



Gendered Term Usage in Forensic Science Publications (2002-2024)



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INTRODUCTION

Sex and gender, though often used interchangeably, refer to two different concepts, the accurate specification of which is very important in the forensic sciences. "Sex" refers to the biological characteristics of an individual (i.e., genitalia, chromosomes) while "gender" refers to the social, cultural, and personal aspects that define how a person identifies in life (i.e., woman, nonbinary, two-spirit).

Those whose identities fall outside of the norm are victimized at higher rates (Human Rights Campaign, 2024).

It is crucial that those who work within forensics use these words and related terms correctly for proper identification, clarity in research, and to avoid perpetuating harmful ideas or stereotypes. For example, a misuse or misunderstanding of these terms can lead to a lack of identification of an individual whose sex may not match their gender.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) How has the use of gendered language in the Proceedings abstracts changed over 22 years (2002-2024)?
- 2) Are researchers across the forensic sub-fields using gendered terminology differently?
- 3) Are there sub-fields who are using terminology more accurately?

MATERIALS & METHODS

DATASET: American Academy of Forensic Sciences Conference Proceedings (2002-2024)

KEYWORDS: Gender, Transgender, Transgendered, Gender Queer, Non-Binary, Cisgender, Transsexual/Transsexualism, Sexuality, Queer, Transvestite/Transvestic, Trans, Gender Identity Disorder, Gender Identity, Gender Dysphoria, Gender Variant, Gender Non-Conformity/Non-Conforming, LGBT, LGBTQ, Bisexual, Intersex, Homosexual/Homosexuality

Year	Keywords Used	Total N/Per Year
2002	gender, homosexual	19
2003	gender, homosexual	8
2004	gender, homosexual	9
2005	gender	11
2006	gender, homosexuality, transgender	10
2007	gender, homosexual	9
2008	gender, transgender(fed), gender identity, gender identity disorder, transsexual(fed), transsexual, sexuality, gender varied, same sex sexuality	12
2009	gender, homosexual, gay, bisexual	15
2010	gender	10
2011	gender, transgender, transsexual, gender identity, gender identity disorder, sexuality, homosexuality, same sex desires	10
2012	gender, transgender, gender non-conforming, gender identity, gender identity disorder, gender variant, homosexual, homosexuality, intersex(fed), gay, lesbian, bisexual, gender variance	8
2013	gender, transgender, gender variant, MTF, FTM, sexuality, homosexual	20
2014	gender, homosexual, transsexual	12
2015	gender, gender identity, transgender, gender dysphoria, transsexual, sexuality	26
2016	gender, homosexual, transgender, trans, transsexual, sexuality, gender identity, gender non-conforming	32
2017	gender, transgender, LGBTQ, gender queer	24
2018	gender, transgender, transsexual, homosexual	26
2019	gender, gender identity, gender non-conformity, LGBT, LGBTQ, transgender, trans transgender(fed), sexuality, homosexual, homosexuality	23
2020	gender, transgender, gender identity, gender variant, trans, gender dysphoria, cisgender	24
2021	gender, transgender, gender non-conforming, queer, sexuality, non-binary, trans, gender identity, LGBTQ	24
2022	gender, transgender, gender non-conforming, gender variant, gender dysphoria, queer, cisgender, trans, gender identity, LGBTQ	32
2023	gender, transgender, gender identity, gender variant, cisgender	20
2024	gender, gender transman, transgender, trans, sexuality, LGBT	24

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

EXAMPLES OF INCORRECT TERMINOLOGY USE IN AAFS PROCEEDINGS ABSTRACTS

GENERAL

ABSTRACT: "Anthropological measurements also gave an evaluation of fetus biological age and gender" (2022)
PROBLEM: Fetuses do not have a gender.

ABSTRACT: "Variations in biometrical qualities can be related to factors such as height, weight, gender, heredity, and others"(2024)
PROBLEM: Biometrical qualities can be related to sex but not the societal construct of gender.

ABSTRACT: "Model calculations of alcohol concentration may have differing applicability to subjects within a demographic group involving gender, age, weight, height, and body mass index (BMI)" (2010)
PROBLEM: Alcohol affects sexes, not genders.

PATHOLOGY/BIOLOGY

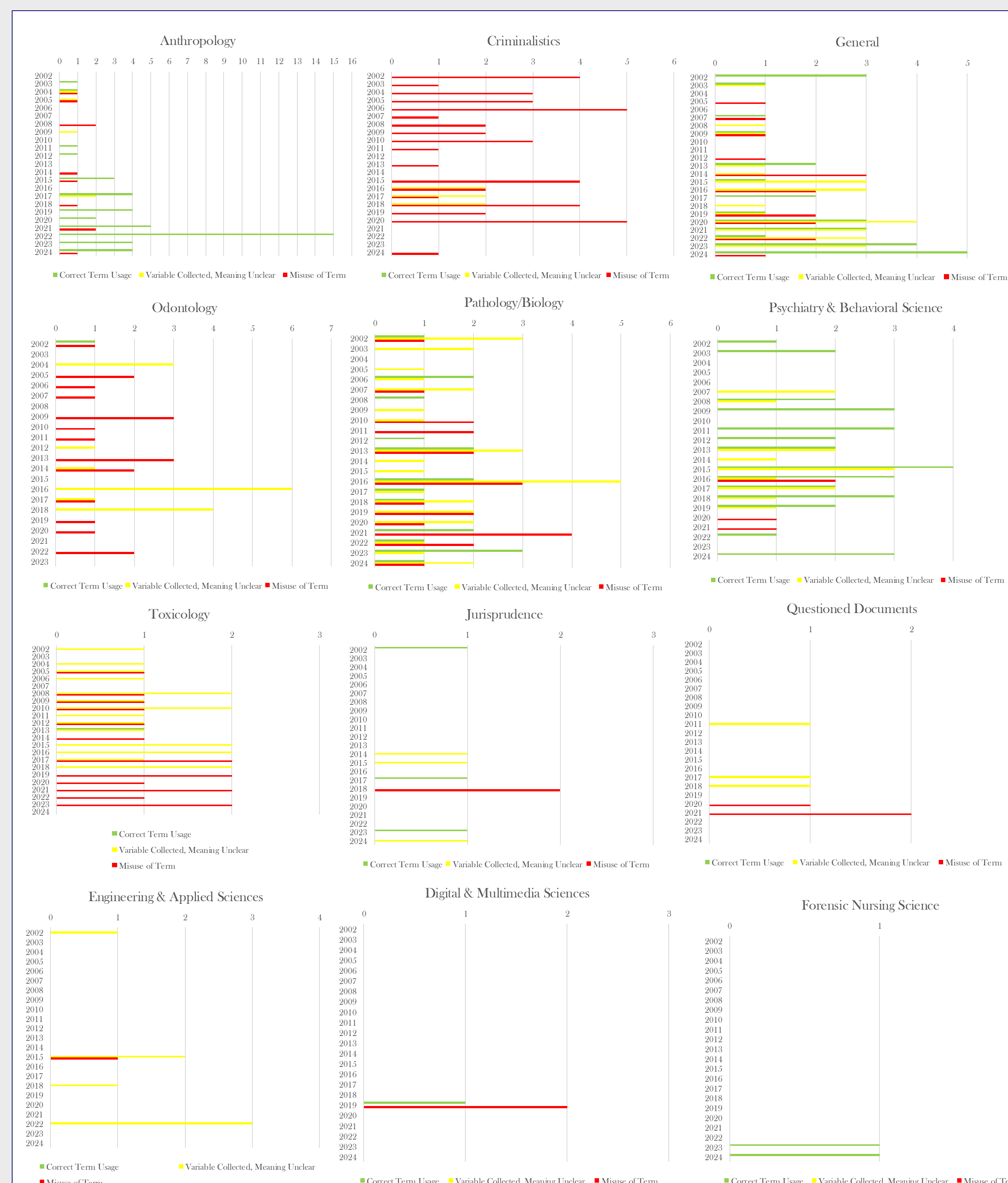
ABSTRACT: "Forensic microbiome is a discipline that utilizes this microbiome from a forensic standpoint, applying it to determine the suspect's gender..." (2024)
PROBLEM: Microbiome cannot be used to determine a suspect's gender as this is defined by societal and not biological factors.

ODONTOLOGY

ABSTRACT: "... a new method in gender determination using odontometrical techniques... indicative of sexual dimorphism" (2007)
PROBLEM: Odontometrical methods can estimate sex due to sexual dimorphism. 'Gender' and 'sex' are used interchangeably.

CRIMINALISTICS

ABSTRACT: "A new STR multiplex kit from Applied Biosystems...contains reagents necessary to amplify 15 tetranucleotide short tandem repeat loci and the gender identification locus Amelogenin in a single PCR reaction"(2002)
PROBLEM: STR kits determine sex, not gender, using differences between X and Y chromosomes.



- Anthropology, followed by Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences, utilize gendered terms most appropriately.
- 'Gender' was the most utilized keyword and most frequently misused term (often used interchangeably with, or in place of, 'sex'). Three abstracts reference nonhuman animals or plants.
- Many abstracts recorded gender as a variable, but not enough information was given to infer if its usage was correct.
- The term 'transsexual' was misused in all but two instances.
- Terms such as 'homosexual,' 'LGBTQ,' 'queer,' 'sexuality,' 'transgender,' and 'gender identity' were largely used correctly.

CONCLUSIONS

Outdated and inaccurate language in case reports and research may be reproduced in government systems (e.g., NamUs) where accurate reports are critical for making missing persons matches and achieving positive identification.

Language in forensic science research and casework should be updated to align with the DSM-5-TR (2022) when referring to identified and unidentified decedents, so that all forensic science output is standardized, inclusive, and accurate.

The conflation of the terms "sex" and "gender" can lead to fewer identifications of individuals who are disproportionately at risk. Forensic scientists should understand the differences between these words and must do better.

Practitioners should remove and correct outdated and inaccurate terminology out of respect for decedents and to ensure a greater chance of identification and case closure.

