

CHAPTER 1

Sex and Gender: Stories and Definitions

Key Questions

1. What are the differences between sex and gender?
2. How many options are available for sex and gender?
3. At what age did you begin to understand your gender identity?
4. We are all made up of many identities. Which of your identities feels most important to you? What are some things that make you you?
5. What aspects of your identity link you to a community of other people who are like you in some way?
6. When you get dressed to leave your home for the day, how much do your choices express your identity? As you get dressed, do you consider where you are going and the ways you would like others to see you?

Chapter Overview

Welcome to *Introduction to Transgender Studies*! The first two chapters of this book introduce you to definitions and concepts about sex, gender, gender expression, gender identity, and sexual orientation that will be used throughout this book. As you read, it is useful to remember that definitions can change quickly and may vary by geographic region, community, and larger social and cultural contexts. Historical context also becomes important as you consider these issues. You will encounter stories from a diverse group of people who give voice to these definitions; the stories of their lived experiences and intersecting identities will help you see how rich, nuanced, and interesting explorations of identity can be.

This first chapter explores the definitions and differences between sex and gender, two separate concepts that are not synonyms. After learning about the differences between sex and gender, you will also look at contemporary cultural assumptions about gender as a *binary*—that is, the idea that one is either a man or a woman. Gender identity and gender expression, however, often move beyond

the binary. As the book progresses, you will encounter historical definitions of sex, gender, and sexual orientation around the world, gaining insight into the ways that different cultures and societies have understood, valued, and given meaning to these aspects of identity.

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