

TALKING ABOUT GENDER & SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Guide to Inclusive Communication

Sexual orientation has to do with a pattern of attraction, behavior, identity, and social contact and may be different from *sexual preference*. Sexual partner preference suggests voluntary choice, while it is widely accepted today that sexual orientation is not a choice.

General Principles for Reducing Bias about Gender & Sexual Orientation

- Gender is cultural and refers to one's role, not one's biological sex. **Gender identity** is how a person thinks about themselves, for example: girl/woman, boy/man, transgender/gender non-conforming.
- Avoid sexist terminology based on demeaning assumptions or stereotypes about gender
- Ask: "What is your preferred pronoun?"
- Only mention gender or sex when it is necessary to do so.

Specific Words to Avoid and Words to Use When Communicating About Gender

Avoid	Use
Assuming, based on role or appearance, or using "he" as a generic pronoun for a person of either sex, or repeatedly using s/he.	Ask: "What is your preferred pronoun?" They, Them, She, Her, He, and Him are common preferences. Note that AP Style now accepts using gender-neutral third-person pronouns "they, them, their" to refer to a singular individual.
Businessman, chairman	Business chair, chairperson, head
Mankind	People, human beings, humanity
Man-made	Machine-made, synthetic, artificial
Mailman	Mail carrier, letter carrier, postal worker



Gender, Sex, Orientation & Expression

One of our favorite summaries of the gender-sex-orientation distinctions is the Gender-Bread Person illustration with key terms below that we first saw in a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) webinar.

GENDER-BREAD PERSON


GENDER / GENDER IDENTITY: How you, in your head, think about yourself. It is the psychological sense of self. For example, Girl/ Woman. Boy/ Man. Transgender/ Non-gender conforming.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION: Who you are sexually, physically, and emotionally attracted to, based on their gender/sex in relation to your own. For example, **Heterosexual**, which is female attracted to males, or vice-versa. **Homosexual**, which is female attracted to females, or vice-versa. **Bisexual**, which is female or male attracted to both females and males.

BIOLOGICAL SEX: Our anatomy as female, male, or intersex. It includes our internal and external sex organs, chromosomes, and hormones. **Female** biological anatomy includes the vagina, ovaries, and XX chromosomes. **Male** biological anatomy includes the penis, testes, and XY chromosomes. **Intersex** biology involves a combination of the two.

GENDER EXPRESSION: How you demonstrate your gender, based on traditional gender stereotypes. Gender expression is done through the ways you act, dress, behave, and interact. Gender is what everyone is around you can see, and is how you choose to express your gender. You can act, dress, behave, and interact however you choose!

Adapted from the Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA) Youth Network
<http://youth.wwda.org.au/gender-sex/>

 **Change Conversations** | <https://conversations.marketing-partners.com>

Five General Principles for Reducing Bias

- 1. When writing, speaking, or using images, aim to use examples that reflect a broad range of identities and perspectives.** Whenever possible, ask the preferred terminology. One person with a visual disability may prefer “blind,” while another person with a similar disability may prefer “person with low or limited loss of vision.”
- 2. Differences of any kind should only be mentioned when relevant.** Marital status, sexual orientation, racial and ethnic identity or the fact that a person has a disability should not be mentioned gratuitously.
- 3. Use the appropriate level of specificity.**
 - **Not specific:** Using the word “man” to represent humanity
 - **Specific:** More accurate would be using the phrase “men and women”
 - **Not specific:** At risk children
 - **Specific:** Children at risk for early school “dropout”
- 4. Be sensitive to labels.**
 - Avoid labeling people whenever possible.
 - If you must use a label, remember to call people what they prefer to be called, keeping in mind that these preferences can change over time. For example, rather than American Indian or Native American, many groups prefer to be referred to by their tribal name, for instance, “... members of the Cherokee tribe.”
- 5. Put the person first.** For example, people with diabetes” or “Mary, who uses a screen reader.”

Resources for Inclusive Language

This guide and guides on other topics of inclusive communication can be found at marketing-partners.com/guide-to-inclusive-language.