**Gender Terminology from Gender Spectrum**

**Biological/Anatomical Sex.** The physical structure of one’s reproductive organs that is used to assign sex at birth. Biological sex is determined by chromosomes (XX for females; XY for males); hormones (estrogen/progesterone for females, testosterone for males); and internal and external genitalia (vulva, clitoris, vagina for assigned females, penis and testicles for assigned males). Given the potential variation in all of these, biological sex must be seen as a spectrum or range of possibilities rather than a binary set of two options.

**Gender Identity.** One's innermost concept of self as male or female or both or neither—how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One’s gender identity can be the same or different than the sex assigned at birth. Individuals are conscious of this between the ages 18 months and 3 years. Most people develop a gender identity that matches their biological sex. For some, however, their gender identity is different from their biological or assigned sex. Some of these individuals choose to socially, hormonally and/or surgically change their sex to more fully match their gender identity.

**Gender Expression.** Refers to the ways in which people externally communicate their gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, haircut, voice, and other forms of presentation. Gender expression also works the other way as people assign gender to others based on their appearance, mannerisms, and other gendered characteristics. Sometimes, transgender people seek to match their physical expression with their gender identity, rather than their birth-assigned sex. Gender expression should not be viewed as an indication of sexual orientation.

**Gender Role.** This is the set of roles, activities, expectations and behaviors assigned to females and males by society. Our culture recognizes two basic gender roles: Masculine (having the qualities attributed to males) and feminine (having the qualities attributed to females). People who step out of their socially assigned gender roles are sometimes referred to as transgender. Other cultures have three or more gender roles.
 **Transgender.** Sometimes used as an umbrella to describe anyone whose identity or behavior falls outside of stereotypical gender norms. More narrowly defined, it refers to an individual whose gender identity does not match their assigned birth gender. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation (attraction to people of a specific gender.) Therefore, transgender people may additionally identify as straight, gay, lesbian, or bisexual.
 **Sexual Orientation.** Term that refers to being romantically or sexually attracted to people of a specific gender. Our sexual orientation and our gender identity are separate, distinct parts of our overall identity. Although a child may not yet be aware of their sexual orientation, they usually have a strong sense of their gender identity.

**Gender Normative/Cisgender.** Refers to people whose sex assignment at birth corresponds to their gender identity and expression.

**Gender Fluidity.** Gender fluidity conveys a wider, more flexible range of gender expression, with interests and behaviors that may even change from day to day. Gender fluid children do not feel confined by restrictive boundaries of stereotypical expectations of girls or boys. In other words, a child may feel they are a girl some days and a boy on others, or possibly feel that neither term describes them accurately.

**Considerations in Gender Identity Development**

**Parental Socialization.** Some parents have rigid definitions of gender roles, gender expressions that are allowable, and/or how one’s biological sex is related to gender identity. Other parents have more flexible or even open notions of gender roles, gender expressions that are allowable, and/or how one’s biological sex is related to gender identity. The child’s own notions are heavily influenced by parental attitude and socialization.

**Peer Socialization.** Some children experience gender policing from peers, while others experience acceptance of a wider range of behaviors and identifications. Gender policing can be relatively innocuous – “Why do you dress like that?” – or very strict – “You can’t do that. You’re a boy. Gender policing takes form as acceptance/non-acceptance to bullying and harassment.

**Community Socialization.** Teachers, grandparents, neighbors, etc. teach the child different notions of gender in subtle and explicit ways. Different messages from different sources can lead to wider range of acceptable behaviors or to confusion around “what is right.”

**Societal Socialization.** Books, movies, TV, etc. teach the child notions of gender in subtle and explicit ways. In current US mainstream society, gender is portrayed as relatively binary and rigid, and non-congruence is portrayed as abnormal or wrong.

**Strength of Individual Identification.** Some children are very sure of their gender identity, while others may be unsure or fluid in how they identify. Some children’s self-identification is very persistent (they have the same conception of gender identity throughout their lives) while others’ self-identification may change over time.

**Pathologizing or Normalizing by Professional Fields (Medicine, Psychiatry, Psychology, Child Development, etc.)** Depending on the prevailing views of fields or individual professionals within the fields, gender nonconformity can be seen as a problem to be fixed or as a natural reality. Depending on the approach, the child can receive hostile or supportive messages about their identity and/or behavior.

**Temperament.** Children can have rigid or fluid temperament. Temperament can influence whether they tolerate ambiguity, whether they self-police according to gender rules of parents, peers, community, or society, or whether they experience pride or shame around conforming to or defying those rules.

**As one might infer, gender is a complex intersectionality of biological sex, gender identity, and gender expression. How children develop gender identity is influenced heavily by socialization from various sources, whether they are in a gender hostile or gender accepting environment, and where they lie on the cisgender to transgender spectrum.**