



QUEER CAFÉ LGBTQ INFORMATION NETWORK

Sex and Gender



Sex and gender are terms that are often used interchangeably and frequently seen as synonymous. For purposes of a discussion that leads to greater understanding of human sexuality, let's consider sex and gender as

separate concepts. Additionally, let's examine variations and aspects of sex and gender. And let's further consider the notion that one's sex and gender may not be defined in the extremes but instead along a continuum.

Sex and gender can be discussed and understood in terms of physical, psychological, social, and emotional perspectives. What do the various labels mean? What is meant by sex, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation? This is an attempt to delineate the differences and clarify the terminology.



SEX (Physical) **Male or Female**

Sex is described with regard to physical elements and in terms of one's biology and anatomy. A person's sex is defined as his or her medical assignment as manifest

through organs, genitals, hormones, and chromosomes. A person might be male or female. Or a person might be intersex (hermaphroditic).

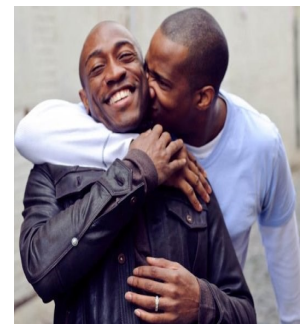
GENDER IDENTITY (Psychological) **Man or Woman**

Gender identity is one's psychological understanding of self. It is defined in terms of roles, perceptions, and self concept. A person's gender identity can be described as the way in which he or she views him or herself. A person might be a man (boy) or a woman (girl). Or a person might be transgender, genderqueer, two-spirit, or third-gender.

It is important to consider a new perspective of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression as they exist across a spectrum of experiences and the concept of a non-binary understanding. Matters of sex and gender should not be defined in mutually exclusive dualistic terms, but along a continuum and in more fluid, sometimes ambiguous, terms.

GENDER EXPRESSION (Social) **Masculine or Feminine**

Gender expression is a social construct. It can be defined with regard to societal expectations and interpretations. A person's gender expression can be described as the way in which he or she communicates his or her gender to others. It is manifest through outward appearance, mannerisms, clothing, hair style, and speech pattern. A person might be masculine (butch, top) or feminine (femme, bottom). Or a person might be agender, androgynous, or a transvestite.



SEXUAL ORIENTATION (Emotional) **Homosexual or Heterosexual**

Sexual orientation is described as one's emotional identity. It can be defined in terms of one's



romantic or erotic response. A person's sexual orientation is described with regard to sexual behavior and is manifest through attraction, affection, relationships, and love. A person who is attracted to persons of the same sex are homosexual (gay, lesbian) and a person who is attracted to persons of the opposite sex are heterosexual (straight). A person might also be bisexual (both sexes), asexual (neither sex), pansexual (all variations), or omniseual (all variations).