

Definitions

Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality

Nationality: A people having common origins or traditions and often constituting a nation.

Race: Groups of people who share similar and distinct physical or biological characteristics. Race is a social construct, which means that society deems which characteristics are significant or not. Historically, race has been used to discriminate against and oppress people who look different. It can also help people identify as a strong group and maintain their heritage.

Ethnicity: The shared traditions, customs, learned behavior, and language from the place where one's ancestors originated. It is possible for people to change aspects of their ethnicity by rejecting current practices or accepting practices from another ethnic orientation. **Assimilation** is when a child shares the attitudes, values, beliefs, and language preferences of the majority culture, rather than those of his or her ethnic culture. Individuals can be assimilated in some ways but not in others. **Ethnocentric** views are those which believe in the superiority of one's own ethnic group over others.

Belief: Mental acceptance of and conviction in the truth, actuality, or validity of something.

Sex, Gender, and Sexual Orientation

Anatomical sex: The sex assigned at birth by a doctor, such as girl or boy. Anatomical sex is based on physical anatomy and hormones. Other terms for anatomical sex include "biological sex," "sex assigned at birth," or simply "sex."

Gender: The attitudes, feelings, and behaviors a given culture associates with a person's anatomical sex, such as typical ways to dress or how to express emotions. Note that a person's gender is not always obvious, and a child may "look" a certain way, but that does not mean that he or she identifies in a certain way. **Gender role** is the expectations that a society has for someone based on his or her anatomical sex.

Gender expression: The ways in which people communicate or display their gender to others through behavior, clothing, hairstyle, voice, etc. These are often measured as "masculinity" and "femininity." A society's or culture's expectations about gender expression can change over time, and gender expression is not an indication of sexual orientation.

Gender identity: A person's internal sense of his or her gender. Common labels are "male" or "female," however some youth identify as male and female, or neither male nor female. Gender identity is separate from gender expression. **Two-Spirit** is a term traditionally used by some Native American people to recognize individuals who possess qualities of both genders. **Gender fluid** may be used to describe a person whose gender identity continually changes throughout his or her lifetime, or who does not feel confined to culturally-expected gender roles.

Transgender is an individual whose gender identity differs from his or her anatomical sex, for example a youth whose anatomical sex is male but who identifies as female. Some transgender youth begin to **socially transition** at a young age, meaning they may change their hair length, clothing, name, and pronouns to more accurately reflect their gender identity. **Cisgender** is a person whose gender identity and anatomical sex align, for example a youth who identifies as a woman and whose anatomical sex is female.

Sexual orientation: Emotional, romantic, and physical feelings of attraction. A **heterosexual** is someone who is attracted primarily to people of the opposite sex (often called “**straight**”). **Gay men** and **lesbians** are men and women who are attracted primarily to people of the same sex. **Bisexual** people are attracted to people of both sexes, while people who identify as **asexual** experience little to no sexual attraction.

Sexual orientation is not the same as sexual behavior. Youth do not need to have any particular sexual experience or any sexual experience at all to identify as straight, gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

LGBTQ is a common acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning. **Questioning** youth are those who are unsure and are sorting out what it means to be straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender and how they want to identify themselves. However, even though someone may question their sexual orientation or gender identity it does not mean that this is a choice, it only means that they need time to process it internally.

Some people prefer not to use such terms as lesbian or gay. For example, some youth in the African American LGBTQ community use the term “**same-gender loving**,” because for them, “gay” and “lesbian” is more connected to white lesbians or gays. Other people choose the term **queer**, which at one time was a derogatory slang term, but is now being embraced as a symbol of pride. The term **homosexual** is derogatory and out dated.

Coming out: The process of acknowledging one’s sexual orientation or gender identity to oneself and/or individuals in one’s life; often incorrectly thought to be a one-time event, this is a lifelong and sometimes daily process.

SOGIE (an acronym for **S**exual **O**rientation, **G**ender **I**dentify and **E**xpression): The SOGIE framework is used to show that at our core, all people have a sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression which shapes our experiences and needs. Like race, ethnicity, and nationality, the three SOGIE aspects may be related but are distinct. Affirming and supporting a youth’s SOGIE is critical to their general health and well-being.

References

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