

Sex vs. Gender

FACT SHEET

Introduction

The words "sex" and "gender" are often mixed up. "Gender" has increasingly taken the place of "sex" in legal documents. In professional and public language gender has been preferred because it does not have the double meaning of "sexual intercourse". But as the theory of gender identity has spread, confusion has arisen because some people are referring to sex and others to gender or gender identity.

Meaning of sex

The two sexes, male and female, are fixed at conception. Sex is either of the two main categories (male and female) into which humans are divided based on their reproductive functions.

Meaning of gender

While "gender" is often used as a synonym for biological "sex", the term has many meanings. "Gender roles" refers to the behaviour expected of and imposed on the two sexes, which vary across time and cultures and are often referred to as masculinity and femininity. Feminists are critical of gender roles that restrict a person's life and the common elevation of masculinity above femininity.

"Gender expression" refers to ways of expressing or presenting yourself that are related to your society's dominant gender roles or norms.

'Gender identity' is the claim that everyone has an inner "gender identity", and that when a person's beliefs about their gender identity conflict with their biological sex, it is the gender identity that determines the person's "true self". People who believe this use the word "trans" for people in whom body and gender identity are believed to be misaligned.

No one can change their sex

For humans, as for all mammals, it is impossible to change sex. It is possible to look more like a member of the opposite sex by using cosmetic or prosthetic aids (temporary and reversible) or cross-sex hormones or surgery (permanent and irreversible). However, a person's actual sex remains constant, even if they have taken measures to look like the opposite sex or changed their legally recorded sex.

Same sex attractedness

If the characteristic of "sex" is defined to mean biological sex, it aligns with the experiences of gays and lesbians who are attracted to the same sex. At times they would like the opportunity to socialise only with others of the same sex. For lesbians this is particularly important as they are increasingly under pressure to accept males (who say they are women) into their physical and online social spaces.

This has become an urgent issue as it has become increasingly easy for any man to claim the rights and status of a woman simply by declaring he 'identifies as a woman'. Transgender has become a very broad category, not necessarily involving body modification.

Homosexuals who have fought hard to enjoy dignity and freedom are now having rights forcibly removed from them.

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