

LEXICON

The International Consortium on Female Sport (ICFS)

Language is how we communicate with one another. With this **ICFS Lexicon**, we establish a basis for clear communication by providing words and setting definitions that will allow women to clearly articulate the objective reality of our physical bodies, so that sex-based discrimination cannot be ignored or obfuscated, whether this is done purposefully or inadvertently. We will also alert the user to words embedded in some sports policies that undermine the rights of women and girls to be accurately represented as we campaign to remove sex-based discrimination in sport. Accurate words and language are necessary for women and girls to be able to articulate their biology and the impacts of their sex in sport and in life. This language, like the biology of sex, is neither hateful nor hurtful. It is a necessary acknowledgment of reality and must take precedence over language of personal identification and beliefs in order to preserve the rights and safety of female athletes.

Sex: Either of the two categories (male and female) into which humans are divided on the basis of their reproductive and biological functions, as usually observed at or before birth and recorded on their birth certificate at the time of birth. Sex is immutable and unchangeable from conception and throughout the lifespan.

Female: Of or denoting the sex that can bear and nurse offspring. Female anatomy and physiology are organized around the production of large gametes (ova) and the ability to nurse infants, whether or not an individual female can or does produce gametes, give birth, or nurse.¹

Woman: An adult human female. An individual who has reached maturity, is of the human species, and a member of the female sex.

Girl: An immature human female. An individual who has not yet reached maturity, is of the human species and a member of the female sex.

Male: Of or denoting the sex that produces small, typically motile gametes (sperm). Male anatomy and physiology are organized around the production of small gametes and the ability to inseminate, whether or not an individual male can or does produce such gametes or fertilize any eggs.²

Man: An adult human male. An individual who has reached maturity, is of the human species and a member of the male sex.

¹ [Oxford Languages Dictionary](#)

² [Oxford Languages Dictionary](#)

Boy: An immature human male. An individual who has not yet reached maturity, is of the human species and a member of the male sex.

Sexual Dimorphism: Like all mammals, humans are either female or male based on their reproductive and biological functions. (See “female” and “male” above). Sometimes called natal or biological sex, sex is immutable. Mammals cannot change sex.

Biological Female: A term sometimes used for clarity; redundant, as it refers to a member of the female sex.

Biological Male: A term sometimes used for clarity; redundant, as it refers to a member of the male sex.

DSD (disorders or differences of sexual development), sometimes termed **VSD** (variations of sexual development) or **CCSD** (congenital conditions of sexual development): A condition in which a person’s sex-related anatomy appears to be atypical for their biological sex. These conditions are sometimes incorrectly referred to as “intersex.” The term “intersex” is contested by some with these conditions, given that it implies that they are neither female nor male, or that sex is “on a spectrum” when it is not. Contrary to the implication that “intersex” refers to an intermediate status, individuals with a DSD still fit the binary: one is either male with a DSD or female with a DSD. [Note: Many people with a DSD object to the inclusion of “I” for “intersex” in the LGBTQI+ acronym.]

Gender:

- a. A synonym for “sex” as a noun.³
- b. Evolving social roles, expectations, and stereotypes that are ascribed to sex or differentiated from sex and vary with time and culture. [Note: Given the ongoing, shifting meaning(s) ascribed to this word, using “gender” to mean “sex” should be avoided.]

Gender Identity: For some people: A personal, internal perception, subjective feeling, preference, or belief of belonging to, or associating with, a particular sex or neither sex or both, which may change with time and circumstance. [Note: Most people do not have a gender identity.]

Gender Dysphoria: A term used to describe an intense dislike or discomfort with one’s body or one’s sex.

³ USA Supreme Court Justice, Ruth Bader Ginsburg (RBG), was the first to use the word “gender” in place of “sex” in a legal document. She credits her secretary for this linguistic choice. The following excerpt makes it clear that in her mind “gender” meant “sex.” Here is the story as told by [NPR](#): “One strategy Ginsburg adopted was to use the phrase “gender discrimination” in her arguments, not “sex discrimination.” Decades later, on a panel honoring her at Columbia University, her law school alma mater, Ginsburg explained how she arrived at that linguistic choice: *“I owe it all to my secretary at Columbia Law School, who said ‘I’m typing these briefs and articles for you and there’s the word sex, sex, sex on every page!’”* Ginsburg told the audience. *“She said, ‘Don’t you know that those nine men to whom you are arguing, when they hear that word, their first association is not what you want them to be thinking about?’”*”

Gender Reassignment: An intentional act to facilitate a physical change in perception or expression of one’s “gender” (see definition above). Usually this implies intervention by a medical practitioner; the most common forms of medical treatment include (but are not limited to) hormone therapy and surgery in order to amend secondary sex characteristics. But the usage and/or definition of this term is not uniformly applied across the globe. For example, “gender reassignment” is a term used in the UK Equality Act to mean claiming a different gender identity, which does not necessarily involve medical intervention or body modification. [Note: Even in the UK, however, the original intent was that this term would refer to some form of medical intervention.⁴]

Transgender person: A male or female person who identifies as the opposite sex and/or with the sex stereotypes associated either with the opposite sex or neither sex due to either ‘gender dysphoria’ or personal preference. We use these phrases:

- **Male who identifies as transgender:** Any man or boy who calls himself trans, transwoman, trans-girl, trans-femme, demigirl, non-binary, gender fluid, or any related terms to describe his feelings about himself.
- **Female who identifies as transgender:** Any woman or girl who calls herself trans, transman, trans-boy, trans-masculine, demiboy, non-binary, gender fluid, or any related terms to describe her feelings about herself.

Non-binary person: A male or female person who declares him- or herself to have an internal perception of not belonging to or associating with either the male or female sex, or both, or alternating on different days based upon a feeling.

TERMS TO AVOID

Cis or Cisgender: Prefixes added to words like “woman”, “man”, “girl” or “boy” that purport to denote “opposite of trans,” but that many find to be insulting. “Cisgender” effectively reduces a person or group to being merely a subset of their sex. This term implies that there are, for instance, two types of women: “cisgender women” (females) and “transgender women” (males). This assertion is false. A man who claims to be trans is not a type of woman. There is only one type of woman (see definition of “woman” above).

Male-to-Female (M2F) or Female-to-Male (F2M): Since it is impossible to change one’s sex from male to female or from female to male, we do not use these terms.

Transathlete: A concocted term applied to a person claiming to be transgender who participates in sport. For any participant in sport, the term “athlete” is sufficient.

⁴ Original intentions of gender reassignment legislation in the UK resulting in the GRA (2004) assumed a three-stage transition process where Stage 1 is self-identification, Stage 2 involves hormones and Stage 3 surgery for most transsexual people and refers to physical transition throughout (Home Office 2000, 28).

Discrimination on the basis of sex-characteristics: This term has been used to denote discrimination against males or females who do not conform to cultural sex stereotypes. However, it is now being misused as a replacement for sex-discrimination. It has arisen recently to undermine advocacy for safety and fairness in women’s sports.⁵ It is a linguistic trick to undermine female-only sports policy. For example, if a man has breast implants (a “sex-characteristic”) to appear “feminine” and continues to be excluded from the female sports category, he might claim that the policy “discriminates on the basis of a sex-characteristic.” The term “**sex-characteristic**” CANNOT serve as a substitute for sex.

STATEMENT ON TERMINOLOGY

The terms listed above are those that will be used by members of **The International Consortium on Female Sport (ICFS)** whenever any one of us engages in conversation or presentation on behalf of the group. The following principles will dictate usage of these terms:

Principle 1. In order to protect the female athlete category, language and concepts referring to biology take precedence over language and concepts that represent gender self-identification. This includes the usage of biology-based pronouns.

Principle 2. We agree that the usage of biology-based terminology, including proper usage of pronouns, is not “hateful.” Indeed, it is confusing and illogical to apply gender-based pronouns to biology-based deliberations in the context of determining sports eligibility and related policies.

Principle 3. When the language of engagement is not English, members of the ICFS must use words in their respective languages that clearly and unequivocally refer to sex and the sex-based right of female athletes to have their own category in sport.

⁵ [UN Human Rights Council – April 2024](#)