Terms & Definitions Related to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

**Ally**  Someone who advocates for and supports members of a community other than their own. Reaching across differences to achieve mutual goals.

**Asexual** Having no evident sex or sex organs. In usage, may refer to a person who is not sexually active, or not sexually attracted to other people.

**Biphobia** The irrational fear and intolerance of people who are bisexual.

**Bisexuality** Also bi. A person who is attracted to two sexes or two genders, but not necessarily simultaneously or equally. This used to be defined as a person who is attracted to both genders or both sexes, but since there are not only two sexes (see intersex and transgender) and there are not only two genders (see transgender), this definition can be inaccurate.

**Coming out** To recognize one's sexual orientation, gender identity, or sex identity, and to be open about it with oneself and with others.

**Discrimination** The act of showing partiality or prejudice; a prejudicial act.

**Domestic partner** One who lives with their beloved and/or is at least emotionally and financially connected in a supportive manner with another. Another word for spouse, lover, significant other, etc

**Dominant culture** The cultural values, beliefs, and practices that are assumed to be the most common and influential within a given society.

**Drag** The act of dressing in gendered clothing as part of a performance. Drag Queens perform in highly feminine attire. Drag Kings perform in highly masculine attire. Drag may be performed as a political comment on gender, as parody, or simply as entertainment. Drag performance does not indicate sexuality, gender identity, or sex identity.

**Family** Colloquial term used to identify other LGBTIQ community members. For example, an LGBTIQ person saying, “that person is family” often means that the person they are referring to is LGBTIQ as well.

**Family of choice** Persons or group of people an individual sees as significant in his or her life. It may include none, all, or some members of his or her family of origin. In addition, it may include individuals such as significant others, domestic partners, friends, and coworkers.

**Gay** Men attracted to men. Colloquially used as an umbrella term to include all LGBTIQ people.

**Gender** A socially constructed system of classification that ascribes qualities of masculinity and femininity to people. Gender characteristics can change over time and are different between cultures. Words that refer to gender include: man, woman, transgender, masculine, feminine, and gender queer.

One's sense of self as masculine or feminine regardless of external genitalia. Gender is often conflated with sex. This is inaccurate because sex refers to bodies and gender refers to personality characteristics.

**Genderism** Holding people to traditional expectations based on gender, or punishing or excluding those who don't conform to traditional gender expectations.

**Gender conformity** When your gender identity and sex “match” (i.e. fit social norms). For example, a male who is masculine and identifies as a man.

**Gender identity** The gender that a person sees themselves as. This can include refusing to label oneself with a gender. Gender identity is also often conflated with sexual orientation, but this is inaccurate. Gender identity does not cause sexual orientation. For example, a masculine woman is not necessarily a lesbian.

**Gender identity disorder** The term used for a condition defined in the DSM4 by the American Psychiatric Association

**Gender-neutral** Nondiscriminatory language to describe relationships—e.g. “spouse” and “partner” are gender-neutral alternatives to the gender-specific words “husband,” “wife,” “boyfriend” and “girlfriend.”

**Gender non-conforming/variant** Displaying gender traits that are not normatively associated with their biological sex. “Feminine” behavior or appearance in a male is gender-variant as is “masculine” behavior or appearance a female. Gender-variant behavior is culturally specific.

**Gender queer (Genderqueer)** A person who redefines or plays with gender, or who refuses gender altogether. A label for people who bend/break the rules of gender and blur the boundaries.

**Gender role** How “masculine” or “feminine” an individual acts. Societies commonly have norms regarding how males and females should behave, expecting people to have personality characteristics and/or act a certain way based on their biological sex.
Terms & Definitions Related to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

**Gender-variant**  Displaying gender traits that are not normatively associated with their biological sex. “Feminine” behavior or appearance in a male is gender-variant as is “masculine” behavior or appearance a female. Gender-variant behavior is culturally specific.

**Hate crime**  Hate crime legislation often defines a hate crime as a crime motivated by the actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexual orientation of any person.

**Heterosexuality**  Sexual, emotional, and/or romantic attraction to a sex other than your own. Commonly thought of as “attraction to the opposite sex” but since there are not only two sexes (see intersex and transsexual), this definition is inaccurate.

**Heterosexism**  Assuming every person to be heterosexual therefore marginalizing persons who do not identify as heterosexual. It is also believing heterosexuality to be superior to homosexuality and all other sexual orientations.

**Heterosexual privilege**  Benefits derived automatically by being (or being perceived as) heterosexual that are denied to homosexuals, bisexuals, and queers.

**Homophobia**  The irrational fear and intolerance of people who are homosexual or of homosexual feelings within one's self. This assumes that heterosexuality is superior.

**Homosexuality**  Sexual, emotional, and/or romantic attraction to the same sex.

The very first edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-I) classified homosexuality as a sexual deviation, as did DSM-II in 1968. However, in December of 1973, the DSM-II was modified by the Board of Trustees of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), who voted to eliminate the general category of homosexuality, and replace it with sexual orientation disturbance.

**Institutional oppression**  Arrangement of a society used to benefit one group at the expense of another through the use of language, media education, religion, economics, etc.

**Internalized oppression**  The process by which an oppressed person comes to believe, accept, or live out the inaccurate stereotypes and misinformation about their group.

**Intersex**  Intersexuality is a set of medical conditions that feature congenital anomaly of the reproductive and sexual system. That is, intersex people are born with "sex chromosomes," external genitalia, or internal reproductive systems that are not considered "standard" for either male or female. The existence of intersexuals shows that there are not just two sexes and that our ways of thinking about sex (trying to force everyone to fit into either the male box or the female box) is socially constructed.

**In the closet**  Keeping one's sexual orientation and/or gender or sex identity a secret.

**Invisible minority**  A group whose minority status is not always immediately visible, such as some disabled people and LGBTIQ people. This lack of visibility may make organizing for rights difficult.

**Lambda**  The Gay Activist Alliance originally chose the lambda, the Greek letter "L", as a symbol in 1970. Organizers chose the letter "L" to signify liberation. The word has become a way of expressing the concept "lesbian and gay male" in a minimum of syllables and has been adopted by such organizations as Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund.

**Lesbian**  A woman attracted to a woman.

**LGBTIQ**  Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer (or Questioning)

**Marginalized**  Excluded, ignored, or relegated to the outer edge of a group/society/community.

**MSM**  Men who engage in same-sex behavior, but who may not necessarily self-identify as gay.

**MTF**  Male to Female Transsexual.

**“On T”**  When a FTM takes the hormone testosterone.

**Out (of the closet)**  Refers to varying degrees of being open about one’s sexual orientation and/or sex identity or gender identity.

**Pansexual**  A person who is fluid in sexual orientation and/or gender or sex identity.

**Polyamory**  Polyamory is the practice of having multiple open, honest love relationships.

**Queer**  An umbrella term to refer to all LGBTIQ people

A political statement, as well as a sexual orientation, which advocates breaking binary thinking and seeing both sexual orientation and gender identity as potentially fluid.

A simple label to explain a complex set of sexual behaviors and desires. For example, a person who is attracted to multiple genders may identify as queer.
Some older LGBT people feel the word has been hatefully used against them for too long and are reluctant to embrace it.

**Rainbow flag**  The Rainbow Freedom Flag was designed in 1978 by Gilbert Baker to designate the great diversity of the LGBTIQ community. It has been recognized by the International Flag Makers Association as the official flag of the LGBTIQ civil rights movement.

**Sex identity**  The sex that a person sees themselves as. This can include refusing to label oneself with a sex.

**Sexual minority**  Refers to members of sexual orientations or who engage in sexual activities that are not part of the mainstream. Refers to members of sex groups that do not fall into the majority categories of male or female, such as intersexuals and transsexuals.

**Sex**  Refers to a person based on their anatomy (external genitalia, chromosomes, and internal reproductive system). Sex terms are male, female, transsexual, and intersex. Sex is biological, although social views and experiences of sex are cultural.

**Sexual Orientation**  The deep-seated direction of one's sexual (erotic) attraction. It is on a continuum and not a set of absolute categories. Sometimes referred to as affection, orientation or sexuality. Sexual orientation evolves through a multistage developmental process, and may change over time.

**SRS**  Acronym for Sexual Reassignment Surgery, the surgery done by transsexuals to make their bodies and their sex identity match.

**Stereotype**  An exaggerated oversimplified belief about an entire group of people without regard for individual differences.

**Straight**  Person who is attracted to a gender other than their own. Commonly thought of as “attraction to the opposite gender,” but since there are not only two genders (see transgender), this definition is inaccurate.

**Transgender**  Transgender (sometimes shortened to Trans or TG) people are those whose psychological self ("gender identity") differs from the social expectations for the physical sex they were born with. To understand this, one must understand the difference between biological sex, which is one's body (genitals, chromosomes, ect.), and social gender, which refers to levels of masculinity and femininity. Often, society conflates sex and gender, viewing them as the same thing. But, gender and sex are not the same thing. Transgender people are those whose psychological self ("gender identity") differs from the social expectations for the physical sex they were born with. For example, a female with a masculine gender identity or who identifies as a man.

**Transgenderist**  A person who lives either full time, or most of the time, in a gender role different than the role associated with their biological or chromosomal sex (a gender non-conformist).

**Transition**  A complicated, multi-step process that can take years as transsexuals align their anatomy with their sex identity; this process may ultimately include sex reassignment surgery (SRS).

**Transphobia**  Fear or hatred of transgender people; transphobia is manifested in a number of ways, including violence, harassment and discrimination.

**Transsexual**  Transsexual refers to a person who experiences a mismatch of the sex they were born as and the sex they identify as. A transsexual sometimes undergoes medical treatment to change his/her physical sex to match his/her sex identity through hormone treatments and/or surgically. Not all transsexuals can have or desire surgery.

**Transvestite**  Individuals who regularly or occasionally wear the clothing socially assigned to a gender not their own, but are usually comfortable with their anatomy and do not wish to change it (i.e. they are not transsexuals). Cross-dresser is the preferred term for men who enjoy or prefer women's clothing and social roles. Contrary to popular belief, the overwhelming majority of male cross-dressers identify as straight and often are married. Very few women call themselves cross-dressers.

**Triangle**  A symbol of remembrance. Gay men in the Nazi concentration camps were forced to wear the pink triangle as a designation of being homosexual. Women who did not conform to social roles, often believed to be lesbians, had to wear the black triangle. The triangles are worn today as symbols of freedom, reminding us to never forget.

**Ze**  Gender neutral pronouns that can be used instead of he/she.

**Zir**  Gender neutral pronouns that can be used instead of his/her.