

Gender identities, including binary, non-binary and gender fluid.

Definition of Gender

The American Psychological Association (APA):

“The socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for different genders. In a human context, the distinction between gender and sex reflects the usage of these terms: Sex refers to the biological status of being male, female, or intersex, whereas gender implies the psychological, behavioural, social, and cultural aspects of gender.”

Gender identity is a person's deep, internal sense of being male, female, a blend of both, or neither, which may or may not match the sex they were assigned at birth.

Cisgender: When a person's gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth.

Transgender: When a person's gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.

Non-binary: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity falls outside the strict male/female binary.

Agender: Identifying as having no specific gender or feeling gender-neutral.

Genderfluid: Having a gender identity or expression that shifts or changes over time.

Gender identity is not the same as a person's sexual orientation (preference for physical attraction). A person's gender identity usually develops when they are very young. Most children and adolescents have a gender identity that corresponds to their birth assignment. A small percentage of children wish they were another gender instead of the gender assigned at birth. An individual's realisation that their gender identity differs from their birth assignment can occur as early as three years old, in childhood prior to the onset of puberty, or later in life (McNabb, 2018). This progression is similar to the awareness of same-sex attraction in childhood developing into using a specific sexual orientation/ sexuality term as a teenager.

Gender Binary

- Many argue that gender is the most significant part of a person's identity, and it has a large impact on how you perceive yourself and how others see and relate to you.
- The gender binary has shaped the history of psychology.
- The gender/sex binary refers to the belief that both sex and gender are binary, and that gender follows directly from sex.
- 'Sex' in this context refers to the biological makeup of an individual (such as their chromosomes and hormones), whereas 'gender' has been used to refer both to the cultural interpretation of sex (i.e. gender roles and stereotypes, what it means to be a woman or a man in a given society) and to gender identity (i.e. self-categorisation into the groups 'girls' and 'boys' or 'women' and 'men', respectively)
- The gender binary is the system that categorises gender into two mutually exclusive and fixed options: men/women; masculine/feminine.
- In Western cultures, the gender binary system can be understood as the hidden foundation upon which much of everyday life is built. Many argue that it is the foundation of gender inequality.
- This classification is often based on biological characteristics such as reproductive organs, chromosomes and hormones.
- In binary gender systems, individuals are expected to conform to the societal norms associated with their assigned gender at birth.
- Binary gender is deeply ingrained in many cultures and societies, shaping perceptions of masculinity and femininity and influencing all aspects of life including language, clothing and social roles
- Often, psychology can be seen to reinforce the gender binary through a prioritising of research that seeks to establish gender differences (link to science; objectivity/research bias)
- Failure to conform to, or challenging, the gender binary can lead to punishment (link to conformity, social control, deviation from social and cultural norms).

Support,

The role of chromosomes and hormones (testosterone, oestrogen and oxytocin) in biological sex	Biological definitions of sex are often based on chromosomes and hormones. Research frames these categories as the basis for distinguishing male and female. Historically, this perspective supports the binary by tying genes and hormones to two distinct categories. In essence, our biological sex determines our gender ('anatomy is destiny').
Biological explanations of gender development, including chromosomes and hormones	Biological explanations traditionally support the gender binary by linking gender to biological sex, arguing that gender traits and behaviours stem from biological differences between males and females. Consideration of material such as sex-specific hormones driving the physical and psychological differences between males and females. Hormones result in distinct male and female traits, e.g. testosterone is associated with traits such as aggression and competitiveness.

However,

Diversity in biological sex	The gender binary often rests on the assumption that there is a sex binary meaning that sex is dimorphic (i.e. two distinct, largely non-overlapping categories). Most individuals with two X chromosomes do indeed develop clearly female sex characteristics, and most individuals with an X and a Y chromosome develop clearly male sex characteristics. However, research from a range of disciplines such as biology, neuroscience and neuroendocrinology, challenge the idea that sex is binary, suggesting instead that sex is a spectrum. Diversity in sex development demonstrates biological diversity beyond the binary. Biologists argue that the view that having a Y chromosome is equivalent to being male is overly simplistic because there are many cases for which this is not true. For example, some individuals are born with a mixture of XY and XX cells or absorb XY cells during pregnancy. For others, chromosomes indicate one sex but gonads and other sex characteristics another. Yet for others, sex characteristics are ambiguous and neither clearly female nor clearly male.
Research which challenges biological explanations of sex/gender differences	The biological explanation of gender development explains gender development in biological terms. Challenges to this can also be valid in relation to the gender binary, i.e. that the idea of mutually exclusive gender categories is weakened by findings that the categories are more similar than different.

Non-binary

- Monro (2019) estimates that the earliest use of terms referring to non-binary identity is around 2000 and that genderqueer and non-binary identities share 'dis-identification' with rigid gender binaries.
- Monro (2019) describes 'non-binary' as an umbrella term that describes those whose identity falls outside of or between male and female, at different times, or someone who does not experience or want to have a gender identity.
- The Lancet Review (2020) state that it is important to note that some youths with a non-binary gender identity do not identify as transgender.
- Estimates of the numbers of non-binary people vary.
- According to official statistics, the proportion of the UK population who define as non-binary when given a choice between male, female and another option is 0.4% which is 1 in 250 people (Titman, 2014).
- The Government and Equalities Office (2018) found that of the 14,320 responses from trans people, almost 52% identified as non-binary. However, Nieder et al (2018) in a comprehensive review found that 80% of trans people identify as male or female, leaving 20% of individuals with an identity that falls outside or between male and female identities.
- According to Monro (2019), around a quarter to a third of trans people identify in some way outside the gender binary.
- Joel et al. (2014) found that, in a general population, over a third of people said that they were to some extent the 'other' gender, 'both genders' and/or 'neither gender'.
- A YouGov survey found that 19% of people disagreed with the statement 'you are either a woman or a man' and a further 7% were not sure.
- Globally many cultures recognise gender identities other than man or woman – the gender binary system that exists within many western societies is not a universal concept; many non-Western cultures have embraced multigender systems where gender identities other than man/woman are recognised.
- The Lancet ([Journal article titled 'Youths with a non-binary gender identity: a review of their sociodemographic and clinical profile' \(The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health\)](#)) states that 'there is a dearth of research focusing on the existence and experience of individuals who do not have a traditional, binary gender identity'.
- The Lancet Review points out that there are 'concerns regarding the vulnerability of people with non-binary identities because of their divergence from societal norms.'

Measuring the prevalence of non-binary,

The gender identity question

Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?

This question is voluntary

☐ Yes

☐ No

(Enter gender identity)

The gender identity question is voluntary. It will only be asked to respondents aged 16 years and over.

- The census question on gender identity was a voluntary question asked of those aged 16 years and over. The question asked, "Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?". Respondents were then asked to write their gender identity.
- Overall, 45.7 million (94.0%) of the population aged 16 years and over answered the question.
- In total, 45.4 million (93.5%) answered "Yes" and 262,000 (0.5%) answered "No".
- The remaining 2.9 million (6.0%) did not answer the question.
- 30,000 (0.06%) identified as non-binary.
- It is important to note that the question used in the survey has been criticized, and the ONS states, 'Gender identity estimates from Census 2021 are official statistics in development. This reflects their innovative nature and the evolving understanding of measuring gender identity, along with the uncertainty associated with these estimates'.

Office of National Statistics (Census 2021)

Gender Fluid

Gender fluid describes a person whose gender identity is not fixed and can shift or change over time. A person who is gender fluid may feel more masculine on one day, more feminine on another, feel both simultaneously, or feel no gender at all (agender). These changes can happen rapidly within a single day, or they can shift slowly over weeks, months, or years. Fluidity can apply to internal identity, external gender expression (clothing, hair, style), or both.

- A gender fluid identity falls under the non-binary umbrella. It is an unfixed and dynamic identity. Monro (2019) describes 'non-binary' as an umbrella term that describes those whose identity falls outside of or between male and female, at different times, or someone who does not experience or want to have a gender identity. Note here the inclusion of gender fluid. There is **no** standard definition of gender fluid. Gender identity is very personal, people may use the term 'gender fluid' differently.
- Katz-Wise (2020) states, 'Gender fluidity refers to change over time in a person's gender expression, gender identity or both. That change might be in expression but not identity, or in identity but not expression, or both expression and identity might change together.' She also points out that gender fluidity may be a way to explore gender before establishing a more stable gender expression or identity. For others, gender fluidity may continue indefinitely.
- People may wish to express their gender fluidity (for example) through their clothes, makeup, hairstyles, voice, pronouns. There is no one-size-fits-all way for gender fluid people to express their identity.
- Doyle (2022) found that non-binary adolescents may express more fluidity of their gender. In addition, the process of gender identity exploration and expression looks different for every individual and can evolve across an individual's lifespan.
- Katz-Wise et al (2023) notes that there is limited research focusing exclusively on gender fluidity.

