



Our Calling Is To Prevent Falling.

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Consider a Unique Perspective to Falls - Gender Identify

By: Christina Crawford, PT, DPT, PhD

Our communities and organizations are striving to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion. Looking at and understanding falls and fear of falling is no different. Gender is a unique perspective. Gender is the socially and culturally influenced expression and identify of an individual. Conversely, sex is considered a biological state. Most research includes sex labeled as male or female subjects. We typically speak about the difference between males and females when it comes to falls. The tendency is to assume older females are frail and vulnerable. This leads to the assumption that older females are the population most in need of fall prevention information. Looking at sex alone may create a false expectation that males are without concern. Sex alone is not enough. We know males fall. This traditional perspective is not inclusive.

Gender has a range of classifications such as gender roles, identity, relations, etc. In this discussion, gender identity will be explored. Gender identity is how we see ourselves and it is a fluid personality trait. It considers the expression of two traits: masculinity and femininity. Someone might be extremely feminine or masculine. Alternatively,

someone might express both traits making themselves androgynous. Conversely, someone that does not express either masculinity or femininity, would be considered undifferentiated. Gender identity is not rigid but something that changes as influenced by family, peers, or society. The individual seeks to express traits that are perceived as most desirable or appropriate.

Prior research found feminine individuals might be more expressive and tend to demonstrate strong help seeking behaviors. Individuals that are masculine demonstrate a strong locus of control and problem-solving skills. Individuals that are androgynous are suggested to be adaptable and resilient. The undifferentiated individual is not as well researched but is considered the less responsive and nurturing than the other gender identities.

Sex does not need to align with an expected gender identity. In other words, not all females are feminine and not all males are masculine. Roughly 25-40% of the population might align that way, whereas about a quarter of the population is androgynous. Males and females may be masculine, feminine, androgynous, or undifferentiated. Gender identity



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may be situational and can change over our life course. It is a flexible personality trait and should only be identified by the individual.

You might be asking yourself; how does gender identity relate to falls? Recent research found gender identity predicted if older males had a history of falling. In this study, masculinity was expressed more by the male fallers compared to male non-fallers. The masculine fallers specifically expressed having a 'strong personality'. Strong personality and masculinity each predicted a fall history among older males. These findings were not

Gender Identify- Continued from pg 1

present among older females in the study.

The study then looked at fear of falling. Androgynous fallers were the group found to be a predictor of fear of falling. Prior research considered androgyny as resilient personality trait. Perhaps the androgynous faller is expressing resiliency by opening about the concern around falling. Having a fear of falling requires awareness about oneself and their environment. Fear of falling can only be addressed once there is a willingness to share it with others. More literature may be needed to explore the dynamics of androgyny and fear of falling amongst older adults.

As a community, we are focused on preventing falls. In this effort, we must understand the experience of falling as much as we seek to understand the individual. When someone speaks about a fall or fear of falling, there is a cognizant and emotional consideration tied to it. Gender identity is similar. Embracing the diversity of gender identity as it pertains to fall prevention is encouraged. We are more dynamic than a biological label such as sex. Consider looking at gender in the literature and seeking to understand how we as a community influence gender. Explore marketing material and program development that considers the personality aspects of gender identity. Be different. Be inclusive.

Crawford, C. (2021). Gender Identity in Older Adults: Predicting Fear of Falling and Fall Identity ProQuest Capella University. 28316131.

STEADI Stopping Elderly Accidents, Deaths & Injuries

Are you looking for additional resources or training material for your staff or organization? Check out the CDC's program Stopping Elderly Accidents, Deaths & Injuries (STEADI) at <https://www.cdc.gov/steady/index.html>.

The website is full of videos, handouts, and training material to use for patients or clients, caregivers, and staff.

These resources include basic information about:

- Falls
- Screening options
- Information on medications linked to falls
- Standardized gait and balance assessment tests
- Online trainings that offer continuing education



Please consider joining one of our committees to help advocate for fall prevention in our communities & state!

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Join Us!

Join us at our general council meetings on the third Thursdays from 10:00am-11:30am.

~~January 20, 2022~~

~~March 17, 2022~~

May 19, 2022

July 21, 2022

September 15, 2022

November 17, 2022



*Register on our website as a member to have the meeting link emailed to you.

We want to know what you are doing to promote and prevent falls in your community! Do you have a program or event that you want to share with our members?

E-mail afpceduchair@gmail.com to submit your article.

Please keep your article submission to 600 words.



If you are interested in being a part of our editorial team please reach out to Lianne afpceduchair@gmail.com

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