

## Watershed Counseling & Consultation Services

Watershed - *An essential point that marks a change of course; a turning point often involving support and movement*

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### Terminology Related to Transgender & Gender Diverse (TGD) Individuals

*Understanding the terminology associated with gender identity and expression is important in providing a safe and supportive environment for all individuals. These are the commonly used terms, though individuals may choose to use other terms. Terminology and language describing transgender and gender diverse (TGD) individuals can differ based on region, language, race, ethnicity, age, culture and many other factors. Language is ever evolving, therefore new terminology comes forth on a regular basis. It is useful to inquire which terms an individual chooses to use.*

**Biological Sex** - is the biological attributes such as anatomy, chromosomes, and hormones that inform whether a person is male, female, or intersex. Many people who are TGD use the phrase “assigned sex at birth” rather than “biological sex” thereby acknowledging that someone else (i.e., a doctor) made the decision for them. Therefore, the assignment of a biological sex may or may not align with how person identifies. In addition, keep in mind 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.

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

**Gender Fluid** - is used by people who do not identify with a fixed gender in regard to time and/or identifiers. The focal point is that of dynamic rather than static gender expression and/or identity. For example, fluidity may be in regard to both time and labels: A gender fluid person may feel they are more female on some days/weeks/years, male on others, or possibly feel that neither term describes 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.

**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 its 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. Not every person who is transgender wants to transition from male to female or from female to male and other people believe they fall somewhere in between such binary definitions of 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.

**Name** - (a person's chosen name rather than "preferred name") is the name a person chooses to use when referred to in conversation and/or on records.

**Non-binary** - (see "Gender diverse")

**Pronouns** - ("pronouns" or "chosen pronouns" rather than "preferred pronouns") refers to the pronoun a person chooses to have used when referred to in conversation. Please note that a

person may choose to go by they, ze (a range of pronouns exist), or no pronouns. Using "preferred" to qualify someone's pronouns suggests that terms they are claiming do not really belong to them — they are just *preferred* over their "true" pronouns. A person who is TGD and uses "he" as a pronoun does not just prefer that word over "she" — that is the pronoun to use in reference to him. Rather than asking someone's preferred pronouns, ask, "What pronouns do you use?"

**Queer** - is a word used to describe people who transgress culturally imposed norms of heterosexuality and gender identity. Many individuals embrace the word today and use it as a more concise word rather than the acronym LGBTQ. Others do not use the word because of its previously derogatory connotation.

**Questioning** - is a term that may be used to describe someone who is unsure of or undecided about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

**Pangender** - 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. Generally considered a more inclusive term than bisexual.

**Sex Assigned at Birth** (aka, assigned sex at birth) - The assignment and classification of individuals at birth, including but not limited to male, female, or intersex and the related physical differences between the sexes, such as pregnancy.

**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 and gender identity are different. TGD individuals may identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or heterosexual. Sexual orientation is different from gender identity or gender expression.

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

**Trans-affirmative** - being aware of, respectful and supportive of the needs of transgender and gender diverse individuals.

**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. A person who is transgender may want to live by a gender that differs from that which was assigned at birth. In short, people who identify as a different gender from the sex they were assigned at birth are transgender.

**Transition** - is the process in which a person goes from living and identifying as one gender to living and identifying as another. Each transgender person has a unique process in which they go from living and identifying as one gender to living and identifying as another. Gender transition can occur at any age. It begins internally then expands to external expression. This can include social, medical and/or a legal transition.