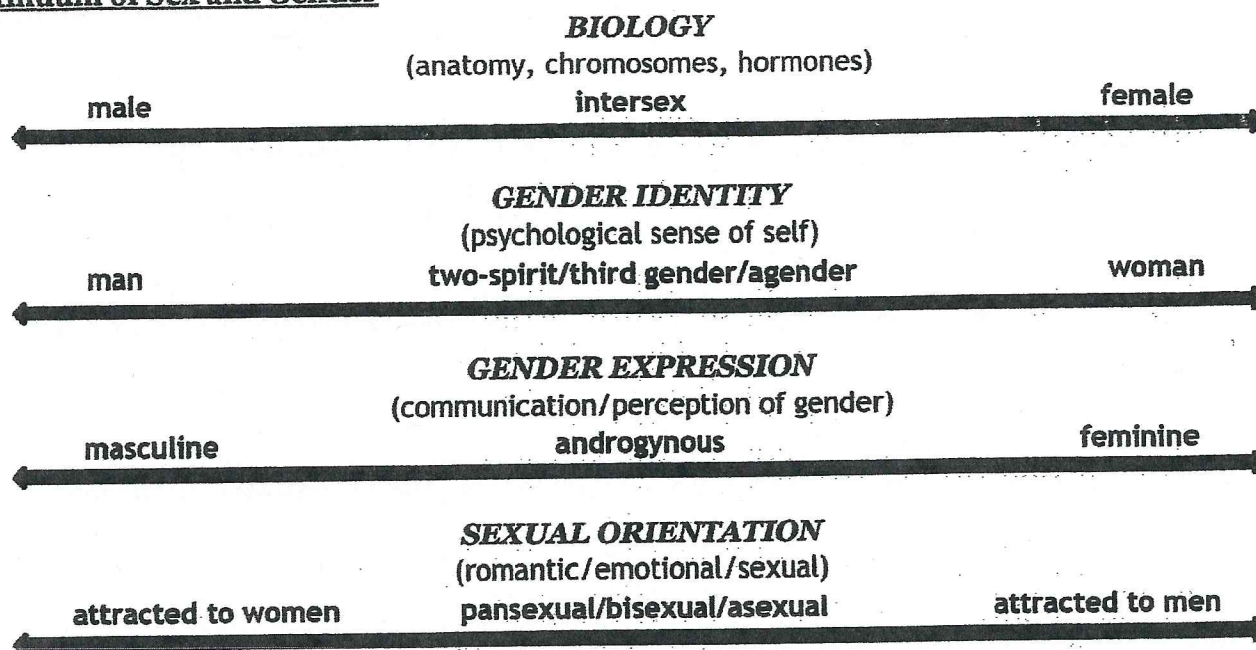


## Continuum of Sex and Gender



- **Biology** includes external genitalia, internal reproductive structures, chromosomes, hormone levels, and secondary sex characteristics such as breasts, facial and body hair, and fat distribution. These characteristics are objective in that they can be seen and measured. The scale consists not just of two categories (male and female) but is actually a continuum, with most people existing somewhere near one end or the other. The space more in the middle is occupied by intersex people who have combinations of physical characteristics such as an organ that could be thought of as a small penis or a large clitoris, or an XXY chromosomal pattern.

- **Gender Identity** is how people think of themselves and identify in terms of sex (man, woman). Gender identity is a psychological quality; *unlike biological sex*, it can't be observed or measured, only reported by the individual. *Like biological sex*, it consists of more than two categories, including those who identify as a third gender, two-spirit (both), or agender (neither).

- **Gender Expression** is everything we do that communicates our sex/gender to others: clothing, hair styles, mannerism, way of speaking, roles we take in interactions, etc. This communication may be purposeful or accidental. It could also be called social gender because it relates to interactions between people. Gender expression also exists on a continuum, with feminine and masculine at either end. In between are those who express their gender androgynously (neither masculine nor feminine) as well as those who express their gender at various points along the continuum.

- **Sexual Orientation** indicates who we are emotionally, romantically, and sexually attracted to. The ends of this scale are labeled "attracted to women" and "attracted to men". In the mid-range is bisexuality/pansexuality; there are also people who are asexual (attracted to neither men nor women). We tend to think of most people as falling into one of the two ends of the continuum (attracted to women or attracted to men), whether they are straight or gay, with only a small minority clustering around the bisexual/pansexual middle. Most people are in fact not at one extreme of this continuum or the other, but identify somewhere in between.

**NOTE:** Our cultural expectation is that men occupy the extreme left ends of all four scales (male, man, masculine, attracted to women) and women occupy the extreme right ends. For each scale, the popular notion that there are two distinct categories, with everyone falling neatly into one or the other, is a social construction. The human condition does not operate as a strict binary system. If we look at what actually exists, we see that there is much middle ground. Very few people are actually at the extreme ends, and there are people at every point along the continuum. Each continuum concept exists independently. It is important to avoid assuming that you know where a person falls on all of the continuaums just because you think you know where a person falls on one or two.

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