LGBTQI Terminology

A note about these definitions: Each of these definitions has been carefully researched and closely analyzed from theoretical and practical perspectives for cultural sensitivity, common usage, and general appropriateness. We have done our best to represent the most popular uses of the terms listed; however there may be some variation in definitions depending on location. Please note that each person who uses any or all of these terms does so in a unique way (especially terms that are used in the context of an identity label). If you do not understand the context in which a person is using one of these terms, it is always appropriate to ask. This is especially recommended when using terms that we have noted that can have a derogatory connotation.

Ally – Someone who confronts heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, heterosexual and genderstraight privilege in themselves and others; a concern for the well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and intersex people; and a belief that heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia are social justice issues.

Biphobia - The fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of bisexuals, which is often times related to the current binary standard. Biphobia can be seen within the LGBTQI community, as well as in general society.

Bisexual – A person emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to males/men and females/women. This attraction does not have to be equally split between genders and there may be a preference for one gender over others.

Cisgender – describes someone who feels comfortable with the gender identity and gender expression expectations assigned to them based on their physical sex.

Coming Out – May refer to the process by which one accepts one’s own sexuality, gender identity, or status as an intersex person (to “come out” to oneself). May also refer to the process by which one shares one’s sexuality, gender identity, or intersex status with others (to “come out” to friends, etc.). This can be a continual, life-long process for homosexual, bisexual, transgendered, and intersex individuals.

Discrimination – Prejudice + power. It occurs when members of a more powerful social group behave unjustly or cruelly to members of a less powerful social group. Discrimination can take many forms, including both individual acts of hatred or injustice and institutional denials of privileges normally accorded to other groups. Ongoing discrimination creates a climate of oppression for the affected group.

FTM / F2M - Abbreviation for female-to-male transgender or transsexual person.

Gay – 1. Term used in some cultural settings to represent males who are attracted to males in a romantic, erotic and/or emotional sense. Not all men who engage in “homosexual behavior” identify as gay, and as such this label should be used with caution. 2. Term used to refer to the LGBTQI community as a whole, or as an individual identity label for anyone who does not identify as heterosexual.

Gender Identity – A person’s sense of being masculine, feminine, or other gendered.

Gender Variant – A person who either by nature or by choice does not conform to gender-based expectations of society (e.g. transgender, transsexual, intersex, genderqueer, cross-dresser, etc.).

Genderqueer – A gender variant person whose gender identity is neither male nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders. Often includes a political agenda to challenge gender stereotypes and the gender binary system.

Heterosexism – Prejudice against individuals and groups who display non-heterosexual behaviors or identities, combined with the majority power to impose such prejudice. Usually used to the advantage of the group in power. Any attitude, action, or practice – backed by institutional power – that subordinates people because of their sexual orientation.
**Heterosexual Privilege** – Those benefits derived automatically by being heterosexual that are denied to homosexuals and bisexuals. Also, the benefits homosexuals and bisexuals receive as a result of claiming heterosexual identity or denying homosexual or bisexual identity.

**Homophobia** – The irrational fear or hatred of homosexuals, homosexuality, or any behavior or belief that does not conform to rigid sex role stereotypes. It is this fear that enforces sexism as well as heterosexism.

**Internalized Oppression** – The process by which a member of an oppressed group comes to accept and live out the inaccurate stereotypes applied to the oppressed group.

**Intersex Person**—Someone whose sex a doctor has a difficult time categorizing as either male or female. A person whose combination of chromosomes, gonads, hormones, internal sex organs, gonads, and/or genitals differs from one of the two expected patterns.

**Lesbian** – Term used to describe female-identified people attracted romantically, erotically, and/or emotionally to other female-identified people. The term lesbian is derived from the name of the Greek island of Lesbos and as such is sometimes considered a Eurocentric category that does not necessarily represent the identities of African-Americans and other non-European ethnic groups. This being said, individual female-identified people from diverse ethnic groups, including African-Americans, embrace the term ‘lesbian’ as an identity label.

**LGBTQI** – A common abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex community.

**MTF / M2F** – Abbreviation for male-to-female transgender or transsexual person.

**Oppression** – The systematic subjugation of a group of people by another group with access to social power, the result of which benefits one group over the other and is maintained by social beliefs and practices.

**Outing** – Involuntary disclosure of one’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or intersex status.

**Passing** – Describes a person's ability to be accepted as their preferred gender/sex or race/ethnic identity or to be seen as heterosexual.

**Queer** – 1. An umbrella term which embraces a matrix of sexual preferences, orientations, and habits of the not-exclusively heterosexual-and-monogamous majority. Queer includes lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transpeople, intersex persons. 2. A reclaimed word that was formerly used solely as a slur but that has been semantically overturned by members of the maligned group, who use it as a term of defiant pride.

**Sexual Orientation** – The desire for intimate, emotional, romantic, and/or sexual relationships with people of the same gender/sex, another gender/sex, or multiple genders/sexes.

**Transgender** – A person who lives as a member of a gender other than that expected based on anatomical sex. Sexual orientation varies and is not dependent on gender identity.

**Transphobia** – The irrational fear of those who are gender variant and/or the inability to deal with gender ambiguity.

**Ze / Hir** – Alternate pronouns that are gender neutral and preferred by some gender variant persons. Pronounced /zee/ and /here/, they replace “he”/”she” and “his”/”hers” respectively.

Terminology taken from terminology sheets by Eli R. Green (eli@trans-academics.org) and Eric N. Peterson at the LGBT Resource Center at UC Riverside - 2003-2004.