

# Watershed Counseling & Consultation Services

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## Words and Terminology Related to LGBTQ+ Individuals

Words and terminology differ based on a range of factors such as region, language, race, ethnicity, age, culture. Language is also ever evolving and therefore new definitions, meaning, and terminology appear/change over time.

**Agender:** A gender identity in which a person does not identify with a gender.

**Aromantic/Aro:** A romantic orientation generally characterized by not feeling romantic attraction or a desire for romance. Aromantic people can be satisfied by friendship and other non-romantic relationships. Many aromantic people also identify with a sexual orientation, such as asexual, bisexual, etc. There is a difference between romance and sexual activity.

**Asexual/Ace:** is an umbrella term that encompasses a broad range of sexual orientations generally describing a lack of or no sexual attraction, interest, or desire for sexual activity. A person who is asexual may have little or no interest in having sex yet may desire emotionally intimate relationships. Asexuality is different from celibacy, which is the deliberate abstention from sexual activity, despite sexual desire. There are many diverse ways of being asexual. A person who does not experience sexual attraction may experience other forms of attraction such as physical attraction, emotional attraction, and romantic attraction.

**Biological Sex** - is the biological attributes such as anatomy, chromosomes, and hormones that inform whether a person is male, female, or intersex. The assignment of a biological sex may or may not align with how a person identifies. Many people who are TGD use the words “assigned sex at birth” rather than “biological sex” acknowledging that someone else (i.e., a doctor) made the decision for them. It is useful to remember that sex refers to biology, while gender refers to the cultural and social understandings that are layered on top of biology.

**Cisgender** - an individual whose gender identity and gender expression align with the sex assigned at birth.

**Consistent/ Persistent re: One’s Gender Identity** - is a commitment to one’s gender identity asserted across multiple settings from the time when a person begins to live as the gender with which they identify rather than the gender they were assigned at birth. “Insistent” is not used in this case since not all people express themselves in an insistent manner. Some individuals also choose not to use the terms consistent or persistent as well.

**Deadnaming** – Using or referring to an individual by their prior name that does not reflect their identity.

**Demisexual:** Individuals who only experience sexual attraction once they form a strong emotional connection with another person.

**Gender** - refers to socially determined characteristics, roles, behaviors, and attributes a society expects from and considers appropriate for males and females; these characteristics are often referred to as “feminine” and “masculine.”

**Gender Affirming:** A broad term encompassing, language, actions, medical care, etc. that affirms and supports someone's gender identity and/ or expression.

**Gender Binary** - is the socially constructed classification of gender into two discrete, distinct, static, and opposite categories of gender, female and male. This model is limiting and does not take into account gender diverse individuals. Gender non-binary describes gender identity on a continuum and thereby accounts for the range of how individuals identify in regard to their gender.

**Gender Diverse** - is a term that conveys a wider, more flexible range of gender identity and/or gender expression than typically associated with the binary gender (male/female) system. People may identify and/or express themselves in ways that broaden the culturally defined behavior or expression associated with one gender. Gender diverse often serves as an “umbrella term” for people who do not meet the “traditional” understandings of gender and who do not want their gender to be defined in a box. Gender diverse is not synonymous with transgender; not all gender diverse individuals identify as transgender. Some individuals may choose to use gender expansive or non-binary rather than gender diverse.

**Gender Expression** – refers to the ways a person's gender identity is externally communicated to others through appearance, behavior, or physical characteristics. It may be in accord with, or differ from one's physical anatomy, chromosomal sex, or sex at birth.

**Gender Fluid** - is used by people who do not identify as having a fixed gender in regard to time and/or identifiers. Described as having a dynamic rather than a static gender expression and/or identity. A gender fluid person may feel they are more female on some days/weeks/years, more male at other times, or possibly feel that neither term fits to them at all.

**Gender Identity** - is a person's innermost concept of self as male, female, a combination of both or neither - how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity may change over one's lifetime, or it may remain the same throughout one's life. It may be the same as the gender one was assigned at birth, or it may be a different gender. The responsibility for determining an individual's gender identity rests with the individual.

**Gender Minority (GM)** - individuals who have a gender identity or expression that differs from their assigned sex at birth or that does not fit within the male–female binary. This term encompasses transgender, genderqueer, and gender nonconforming individuals, as well as those who have another self-identified gender. It is used more as a descriptor in research etc. rather than as a day-to-day self-descriptor by a person.

**Gender Nonconforming** - describes an individual whose gender identity or gender expression differs from the gender norms associated with the sex they were assigned at birth.

**Genderqueer** - is an individual whose gender identity is outside of the traditional gender binary system of female and male. They may view themselves as both female and male, neither female nor male, moving between genders, a third gender, or outside of gender categories altogether. Genderqueer may also refer to people who do not follow traditional gender stereotypes and is also used by people who identify as gender diverse, transgender and/or queer. It is worth noting that many people who use this term do not find the word “queer” to be a derogatory term as in the past, rather a word that has been reclaimed and embraced.

**Gender Transition** - is the process by which some people strive to more closely align their internal knowledge of gender with their outward appearance. Some people socially transition, whereby they might begin dressing, using names and pronouns and/or be socially recognized as another gender. Others may undergo physical transitions in which they modify their bodies through medical interventions. Others may include legal transitions such as legally changing their name. Not every person who is transgender wants to transition from male to female or from female to male. Some people identify somewhere along definitions of gender, and others transition to not being any one gender.

**Intersex** - is a person born with biological sex characteristics (such as genitals or chromosomes) that do not fit the typical definitions of male or female.

**LGBTQ+** - is an acronym that stands for “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning.” Questioning incorporates those who are uncertain about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. The “+” symbol is added to acknowledge other descriptors exist. Sometimes an “I” for intersex and “A” for asexual are added to the acronym.

**Non-binary** - (see “Gender diverse”)

**Omnisexual** - A sexual identity where a person is attracted to people of all genders and all sexual orientations. People who are omnisexual recognize the gender of potential partners whereas people who are pansexual experience attraction to people without noticing their gender.

**Pronouns** - refers to the pronoun a person uses when referred to in conversation. A range of pronouns exist including she, he, they, ze. Avoid adding adjectives such as “preferred,” “chosen,” or “requested” before a person’s pronoun or using when using the word “name” in relation to a TGD person.

**Queer** – an umbrella term used to describe gender/sexual/romantic orientations or identities that fall outside of societal norms. Although considered a slur or epithet against LGBTQ+ people in the past, many individuals today have reclaimed / embraced the word and self-identify as queer.

**Questioning** – the process of exploring one’s own gender identity, gender expression, and/or sexual orientation.

**Pangender / Polygender** - a gender identity and/or gender expression that consists of more than one gender and may be either fixed (many at once) or fluid (moving from one to another, often more than two). Individuals who identify having two genders may identify as bigender.

**Pansexual** - A sexual identity where a person is attracted to all types of people regardless of gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation. People who are pansexual often say they experience attraction to people without noticing their gender, while omnisexual people recognize the gender of potential partners.

**Polyamory/Poly/Polyam** - consensually being in/open to multiple loving relationships at the same time. Some polyamorous people consider “polyam” a relationship orientation. Used by some as an umbrella term for all forms of consensual, ethical, and loving non-monogamy.

**Polysexual** – to have romantic, sexual, and/or affectional desire for more than one gender. Differs from polyamory.

**Sex / Sex Assigned at Birth** - the medically constructed categorization and assignment of individuals at birth often based on appearance of the genitalia during ultrasounds or at birth. Sex assigned at birth is different from gender identity. Sex is not always binary as in female or male, such as for Intersex individuals. A person may describe themselves as AFAB (assigned female at birth) or AMAB (assigned male at birth), but these terms are often not used so as to avoid erasing a person's identity as a woman or a man. It is best to use a person's self-description as well as the pronouns the person uses.

**Sexual Orientation** - an inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to other people, including but not limited to heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, lesbian, gay, and queer. Sexual orientation is different from gender identity or gender expression. For example, in regard to sexual identity, TGD individuals may identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or heterosexual.

**SOGI** - is an acronym for Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression. Use by some similar to using umbrella acronym: LGBTQIA.

**Straight** - a romantic and/or sexual orientation in which a person is attracted to people of a gender other than their own. Also referred to as heterosexual.

**TGD** - is an acronym that stands for "transgender and gender diverse."

**Transgender** - is a word used to describe a person whose sex assigned at birth does not correspond with their gender identity. A transgender person's gender identity differs from their gender assigned at birth, and their gender expression consistently varies from stereotypical expectations and norms. In short, people who identify as a different gender from the sex they were assigned at birth are transgender.