristic and gender as a social construct."

[World Health Organisation](#)

Gender is a social construct and is part of a person's identity. It refers to the way a person feels, presents and is recognised within the community and can include a person's social and legal status, name, appearance, mannerisms and dress.

Gender is more complex than sex because it is about more than a person's body parts. Each culture has expectations about a way a person should behave based on their gender and, as a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time ([source](#)).

What is gender identity?

Gender identity is an individual's own sense of their gender.

Some people feel their gender is in line with the sex they were assigned at birth, but some people don't. A person assigned female at birth may, instead, have a male gender identify, and vice versa. Or, instead of identifying as female or male, they might prefer to use a gender diverse term such as:

- Transgender
- Transsexual
- Gender queer
- Pan-gendered
- Androgynous
- Inter-gender

What are gender-pronouns?

Gender pronouns are the words or language people choose to refer to themselves that reflect their gender identity. Knowing and using a person's correct pronouns can help make people feel respected and valued, affirming their gender identity ([source](#)).

What are gender-pronouns? *cont.*

They might be:

- She/her
- He/him
- They/them

What is sexual orientation?

Sexual orientation, also referred to as sexuality, is about who a person is attracted to romantically, emotionally and/or sexually.

It is completely normal for a person's sexual orientation to remain the same or vary throughout their life ([source](#)). Some of the identities commonly associated with sexual orientation are:

Heterosexual or straight: an individual who is sexually and/or romantically attracted to the opposite gender to themselves. This term is inclusive of transgender and intersex people ([source](#)).

Gay: an individual who identifies as a man and is sexually and/or romantically attracted to other people who identify as men. The term gay can also be used in relation to women who are sexually and romantically attracted to other women.

Lesbian: an individual who identifies as a woman and is sexually and/or romantically attracted to other people who identify as women.

Bisexual: an individual who is sexually and/or romantically attracted to people of the same gender and people of another gender. Bisexuality does not necessarily assume there are only two genders.

Pansexual or queer: an individual whose sexual and/or romantic attraction to others is not restricted by gender. Pansexuality can include being sexually and/or romantically attracted to any person, regardless of their gender identity.

Questioning or curious: People who're unsure about their sexual orientation.

Asexual: a sexual orientation that reflects little to no sexual attraction, either within or outside relationships.

([source](#))

It is important to understand that these are labels and that they don't describe every person's sexual orientation. Some people don't use labels at all, while some people are comfortable using some but not others.

Gender Stereotypes and inequality?

Stereotypes or rules about how people should behave according to their gender leads to gender inequality and everyone is affected – women, men, transgender and gender diverse people, children and families.

Gender stereotypes begin in childhood and can affect a person's behaviour, study choices, ambitions and attitudes about relationships. For example, Victorian women earn 87.6 cents to every dollar earned by men and transgender and gender diverse people are at greater risk of mental illness, verbal and physical abuse and social exclusion. Gender inequality is also a root cause of violence against women.

Not everyone experiences inequality the same way. The situation is different, and often worse, for people who face more than one type of discrimination such as women with disabilities, Aboriginal women and migrant and refugee women.

Contact

Women's Health & Wellbeing Barwon South West

03 5500 5490 | info@womenshealthbsw.org