Definition of Terms:
Sex, Gender, Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation

Excerpt from: The Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients, adopted by the APA Council of Representatives, February 18-20, 2011. The Guidelines are available on the APA website at http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/guidelines.aspx

Definition of Terms

Sex refers to a person's biological status and is typically categorized as male, female, or intersex (i.e., atypical combinations of features that usually distinguish male from female). There are a number of indicators of biological sex, including sex chromosomes, gonads, internal reproductive organs, and external genitalia.

Gender refers to the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex. Behavior that is compatible with cultural expectations is referred to as gender-normative; behaviors that are viewed as incompatible with these expectations constitute gender non-conformity.

Gender identity refers to "one's sense of oneself as male, female, or transgender" (American Psychological Association, 2006). When one's gender identity and biological sex are not congruent, the individual may identify as transsexual or as another transgender category (cf. Gainor, 2000).

Gender expression refers to the "…way in which a person acts to communicate gender within a given culture; for example, in terms of clothing, communication patterns and interests. A person's gender expression may or may not be consistent with socially prescribed gender roles, and may or may not reflect his or her gender identity" (American Psychological Association, 2008, p. 28).

Sexual orientation refers to the sex of those to whom one is sexually and romantically attracted. Categories of sexual orientation typically have included attraction to members of one's own sex (gay men or lesbians), attraction to members of the other sex (heterosexuals), and attraction to members of both sexes (bisexuals). While these categories continue to be widely used, research has suggested that sexual orientation does not always appear in such definable categories and instead occurs on a continuum (e.g., Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953; Klein, 1993; Klein, Sepekoff, & Wolff, 1985; Shiveley & DeCecco, 1977) In addition, some research indicates that sexual orientation is fluid for some people; this may be especially true for women (e.g., Diamond, 2007; Golden, 1987; Peplau & Garnets, 2000).

Coming out refers to the process in which one acknowledges and accepts one's own sexual orientation. It also encompasses the process in which one discloses one's sexual orientation to others. The term *closeted* refers to a state of secrecy or cautious privacy regarding one's sexual orientation.

*The 2011 guidelines replace the *Guidelines for Psychotherapy with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients* adopted by the Council, February 26, 2000, which expired at the end of 2010.