

The Four Corners of Identity

Sex Assigned at Birth, Gender Identity,
Gender Expression and Sexual Orientation



Sex Assigned at Birth

Examples: Male, Female, Intersex,
MAAB (male assigned at birth), FAAB
(female assigned at birth)

SAAB is what the doctor said when they looked at your genitals and decided "this is a boy" or "this is a girl." There are also people born "intersex," or with physical traits of both historically recognized sexes.

Why should we say "sex assigned at birth" instead of just sex or biological sex?

Even though these assumptions are usually right for most people, calling it "assigned sex" creates space for people who don't fit in that original category without making it abnormal or something people do in opposition to an assumed "real sex" that is unchangeable.

Gender Identity

Examples: Man, Woman, Genderqueer,
Gender Fluid, Transgender, Agender

Gender identity is your deeply held sense of your own gender. Everyone has a gender identity. Your gender identity is the internal sense you have of being a man, a woman, neither, both, or any other identity, and no one else can tell you what your gender identity really is but you.

Everyone has a gender identity, but you might not have thought about it before because a lot of people assigned male or female simply feel the gender they were assigned. It's important to remember that even though some gender identities are more **common** than others, it doesn't make the common ones more right or more real. All gender identities are valid and based on your truth. Some gender identities are more common than others, but that doesn't make them more "natural" or "right".

Gender Expression

Examples: Feminine, Masculine, Butch,
Femme, Queer, Fluid, Non-gendered

Your gender expression is how you communicate (or choose not to communicate) your gender identity to other people. Much like with gender identity, **everyone has a gender expression**, even if you don't think about it that way. All of us make choices about what we will wear, how to style our hair, and other visible markers of our "male", "female", and non-gender identity.

It's important to think of gender identity and expression as separate things because there are times where someone's expression may not match their internal identity, but it doesn't mean that identity isn't true or honest. For example, someone may know they are transgender, but not feel safe enough to present that way at work or school.

Sexual Orientation

Examples: Pansexual, Lesbian, Bisexual,
Straight, Gay, Heteroflexible

Sexual orientation (sometimes called sexual identity) is your natural attraction to other people's gender identity, gender expression, and physical body traits. Some sexual orientations are attracted to only one identity. For example, gay men are only attracted to other men; straight men are only attracted to women.

Other orientations have the potential to be attracted to multiple identities. An example would be bisexual people (attraction to men and women) or pansexual (attracted to any gender identity or expression).

Some related identities to sexual orientation include asexual people, who don't feel sexual attraction at all or only feel sexual in certain situations. Another important group is polyamorous people, who engage in multiple, consensual relationships at the same time

Pronouns: What They Are And Why They Matter



Pronouns are the words we use to refer to other people in speech and writing. You may have never thought about how important your pronouns are, but people use your pronoun dozens of times a day. For people whose pronouns aren't easily "guessed," asking people to use the correct pronoun can feel degrading, shameful, and difficult. As allies, we can't promise to get pronouns right all the time, but we can have compassion for different pronouns, even if it's hard to understand why someone would want them.

If you accidentally use the wrong pronoun: address it, correct it, apologize, and quickly move on

Possible pronouns (and how to use them)

She / Her / Hers

She went to the store.

I gave the backpack to **her**.

That pen is **hers**.

He / Him / His

He went to the store.

I gave the backpack to **him**.

That pen is **his**.

They/Them/Theirs

They went to the store.

I gave the backpack to **them**.

That pen is **theirs**.

Ze / Hir / Hirs

Ze went to the store

I gave the backpack to **hir**
(pronounced "here")

That pen is **hirs**

(pronounced "heerz")

Other pronouns you may see:

Xe/Xem/Xyr & Ze/Zir/Zim

Did you know? "They" was a common singular pronoun used by Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare, and many other famous writers in the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries? The invention of the printing press and increased literacy led to more lower class people using "they" as a singular pronoun, until it was eventually labeled as "inappropriate" and outlawed from English Grammar Schools, where upper class children learned their language skills.

This stigma for singular "they" in schools and elsewhere still exists today, even though we use it all the time! For example, if someone had left a backpack in your classroom, you'd probably say "I wonder whose backpack this is... I hope **they** come and get it." In that case, we use "they" because we don't know the gender of the person who left the backpack.