

## Gender Identity and Pronouns:

### Gender Identity:

Two terms that are often used incorrectly in everyday speech as synonyms are sex and gender. **Sex** reflects a person's anatomy, biology, genitalia, internal sexual organs, and chromosomal structure. **Gender** by contrast is socially constructed and refers to a person's self-image, the public perception of that image, and the individual's expression of sexual roles.

As a society, we often expect people to fit into one of two 'sex' categories - men or women. Within these categories we expect men to act in a "masculine" manner and women to act in a "feminine" manner. This produces a societal norm of cisnormativity, where it is expected that a person's gender will equate with their sex. However, there are lots of people who don't "fit" within this norm.

Our **gender identity** refers to our deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex we were assigned at birth, including our personal sense of our bodies. Expressions of gender identity may involve, if freely chosen modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means, and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms.

The term **transgender** can be used as an umbrella term to describe **gender variant** people who have gender identities not traditionally associated with their birth sex. **Transgender** can also mean anyone who *transcends* the conventional definitions of 'man' and 'woman'.<sup>1</sup>

### Gender Pronouns:

Nothing is more personal than the words people use to refer to us through our names and pronouns. While many of us are used to hearing binary pronouns, for example he/him/his for men and she/her/hers for women, these binaries no longer capture the broad range of gender identities and expressions. It is important not to assume anyone's gender identity, but to instead ask how they self-identify. Correctly using an individual's self-identified pronouns is an easy way to show respect. It is also respectful to drop the term "preferred" before pronouns, which is affirming for gender-non-conforming individuals. When meeting new people, you may consider introducing yourself with your own pronouns to help break down this barrier for others.

The EDI Committee encourages you to learn more about the range of gender identifications that exist and to actively challenge your understandings and norms around gender. We will be visiting teams through the month to discuss pronouns together and answer any questions you may have.



<sup>1</sup> Transgender is often mistakenly understood to mean **transsexual**. Transsexuals are but one component of the transgender umbrella. Transsexual refers to sex rather than gender, a biological emphasis that excludes psychological gender identity; transgender recognizes the extrabiological nature of gender.