



Gender fluidity

Best practice guidelines

Recommended supplement: Pronouns and gender inclusive language

Definition

Gender fluidity describes the experience of one's gender shifting dynamically over time. For people who experience gender fluidity, their gender is not a static thing and it can change. The frequency of this change can be daily or yearly—or somewhere inbetween—and varies from person to person.

Genderfluid people can (and often do) experience their gender shifting between multiple genders outside of the male/female gender binary. While some people only experience gender shifts between male or female, many also spend time experiencing their gender as nonbinary, agender, a third gender, or something else.

It is also important to recognise that gender fluidity is not the same as being trans or transgender. A trans person might transition from the gender they were assigned at birth to the gender they identify with, but this does not mean that their gender shifts or changes over time like a genderfluid person's might.

Labels and descriptors

Whether or not to use descriptive labels for one's identity is reliant on the personal preference of the individual. Genderfluid is one term that people may use to help explain their identity, and may be combined with other terms.

Some people who experience gender fluidity may also identify as transgender, though not all do.

Some genderfluid people may also use other descriptors of their gender, sometimes many interchangeably, including **nonbinary**, **agender**, **bigender**, **genderqueer**, **demiboy**, **demigirl**, and others. There are innumerable ways that people choose to identify themselves and describe their genderfluid

v.1.0 | Updated June 2021

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experience. The best way to know how to describe someone is to ask in a respectful manner or listen to the way they describe themselves.

Gender shifts

When genderfluid people experience shifts in their gender, it is an internal feeling, experience, or knowledge that they have about themselves. There isn't a way to definitively know, as an observer, that a gender shift has happened unless the genderfluid person confirms that it has.

The most respectful thing to do is not to rely on visual 'tells' when someone's gender has shifted but rather to ask that person directly (if appropriate) or create inclusive spaces where that person feels welcome to share their experience of gender.

Presentation

When a genderfluid person's experience of their gender shifts, as stated above, there is not always an immediate or outward manifestation of that shift. That is because a person's gender and a person's presentation are separate aspects of their identity, and one does not necessarily predict or mandate the other; this is true in all people's experience of gender and presentation.

Although they are often tied to each other in certain ways, gender is an internal knowledge or experience, while presentation is an outward manifestation. For example, a person could be male and choose to present in a feminine way. Their gender does not demand that their presentation be restricted to a certain kind of expression, and their presentation does not necessitate a certain gender be attached to it. They are all different facets of a person's experience and identity.

Along those lines, while all genderfluid people experience shifts in their internal experiences of gender, each genderfluid person may have a different relationship between their gender and their presentation. Some of the many ways that a genderfluid person may decide to change their presentation based on the gender they are experiencing at the time include:

- Name
- Pronouns
- Mannerisms
- Vocal tone or speech patterns

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- Clothing
- Accessories (presence or style)
- Make up (presence or style)
- Hairstyles or hair length
- Nail polish (presence or style)
- Facial hair (presence or style)
- Body hair (presence or style)
- Personality traits or interests

Pronouns

Genderfluid people use a variety of pronoun arrangements as a part of their gender expression or presentation.

For some, the pronoun they want others to use when referring to them changes with their gender. For example, someone might ask that he/him be used on days this person experiences gender as male, she/her when female, and they/them when nonbinary.

Others use the same pronouns all of the time; often it is a gender neutral pronoun such as they or xe, though not always.

Some genderfluid people use multiple sets of pronouns all of the time. For example, one person might use he/him, she/her, and they/them interchangeably; one person might use he/him as well as they/them with a slight preference for the former; or one person might use she/her and xe/xem with a preference that they be used with equal frequency in sentences. Sometimes people indicate that they use multiple pronoun sets (e.g. she/they or he/they).

One way that a genderfluid person might signal their pronoun usage in a welcoming space could be wearing a pin with the pronoun they're using in that moment on it. There is also custom made jewelry that can be flipped or spun to indicate a certain pronoun.



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Assumptions

Always take the small extra step to ask what pronouns someone uses; don't make assumptions based on their presentation or even their gender. As some people's pronouns may change between the present and the last time that you spoke with them, it's a good practice to ask again whenever you can.

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