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Sidebar

What Constitutes a SGM Community?

Mathijs F.G. Lucassen, PhD, and Ana M. Ugueto, PhD, ABPP

[Dr Lucassen: We've moved this to a sidebar, since the reviewer felt the article worked better with that section removed and we think this is important information. Would you add a few sentences to start off the discussion and a few concluding thoughts?]

In the academic literature the terminology “sexual and gender minority” or SGM is commonplace. That is because SGM helps to succinctly encapsulate a diverse range of people, who often identify with multiple SGM identities. However, it is rare for young people to refer to themselves as SGM, instead (as summarized below) LGBTQ+-related terms are more likely to be used.

Typically, when an individual's sex assigned at birth differs from their gender identity (i.e., how they know themselves to be), they are categorized as transgender or gender diverse.² Thus, a person assigned male at birth who identifies as female is frequently described as a trans girl or trans woman (or simply just as a girl or woman).² Individuals who identify as nonbinary (i.e., not exclusively masculine or feminine identified) are also gender diverse, as they fit outside the male/female gender binary. Conversely, a young individual whose sex assigned at birth directly aligns with their gender identity is usually described as cisgender. Based on population-based data and other estimates, approximately 1% of young people are transgender.^{3,4}

It is important to note that LGBTQ+-related labels and terms continue to evolve. For instance, there has been some debate about whether or not the more established sexual identity labels (i.e., gay, lesbian, and bisexual) have now lost their meaning and relevance resulting in young people today being post-gay.⁵ These old labels still appear to be of value for the majority of sexual minority youth,⁵ alongside the meanings ascribed to more contemporary terms such as “pansexual” (i.e., attraction regardless of assigned sex or gender identity), “queer” (a reclaimed word), or developmentally relevant terms such as “questioning.”

Other unique subpopulations, which at times are grouped under the “plus” in LGBTQ+, include asexual and intersex individuals. Asexual individuals are those who lack sexual attractions to others. In the case of adolescents, however, it is important to consider developmental factors. For example, younger teenagers may report being “neither sex attracted.” This does not necessarily mean that they are asexual per se, but rather with age many are likely to start experiencing sexual attractions.⁶ Intersex individuals are born with biological or physical sex characteristics (e.g., sexual anatomy and hormonal variations) that are more diverse than those stereotypically linked to male and female bodies.⁷ Consequently, they are diverse in terms of their sex.

LGBTQ+ youth are also diverse in terms of other important demographic features, such as being from a racial, ethnic, or religious minority group, having a disability, having an overlapping identity (like being LGB as well as transgender), or any combination of these features.⁸ Unfortunately, there is still stigma associated with being anything other than exclusively heterosexual and cisgender.⁸ As a result, LGBTQ+ youth often remain hidden (what is known as in the closet) and subsequently can be hard-to-reach.

Language does matter, and although “sexual and gender minority” terminology is useful, particularly in the academic literature, it tends to be “technical jargon” which is not in common usage. When working with SGM youth it is therefore important to pay attention to the labels and their associated descriptions, as these are used by the young person. This also extends to using the patient’s correct pronouns (i.e. she/her, he/him or they/them), as indicated by the young person.