Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services Terminology Sheet

**Ally:** An individual who is supportive of sexual and gender minority people and their rights, and works to end oppression and discrimination.

**Asexual:** A person whose attraction to others does not include, or is not solely based on, sexuality.

**Bisexual:** An individual who is attracted to the same and opposite sex.

**Cisgender/Cissexual:** An individual whose assigned sex and gender is the same as their gender identity.

**Fag/Faggot:** A derogatory term for a gay man. Historically the term was used to describe a bundle of sticks used to burn individuals at the stake that went against the church, such as those accused of homosexual behavior.

**Gay:** Refers to a male who is physically and emotionally attracted to other males. This term can apply to both men and women.

**Gender Identity:** A person’s internal sense of gender. It relates to one’s sense of maleness, femaleness, or represents a fluid interplay between these two constructs.

**Gender Transition:** The process of aligning one’s physical body and gender expression with one’s gender identity. This may or may not include surgery, hormone therapy, and changes in dress, appearance, name, and pronoun usage. “Affirming” one’s gender is a synonymous term.

**Gender Diverse/Creative:** Umbrella terms referring to individuals whose gender expression (how you present your gender to society, and how others read your gender identity) differs from the culturally constructed male/female gender binary, or what is ‘expected’ of them. The phrase *gender creative* is often used in reference to children.

**Genderqueer:** A label for individuals whose gender identity and expression are fluid and fall outside of the male/female gender binary. A political term often associated with challenging the gender binary and stereotypes.

**GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance):** Student organizations found in some K-12 schools and post-secondary institutions that create a safe and supportive places for sexual and gender minority students and their allies.

**Heterosexism:** The assumption that all gender/sexual minorities are inferior. It is often institutional and systemic, and therefore quite pervasive and damaging.

**Homophobia:** An irrational fear or hatred of people who are, or perceived to be, gay, lesbian, or bisexual, often exhibited by prejudice, discrimination, intimidation, or acts of violence.

**Homosexual:** Associated with a medical model, this term refers to a person who is physically and emotionally attracted to someone of the same gender. This is an outdated term that carries negative connotations due to its association with the medicalization and discrimination of LGBTQ people.

**Inclusive Language:** The use of gender non-specific language (e.g.: "partner" instead of "husband/girlfriend" or "they" instead of "he/she", etc.) to indicate consideration of sexual and gender minority individuals.
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 culturally constructed categories of ‘female’ or ‘male’. Some people’s natal physical sex may be physically ambiguous, and others may not discover that they are intersex until later on in life if they are chromosomally sex-variant and absent of any external indicators.

Lesbian: A female who is physically and emotionally attracted to other females.

LGBTQ/GLBT/LGBTQIA*: Acronyms that represent the constellation of lesbian, gay bisexual, trans-identified, two-spirit, and queer identities. The asterisk represents the inclusion of additional identities not represented in the acronym. ‘Sexual and gender minorities’ is synonymous and is often used as an umbrella category.

Outing: The public disclosure of another person’s sexual orientation or gender identity without that person’s permission or knowledge. This can be very disrespectful and is potentially dangerous.

Pansexual/Omnisexual: A person who is physically and emotionally attracted to people of many different gender identities. This pair of terms reflects an understanding of gender that reaches beyond the male/female binary.

Pink Triangle: Pink (for gay men) and Black (for lesbian women) triangle symbols were used by Nazis for gay and lesbian prisoners; now reclaimed as symbols of gay and lesbian pride.

Queer: Historically a negative word for homosexuality. Recently it has been reclaimed and used in positive ways to describe identities, communities and social movements.

Rainbow Flag: A symbol of the LGBT movement designed in 1978 in response to the murder of Harvey Milk, the first openly gay man elected to public office in California.

Reclamation of Language: Taking back and reinvigorating historically negative and derogatory terms used by infusing them with positive meaning for personal and social empowerment.

Sexual Orientation: Feelings of attraction, behaviour, intimacy, or identification that direct people towards intimacy with others.

Stonewall: An LGBTQ bar in New York City that was the site of 1969 riot between patrons and police. This event is considered to be the beginning of the modern gay liberation movement.

Transgender/Trans/Trans-Identified: Umbrella terms used to refer to people whose gender identities or expressions differ from the sex or gender they were assigned at birth.

Transsexual: A term to describe people whose gender identity differs from the sex or gender they were assigned at birth, and may undergo a gender transition that could include surgical or hormonal treatments. Unlike transgender/trans/trans-identified, transsexual is not an umbrella term, and not all transgender individuals identify as transsexual.

Two-Spirit: A spiritual identity for some indigenous people. This term implies the embodiment of both masculine and feminine spiritual qualities within the same body, and has different meanings for different indigenous communities. Some indigenous people use this term instead of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, etc.