

# Language Guide: Gender & Sexuality

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## Purpose:

We cannot all be experts in everything. This guide exists to help you integrate best practices with gender and sexuality identities of students and patients into your curriculum.

## Language Guidelines:

- **'Sex'** defines persons by their bodies - reproductive organs, sexual organs, chromosomes, gonads, and/or hormones. Typically reproductive and sexual organs assign sex.
  - There are three possible sex assignments:
    - Male
    - Female
    - Intersex
  - The sex binary assumes every person fits into either male or female sex categories. Shifting our thinking from the binary to a non-binary definition of sex is inclusive of all individuals.
- **'Gender'** describes individual and cultural representations of behaviors, roles, feelings, and activities; gender is not defined by biological characteristics.
  - Our current culture often links sex and gender with expectations and norms around masculinity and femininity.
  - Individuals can identify as many different genders regardless of their sex.
    - Ex. Masculine, feminine, genderqueer (queer, fluid, non-binary), agender, cisgender, and transgender
      - Cisgender - the gender identity that is the same as the assigned sex
      - Transgender - any gender identity that differs from sex assignment
    - Assuming an individual's gender based on their appearance and using pronouns they do not identify with is called 'misgendering.' Misgendering individuals can be disrespectful and dismissive.
- Gender and sex are discrete categories and inquiries into an individual's sex may invade privacy, even in clinical settings.
- **'Sexuality'** includes romantic and physical attractions.
  - Sexual identities may specify romantic and/or sexual attraction (heterosexual, homosexual, gay, lesbian) while others express romantic and/or sexual desires or acts as they relate to cultural norms (queer, pansexual, asexual).
- Existing binaries and cultural norms create hierarchies that determine 'acceptable' from 'unacceptable' sexualities and these binaries foster discrimination and violence.
  - Sex-positive movements advocate for the acceptance of all sex acts and sexualities so long as they are safe and consensual. These focus on diminishing stigma and increasing public health and safety.
- Language is ever changing - be considerate of others and keep learning.
- Sexual identity and gender identity are not the same thing, and they do not have to "make sense" to you. For example, if you see a patient who identifies as a transgender straight man, that person might still have sexual experiences with women. Best to just ask the patient their identities without trying to have them "make sense" to you.

**To do:**

- Use intentional language consistently and respectfully.
- Ask an individual's gender and pronouns - do not assume based on their appearance.
- Present cases or examples with women, gender non-conforming persons, and 2SLGBTQ-identified people.
- Consider writing case examples without a stated gender at all. Part of the case discussion might include how your differential would change given various sexual or reproductive organs or identities present.

In the classroom, limiting cases or examples to heterosexual or male identities does not honor the breadth of experience in peoples' lives, and does not adequately prepare our students for the patients they will see during their clinical rotations.

<b>Use:</b>	<b>Stay Away From:</b>
Gender inclusive pronouns when possible Ex. They/them/their/themselves	Gendered pronouns when unknown or not applicable Ex. He/him or she/her
Gender inclusive language Ex. Congressperson, humankind, firefighter	Sexist language Ex. Congressman, mankind, fireman
Clear, specific language around gender Ex. Cis-gender female, non-binary person	Gender assumptions Ex. Romantic partner vs. husband/wife
Gender neutral identifying language when appropriate Ex. Pregnant people	Gendered identifying language Ex. Women/moms who are pregnant
Specific anatomical language Ex. Bodies with breasts, persons who menstruate	Gendering bodies based on assumptions Ex. Menstruating women

**Examples:**

15 y/o person with severe menstrual cramping that occurs 2 days before their (or the patient's) period. They (or the patient) has tried ibuprofen for the pain and that sometimes helps.

- Gendered language has been removed
- That the patient has a uterus is clear from the case description without gendering the person's body
- Pronouns have been changed to they/them/their but can also use 'the patient'

**Resources:**

Adapted from Julie Beaulieu, University of Pittsburgh

<https://www.gsws.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/gender-inclusivelanguageguidelines.pdf>