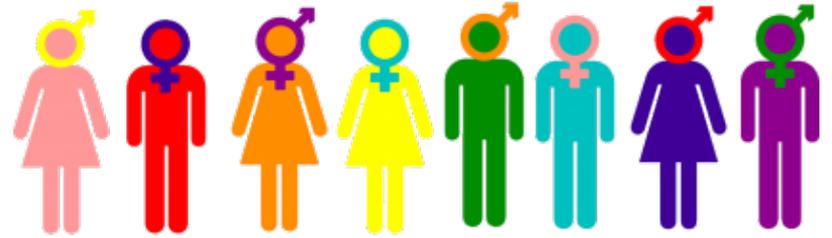


Basic Definitions About Gender Identity

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Our culture tends to limit its understanding of gender to only two options: man and woman. Unitarian

Universalism recognizes that there are more than two genders, and an infinite variety of gendered experience in the world.



Biological Sex

The biological attributes such as anatomy, chromosomes, and hormones that inform whether a person is male, female, or intersex. Where *sex* refers to biology, *gender* refers to the cultural and social understandings that are layered on top of biology.

Gender Identity

An individual's internal sense of being a man, a woman, neither of these, both, and so on—it is one's own understanding of how one relates to the gender binary. With the exception of agender people, who often do not have an internal sense of gender, most people have a gender identity.

Gender Expression

The ways in which a person manifests masculinity, femininity, both, or neither through appearance, behavior, dress, speech patterns, preferences, and more. This term refers to how a person expresses their gender identity or the cues people use to identify gender.

Gender Binary

A system of classifying sex and gender into two distinct and disconnected forms—male/man/masculine and female/woman/feminine—and assigning all bodies, identities, roles, and attributes to one side or the other. The gender binary is dependent on policing people to make sure they don't digress from the system in appearance, anatomy, or behavior.

Sexual Orientation

The gendered pattern of a person's sexual attractions, or the gender of the people a person is attracted to. Gender and sexual orientation are often lumped together, despite being different, because of societal expectations around sex, gender, and expression. Transgender individuals can be lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, straight, or any other sexual orientation. Everyone has a sexual orientation.

Transgender

First coined to distinguish gender benders with no desire for surgery or hormones from *transsexuals*, those who desired to legally and medically change their sex, more recently *transgender*, *trans*, and/or *trans** have become umbrella terms popularly used to refer to all people who transgress dominant conceptions of gender, or at least all people who identify themselves as doing so. The definition continues to evolve.

Cisgender

A term that describes people who are not trans or gender variant—in other words, those whose gender identities, presentations, and behavior “match” (according to the gender binary) the sex they were assigned at birth. Cis is a prefix with roots that mean “on the same side”.

Cross-Dressing and Drag

Cross-dressing refers to occasionally wearing clothing of the “opposite” gender, and someone who considers this an integral part of their identity may

identify as a crossdresser. *Drag queens* and *drag kings* are performers who offer exaggerated, performative presentations of gender and often cross-dress performatively. Cross-dressing and drag are not necessarily tied to erotic activity or sexual orientation.

Genderqueer / Third Gender / Gender Fluid / Two Spirit

Terms used by people who identify as being between and/or other than man or woman. They may feel they are neither, a little bit of both, or they may simply feel restricted by gender labels. *Two spirit* is a complex term derived from some Native North American cultures and can sometimes mean a mixture of masculine and feminine spirits in the same body.

Intersex

A general term used for a variety of genetic, hormonal, or anatomical conditions in which a person's reproductive or sexual anatomy doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male. Some intersex individuals identify as transgender or gender variant; others do not.

Transsexual

Historically this term has been used to refer to individuals who have medically and legally changed their sex, or who wish to do so. Most transsexual people feel a conflict between their gender identity and the sex they were assigned at birth. Other labels used within this group include *MtF* (male-to-female) or *trans woman*, and *FtM* (female-to-male) or *trans man*.

Transition

The complex process of authentically living into one's gender identity, often but not always including leaving behind one's assigned birth sex. A transition may include coming out to one's family, friends, and/or co-workers; changing one's name and/or gender markers on legal documents; hormone therapy;

and/or possibly (though not always) some form of surgery. Not all trans people identify with the word *transition* and it should furthermore never be assumed that transition is a process to be “completed.” Some people who have transitioned no longer consider themselves to be transsexual or transgender and rather identify only as a man or a woman (occasionally “of transgender experience”). Others identify as a *trans man* or a *trans woman*.

Coming Out vs. Disclosure

Coming out (of the closet) refers to openly stating one’s identity (usually sexual orientation). Being *out* means being open about one’s identity. Being *outed* means someone else has disclosed one’s identity, usually without permission. *Coming out* is often a liberating experience for people who have previously hidden their identity; it can lead them to feel like they can be their authentic selves. However, trans people who have transitioned are not “in the closet” about their identity, so telling people that they are trans is a *disclosure* and is different than *coming out*. Trans people are not “fooling” or “deceiving” anyone about their identity by presenting themselves authentically as men or as women.