LGBTQ Terminology* Review

*Though connected and overlapping, the following categories of sexual and gender identity are often distinct and unique. The same is true for terms describing bias against these groups.

**Gender:** The following terms are meant to describe the biological, social, psychological, and emotional nature associated with gender in regards to identity, expression, orientation, and fluidity.

- **Androgyny:** Having the characteristics or nature of both maleness and femaleness; neither specifically feminine nor masculine. Some androgynes may identify as being “between” genders, or as entirely genderless. Other identities may be: non-gender, genderneutral, between genders, intergender, bigender, genderqueer or gender fluid.

- **Bi-gendered:** One who has a significant gender identity that encompasses both genders - male and female.

- **Biological Sex:** This can be considered our “packaging” and is determined by our chromosomes (such as XX for female and XY for male); our hormones (estrogen/progesterone or testosterone); and our internal and external genitalia (vulva, clitoris, vagina, penis, testicles).

- **Cisgender:** A cisgender person is someone who identifies as the gender/sex they were assigned at birth. For example, your birth certificate says female, and you identify as a female woman.

- **FTM or F2M (female to male):** An identity for a person who was assigned female at birth, and who identifies as male, lives as a male or identifies as masculine. Other terms: transgender male, transman, affirmed male.

- **Gender:** A set of social, psychological and emotional traits, often influenced by societal expectations that classify an individual as feminine, masculine, androgynous or other. Gender characteristics can change over time and are differentiated by culture. Gender is often linked with sex, but this is inaccurate because sex refers to birth genitalia and/or chromosomes or hormones and gender refers to social and emotional feelings and norms.

- **Gender Binary:** The concept that everyone must be one of two genders: male or female. The term also describes the system in which a society divides people into male and female gender roles, gender identities and attributes.

- **Gender Expression:** This refers to an individual’s physical characteristics, behaviors and presentation: such as appearance, dress, mannerisms, speech patterns, and social interactions that are linked, traditionally, to either masculinity or femininity. Gender expression is not an indication of sexual orientation.

- **Gender Identity:** This is how we identify ourselves in terms of our gender. Identities may be: male, female, androgynous, bigender, transgender and others.
Genderism: This is the systematic belief that people need to conform to the gender role assigned to them based on a gender binary system, which includes only female and male. Related to sexism, genderism is a form of institutionalized discrimination, as well as, the individual manifestations of gender prejudice.

Gender Non-Conforming or Gender Variant: An identity for a person who has gender characteristics and/or behaviors that do not conform to traditional or societal binary gender expectations. Gender non-conforming people may or may not identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer.

Gender Orientation: This is an individual’s internal, deeply felt sense of their gender – their feelings about their own maleness or femaleness. This is about what gender you are oriented toward: male, female, both or neither. Gender orientation doesn’t necessarily align with biological sex however it is closely linked with gender identity.

Genderqueer: An identity for people who do not identify and/or who do not express themselves as completely masculine or feminine. Genderqueer people may or may not identify as transgender. This term became popular as increasing amounts of gender variant people voiced discomfort in and exclusion from the transgender community.

Gender Role: A set of traditional and stereotypical roles, traits, dress, characteristics, qualities, mannerisms and behaviors that are usually attributed to “males” or “females”.

Hir - used in place of her, his and him. Pronounced “here.”

Intersex: An umbrella term referring to a health condition, often present at birth, involving anatomy or physiology that differs from societal expectations of male and female. Intersex conditions can affect the genitals, the chromosomes and/or secondary sex characteristics. People who are intersex should not be assumed to be transgender. Formally known as hermaphrodites. May have ambiguous genitalia and secondary sexual characteristics. (Please note that his term is currently being challenged because it labels the person rather than the physical condition.)

MTF or M2F (male to female): An identity for a person who was assigned male at birth, and who identifies as female, lives as a female or identifies as feminine. Other terms: transgender female, transwoman, affirmed female.

Sex: A socially-constructed identity that is usually based on biological markers such as chromosomes and genitalia. In western culture, two sexes are institutionally recognized - male and female.

Sex Realignment Surgery (SRS): A term for the surgical procedures by which a person’s physical appearance and function of their existing sexual characteristics are altered to resemble that of the other sex. This may include “top surgery” (breast augmentation or removal) or “bottom surgery” (altering genitals). Other names used are Sex Reassignment Surgery, Gender Realignment Surgery, Gender Reassignment Surgery, Genital Reconstruction Surgery, Gender Confirmation Surgery or Sex Affirmation Surgery. Sex change is now considered inaccurate, derogatory and no longer used. (See also Transition below.)

Transgender or Trans: A broad umbrella term that can be used to describe people whose gender expression is non-conforming and/or whose gender identity is different from their sex assigned at birth. Includes transsexuals, both operative & non-operative, bigendered people, intersexed, & transgenderists.
Transgender people may or may not choose to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically. People must self-identify as transgender in order for the term to be appropriately used to describe them. A transgender person is someone who significantly transgresses the gender assigned to hir body at birth and identifies with the term transgender.

Ze - used in place of "he or she". Pronounced “z.”

**Biases and Oppressive Terminology:** This section describes terms that are traditionally biased, discriminatory, and/or oppressive towards the LGBTQ community. Some terms may or may not be reclaimed as a source of pride by the LGBTQ community.

- **Biphobia** - fear or hatred of bisexual men and women displayed by heterosexuals, gay men, and lesbians.

- **Dyke**: A derogatory slur for lesbians. Reclaimed by some as a term of pride.

- **Faggot**: A derogatory slur for gay men. Reclaimed by some as a term of pride. Derived from the word faggot (literally “small bundle of sticks”), an allusion to the Inquisition-era practice of burning people at the stake for suspected homosexual practices.

- **Heterosexism**: A term that applies to attitudes, bias and discrimination in favor of opposite-sex sexuality and relationships. It includes the presumption that everyone is heterosexual or that opposite-sex attractions and relationships are the norm and therefore superior. Heterosexism is a broader term than homophobia in that it need not imply the fear and loathing the latter term suggests. It can describe seemingly benign statements or questions, such as asking a young woman if she has a boyfriend, or asking a man what his wife does for a living.

- **Homophobia**: Refers to an irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuality or LGBTQ people. Homophobia can be understood as a destructive force that prevents many LGBTQ people from securing safe, open, and equal lives. Homophobic reactions often lead to intolerance, bigotry, and violence against anyone not acting within heterosexual norms.

- **Lifestyle**: This is a word that is often used outside the LGBTQ community to describe living life as an LGBTQ person, i.e. the “gay lifestyle.” Many people do not find this word particularly appropriate or positive because it seems to trivialize personal identity, as well as not make space for the large variety of lifestyles that lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender people live.

- **Queer**: An umbrella term used to describe a sexual orientation and/or gender identity or gender expression that does not conform to heteronormative society. While it is used as a neutral, even positive term among many LGBTQ people today, historically it has been negative and can still be considered derogatory by some.

- **Tranny**: Derogatory term for a transgender person. Reclaimed by some as a term of pride.

- **Transphobia**: The irrational fear, hatred and/or discomfort of those who are perceived to break or blur stereotypical gender roles, expressed as stereotyping, discrimination, harassment and/or violence.
Usually directed at those who defy stereotypical gender norms or those who are perceived to exhibit non-heterosexual characteristics regardless of their actual gender identity or sexual orientation.

**Transsexual:** An older term, which originated in the medical and psychological communities. The term historically referred to people whose gender expression is non-conforming and/or whose gender identity is different from their sex assigned at birth regardless of where they are in the transition process. Many transgender people prefer the term “transgender” instead of “transsexual”. Unlike transgender, transsexual is not an umbrella term.

**Sexuality:** *This section describes the common orientations, behaviors, and preference of LGBTQ individuals in regards to their sexuality.*

**Asexuality:** A sexual orientation that describes individuals who do not experience sexual attraction.

**Bisexual:** A person (male or female) who has significant sexual and or romantic attractions to both males and females or someone who identifies as a member of this community.

**Gay:** An identity for people who are male identified and attracted sexually and emotionally to other males. At times, “gay” is used to refer to all people, regardless of sex, who have their primary sexual and or romantic attractions to people of the same sex. Lesbians and bisexuals may feel excluded by this word. Gay used to be an umbrella term to refer to all lesbian, gay and bisexual people but the more inclusive term used now is LGBTQ (see below).

**Heterosexual:** An identity for a person who is sexually and emotionally attracted to members of the opposite sex. Usually referred to as “straight.”

**Homosexual:** An identity for a person who is sexually/erotically and emotionally attracted to members of their own sex. Generally, the term homosexual is no longer used and is replaced by lesbian, gay or LGBTQ. This was the formal or clinical term coined in the field of psychology, sometimes meaning only “gay male,” but at times encompasses lesbians and occasionally bisexuals. The word is often associated with the proposition that same sex attractions are a mental disorder, and is therefore distasteful to some people.

**Lesbian:** An identity for people who are female identified and who are attracted sexually/erotically and emotionally to some other females. Bisexual women may not feel included by this term.

**MSM:** A term given to men who engage in sexual activity with other men regardless of their self-identified sexual orientation.

**Questioning:** An identity for people who are uncertain of their sexual orientation and/or their gender identity.

**Sexual Behavior:** This is what we do sexually and with whom.

**Sexual Identity:** This is what we call ourselves in terms of our sexuality. Such labels include “lesbian,” “gay,” “bisexual,” “bi,” “bicurious,” “pansexual,” “pomosexual,” “queer,” “questioning,” “undecided,”
“undetermined,” “heterosexual,” “straight,” “asexual,” and others. Our sexual behavior and how we define ourselves (identity) is a choice; sexual orientation is not a choice.

**Sexual Orientation:** This is the deep-down, inner feeling of who we are attracted or “oriented” to sexually and emotionally. Some categories of sexual orientation include lesbian, gay - attracted to some members of the same sex; bisexuals - attracted to some members of both genders; straight - attracted to some members of the opposite sex; and asexual – not sexually attracted to others. (See sexual identity above.)

**Straight:** A person (male or female) who has significant sexual and or romantic attractions to primarily members of the opposite sex.

**Two-Spirit:** Native-American people who would be identified as being LGBTQ by Western culture. This term was created in 1990 in reference to third and fourth genders that were recognized in many traditional Native American cultures. Many Native/First Nations people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, or gender non-conforming identify as Two-Spirit; in many Nations, being Two-Spirit carries both great respect and additional commitments and responsibilities to one’s community.

**Notable Terms & Expressions:** The following are important terms closely linked to gender and sexuality in the LGBTQ community. Some terms may vary in their usage depending on the heritage or geographic location of the person using the term.

**Ally:** A person who supports and honors sexual diversity, acts accordingly to challenge homophobic and heterosexist remarks and behaviors, and is willing to explore and understand these forms of bias within him or herself. Most often, allies do not identify as LGBTQ, but still support and advocate for equality of LGBTQ people.

**Butch/Femme Queen:** Popular identities in the African-American and Latino ball scene. “Queen” usually refers to queer males and the butch/femme part refers to the individual’s gender expression.

**Closet:** Used as slang for the state of not publicizing or acknowledging one’s sexual identity while living an outwardly heterosexual life while identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender. At times, being in the closet also means not wanting to admit one’s sexual identity to oneself.

**Coming Out (of the Closet):** The act of sharing one’s identity to an individual, a group, or in a public setting. Coming out is a life-long process—in each new situation a person must decide whether or not to risk coming out. Coming out can be difficult for some because reactions vary from complete acceptance and support to disapproval, rejection or violence. Some people think of coming out as a larger system of oppression of LGBTQ people—that an LGBTQ person needs to come out at all shows that everyone is presumed heterosexual until demonstrated otherwise. But this word need not apply only to the LGBTQ community. In some situations, a heterosexual may feel the need to come out about their identity as well.

**Cross-dresser:** A person who wears clothing associated with a gender identity other than what the person holds for hirself, but are usually comfortable with their sex assigned at birth, and do not wish to change it. Most men who cross-dress are heterosexual but can have any sexual orientation. Very few women identify as cross-dressers.
**Drag King/Queen**: A stage/theater performer whose performances are centered on or around gender. The performer typically performs the gender considered to be opposite of what ze identifies as. (Drag Queen is also used as slang, sometimes in a derogatory manner, to refer to all transgender women.)

**Fluid**: An identity assumed by individuals who feel as though their sexual orientation is more flexible and not definable by any singular position on a continuum of sexual orientation. These individuals identify as neither heterosexual nor homosexual, but somewhere in between. This identity is wider than bisexual as it leaves open the possibility for the attraction to individuals who identify as transgender, genderqueer, and/or intersex.

**Hijra**: An Indian/South Asian term that refers to people born with XY chromosomes or an intersex combination and identify as belonging to a third sex that perform traditional religious ceremonies at marriages and births of male babies – believed to bring good luck and fertility.

**Kathoey**: In Thailand, this term usually refers to what Westerners might refer to as a MTF or a feminine gay male and has higher visibility and acceptance than its counterparts in Western societies.

**LGBTQ**: An umbrella term referring collectively to people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning and/or queer. At times, an A for ‘Ally’, and/or a TS for ‘Two Spirit’ will be added. Gay used to be the general phrase used but now LGBTQ is the more current and inclusive term.

**Passing**: A term used by transgender people to mean that they are seen as the gender with which they self-identify. For example, a transgender man (born female) who most people see as a man.

**Transition**: Refers to the myriad of actions a person may take including the social, psychological and medical process of transitioning from one gender to another. Transitioning is a complex process that occurs over a long period of time, it is not an event. Transitioning may include changing one’s name, taking hormones, having surgery, or changing legal documents (e.g. driver’s license, Social Security record, birth certificate) to reflect their new gender.