Understanding Gender

The conversation about gender identity, expression, and identification is constantly evolving. People may interpret some of these terms differently, and these terms may change. This reflects the tremendous diversity of our community and reminds us that there is no one definitive way to understand who we are.

**Sex:** Biological, genetic, and/or physical characteristics that classify someone as male, female, or intersex. Also known as sex assigned at birth. Biological sex is different from gender.

**Gender:** Social, psychological, and/or emotional traits influenced by societal expectations that classify an individual as feminine or masculine. Individuals may be gender non-conforming, meaning they do not associate with what is society’s traditional idea of gender.

**Gender Identity:** The internal perception of one’s gender and how they label themselves—or choose not to label themselves. Gender identity does not always correspond with a person’s biological sex.

**Gender Expression:** How a person externally communicates their gender identity to others through ways such as clothing or mannerisms. Gender expression may include combinations of masculinity and femininity—or neither—through androgynous expressions. It is important to remember and respect that every gender expression is valid.

**Sexual Orientation:** Emotional, romantic, and/or sexual feelings toward other people. An individual’s sexual orientation is separate from their gender identity.

This message is a collaboration between Health Promotion and Wellness, The League of Extraordinary Genders, and PRIDE ISU. For more information, visit Wellness.IllinoisState.edu.