

GENDER DISCOURSE

It's important to talk about and be aware of the different genders, especially now, as society goes through phases of acceptance and rejection in equal measure. The **Mumbai Mix Team** brings you up to speed on the issue

It is usually a conversation that's swept under the rug; however, learning about sex, sexuality and gender is extremely important in this day and age. Whether you're trying to understand how someone around you is dealing with a new identity or you're explaining things to your child, here's what you need to know about the different genders. You'll be surprised that you know so little on the topic.

SEX & SEXUALITY

"You are born with, and have physically and socially identified with a sex because of biological anatomy. Gender, on the other hand, is something you identify with. If you're a male who feels like a woman, your sex is male, but your gender is woman," Niyazi Shah, sexuality and parenting coach, explains. Of course, there's a lot more to it than this basic and simple definition, but it makes for a good starting point for those who have never been part of the discussion. Since acceptance is still in its nascent stages in India, these terms may be new to you.

THE NAME GAME

Since the pronouns we are used to are sort of binary, it's important to make an effort to understand what people prefer to be addressed as. Richa tells us, "To me, it should be as simple as a name change. For example, Sachin may wish to be called *Harman*, because it is a name he identifies with more. It is always a good idea to ask the person rather than assuming when you say he/she/there."



Richa Vashista, mental health counsellor with Humusaid, an NGO that promotes LGBT rights, tells us, "What you think about yourself is your gender and who you feel attracted to is your sexuality." In an effort to clear up the confusion surrounding the issue, here's a brief introduction to some of the gender-related terms you should be aware of. However, we suggest getting involved with a community or support group in order to learn more about them!

Female & woman Yes, there's a difference! The term female is used to describe those who have female sex organs and who



- It's essential for us to be accepting towards identities that we are not yet used to develop female secondary sexual characteristics during puberty. The term woman is used to describe those who identify with a feminine manner, regardless of biological factors.
- Male & man** 'Male' is used if you are born with male sex organs, while the term man is used when you identify as masculine.
- Transgender** This may seem like a confusing term and is often controversially used, but this isn't a new term, having existed since the early '90s. It simply means that your gender identity matches your sex at birth.
- Bigender** Bigender is a term used when a person identifies with two gender identities. While some bigender individuals express male and female gender identities separately, others identify as two genders simultaneously.
- Transsexual** Transsexuals are people whose gender expression differs from their sex at birth.
- Transgender** We're often confused about how this differs from transgender, but it's actually quite simple. Like transgender individuals, transsexuals identify with the opposite sex, but some undergo surgical procedures or hormone therapy to transition from one sex to another. While one can't wholly change the sex you are born with (anatomy and genetics), transsexuals become what is often termed as recognisably male or female.
- Androgynous** Most people are already used to this term, and it's thanks, in part, to fashion. Used loosely to describe types of clothing as well, this refers to a sense of gender ambiguity, where styles and personalities are more fluid — you can't identify them as strictly male or female. The term first came into use in the 17th century and was even mentioned by philosophers like Plato. So, while the definition has been modified, like homosexuality, it's not a new idea.

THE CHANGES WE NEED

Social science researcher Dr. Jaya Goyal tells us, "Questioning gender and sexuality begins at a young age, during which the conditioning you receive helps you develop your identity about gender. When I go out with my daughter and she sees men dressed in women's clothes, she becomes uncomfortable. She is born as a man, but feels more comfortable in clothes we are used to seeing on women. I often also explain situations where they have changed their identity and are women now." One of the most important lessons that we must teach our children is that irrespective of gender, personal choice and compassion is most important.

LOOK WHO'S TALKING

Here's a look at people who've taken a positive step towards creating a more conscious, accepting society.

- Gender** Imagine a world without labels. It will take us a while to get there, but the team at Elle India helped start it with the FOCUS Photography Festival in 2015, where real people showcased work that transcended the boundaries of what people think is gender-appropriate.
- Sanjoli Lama, Nepal's first transgender model** Born as a boy named Nabin Wabla, Sanjoli Lama changed her gender once she moved to Kathmandu. After making a name for herself in the Nepali fashion industry, she was chosen to walk the ramp for the Lakme Fashion Week Summer/Resort 2017. She has now been featured in popular magazines such as *Navyata* and *Wave*.
- The heartwarming Vicks ad** With a heartwarming story of a young girl who was adopted by a transgender woman, the new advertising campaign by Vicks sheds a light on the life of Gauri Sawant, who had to go through a lot of problems in her life to be able to raise Gayatri. The advertisement that made this campaign go viral apart from telling us Gauri's story, also touches upon the life of sex workers and people with HIV as Gauri took Gayatri in her care after her biological mother died of AIDS.

MOVEMENTS WE LOVE

- In 2014, Facebook changed its gender options, adding up to 50 different choices for users who identified with a slew of different types and preferred pronouns.
- In January 2016, Wing Rainbow, a radio taxi company recruited LGBTQ members as drivers. It's expected to begin service this year.
- WhatsApp's homosexual love emoji was introduced in February 2016 to help the community express themselves better.
- In December 2016, the first transgender school (Sahaj International) was set up in India, aiming to provide education to children who had to drop out because of social stigmas.
- In 2017, Lucknow joined the ranks as another city to hold an LGBT pride parade — a big step to continue the legacy started in Kolkata 15 years ago.
- Being the first to start a phenomenon in the banking industry, HSBC Bank now provides 10 different gender titles for clients to choose from in the UK.



INCLUSIVE