

A Framework for Understanding Transgender – Some Important Distinctions:

SEX <-> GENDER <-> SEXUALITY

Sex

Separate from gender, this term refers to the cluster of biological, chromosomal, and anatomical features associated with maleness and femaleness in the human body. Sexual dimorphism is often thought to be a concrete reality, whereas in reality the existence of intersex people points to a multiplicity of sexes in the human population.

Common categories of sex: Male, Female, Intersex

Traditional way of conceptualizing sex: A Male-Female binary

More accurate way of understanding sex: A spectrum of biological, chromosomal and anatomical features.

Gender:

A complicated set of socio-cultural practices whereby human bodies are transformed into “men” and “women.” Gender refers to that which a society deems “masculine” or “feminine.” Gender identity refers an individual’s self-identification as a man, woman, transgendered or other identity category. Most contemporary definitions stress how gender is socially and culturally produced and constructed, as opposed to being a fixed, static, coherent essence.

Common categories of gender: Men, Women, Transgender

Traditional way of conceptualizing gender: A Man-Woman binary

More accurate way of understanding gender: A spectrum or constellation of different behaviors, attributes and identifications.

Sexuality:

Sexuality is a broad term which refers to a cluster of behaviors, practices and identities in the social world, largely linked to who an individual desires or has romantic and/or erotic connections with.

Common categories of sexuality: Heterosexual, Homosexual, Bisexual, Pansexual, Asexual

Traditional way of conceptualizing sexuality: A heterosexual-homosexual binary

More accurate way of understanding sexuality: A spectrum or constellation of different desires, behaviors, attributes and identification.

Transgender: A range of behaviors, expressions and identifications which challenge the pervasive bipolar gender system in a given culture. This, like trans, is an umbrella term which includes a vast array of differing identity categories such as transsexual, drag queen, drag king, cross-dresser, transgenderist, bi-gendered and a myriad of other identities. This category refers to an individual who dis-identifies with their assigned birth gender and has their own internal sense of their gender identity. This may include physical modifications but there are also many transgender people who do not seek or want hormones or sex reassignment surgery.