

# DEFINITIONS RELATED TO SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY

## **ANTI-LGBTQ BIAS**

Prejudice and/or discrimination against people who are or who are perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ).

## **ASEXUAL**

A person who does not experience sexual attraction, but may experience other forms of attraction (e.g., intellectual, emotional).

## **BIOLOGICAL SEX**

The biological and physiological characteristics of males and females. These are characteristics people are born with that do not usually change over the course of their lives. Although sex is typically defined as being male or female, in actuality, there are more than two sexes. About 1.7% of the population is intersex (see definition below).

## **BISEXUAL**

A person who is emotionally, physically and/or romantically attracted to some people of more than one gender.

## **CISGENDER**

A term for when someone's gender identity/expression matches the gender they were assigned at birth.

## **COMING OUT (OF THE CLOSET)**

To be "in the closet" means to not share a part of one's identity. Some LGBTQ people choose to disclose that part of their identity in some situations (to be "out") and not in others (to be "closeted"). To "come out" is to publicly declare one's identity, sometimes to one person in conversation, sometimes to a group or in a public setting. Coming out is a lifelong process. In each situation, a person must decide where they are at that point in time with their identity. In each new situation, a person must decide whether or not to come out.

## **FTM/MTF**

FTM refers to a person who transitions from "female-to-male," meaning a person who was assigned female at birth but identifies and lives as a male. MTF refers to a person who transitions from "male-to-female," meaning a person who was assigned male at birth, but identifies and lives as a female.

**GAY**

A person who is emotionally, physically and/or romantically attracted to some other people of the same gender. Can be used to refer to people of all genders, though it is used most commonly to refer to males. Some women and girls choose not to identify as gay, but as lesbian.

**GENDER**

The socially-defined “rules” and roles for men and women in a society. The attitudes, customs and values associated with gender are socially constructed; however, individuals develop their gender identities in two primary ways: through an innate sense of their own identity and through their life experiences and interactions with others. Dominant western society generally defines gender as a binary system—men and women—but many cultures define gender as more fluid and existing along a continuum.

**GENDER EXPRESSION**

Refers to the ways in which people externally communicate their gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, haircut, voice and emphasizing, de-emphasizing or changing their bodies’ characteristics. Gender expression is not an indicator of **sexual orientation**.

**GENDER IDENTITY**

How an individual identifies in terms of their gender. Since gender identity is internal, one’s gender identity is not necessarily visible to others.

**GENDER NON-CONFORMING**

A person who doesn’t adhere to societal pressures to conform to gender norms and roles.

**GENDER ROLE**

The set of roles and behaviors expected of people based on gender assigned at birth.

**HETEROSEXISM/ HOMOPHOBIA**

Prejudice and/or discrimination against people who are or who are perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ). While homophobia is usually used to describe a blatant fear or hatred of LGBT people, heterosexism is a broader term used to describe attitudes and behaviors based on the belief that heterosexuality is the norm. Other related, specific, terms are transphobia and biphobia.

**HETEROSEXUAL/STRAIGHT**

A person who is emotionally, physically and/or romantically attracted to some members of another gender.

**INTERSEX**

A general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn’t seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male.

**LESBIAN**

A woman who is emotionally, physically and/or romantically attracted to some other women.

### LGBT (OR GLBT)

Acronym that groups lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals into one group based on their common experience as targets of heterosexism and transphobia and their common, yet complex, struggle for sexual and gender freedom. This term is generally considered a more inclusive and affirming descriptor than the more limited “gay” or the outdated “homosexual.”

### PANSEXUAL

A person who is emotionally, physically and/or romantically attracted to some people, regardless of that person’s gender identity or biological sex.

### QUEER

An umbrella term used to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Some use as an alternative to “LGBT” in an effort to be more inclusive. Depending on the user, the term has either a derogatory or an affirming connotation, as many within the LGBT community have sought to reclaim the term that was once widely used in a negative way.

### QUESTIONING

Refers to people who are in the process of understanding and exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity. They are often seeking information and support during this stage of their identity development.

### SEXISM

Prejudice and/or discrimination against people based on their real or perceived sex. Sexism is based on a belief (conscious or unconscious) that there is a natural order based on sex.

### SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Determined by one’s emotional, physical and/or romantic attractions. Categories of sexual orientation include, but are not limited to: **gay**, **lesbian**, attracted to some members of the same gender; **bisexual**, attracted to some members of more than one gender; and **heterosexual**, attracted to some members of another gender.

### STRAIGHT ALLY

Any person outside the LGBTQ community who supports and stands up for the rights of LGBTQ people.

### TRANS\*

An umbrella term that refers to all of the identities within the gender identity spectrum.

### TRANSGENDER

An umbrella term for people whose gender identify differs from the sex they were assigned at birth and/or whose gender expression do not match society’s expectations with regard to gender roles. The term may include identities such as: transsexual, gender queer, gender nonconforming, FTM, MTF, and gender-variant. Transgender people may or may not choose to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically.

### TRANSITION

The process when a person begins living as the gender with which they identify rather than the gender they were assigned at birth, which often may include changing one’s first name and dressing and grooming differently. Transitioning may or may not also include medical and legal aspects, including taking

hormones, having surgery or changing identity documents (e.g. driver's license) to reflect one's gender identity. Transitioning is not a one-step procedure; it is a complex process that occurs over a period of time.

### **TWO-SPIRIT**

A contemporary term that references historical multiple-gender traditions in many First Nations 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.

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