

## GLOSSARY OF COMMONLY USED TERMS

**ALLY** A person who actively supports and advocates for people who belong to marginalized, silenced, or less privileged groups without actually being a member of those groups. This person will often challenge or confront systems of oppression.

**BISEXUAL** An individual who is emotionally, spiritually, physically, and sexually attracted to more than one gender and/or sex.

**FTM (Female to Male)** A person who appeared to be – or was assigned at birth to be – female, was raised as a girl, who knows himself to be male, and who wishes to or does live as a male part or all of the time. Some people may also identify as “transmen” or “trans-masculine.”

**GAY** A person who is emotionally, spiritually, physically, and sexually attracted primarily to members of the same gender and/or sex. (Usually used by people who identify as men, though some women also use this term about themselves.)

**GENDER IDENTITY** A person’s inner understanding of what gender(s) they belong to or identify with. This is each person’s unique knowing or feeling, and is separate from a person’s physical body or appearance (although often related).

**GENDER EXPRESSION** External manifestation of one’s gender identity, usually expressed through “masculine,” “feminine,” or gender variant behavior, clothing, haircut, voice or body characteristics. Sometimes what is expressed externally matches a person’s gender identity, and sometimes what is expressed externally is perceived as incongruous with one’s personal sense of their gender.

**GENDER NONCONFORMING** An umbrella term that can include anyone whose gender identity, expression, or behavior is outside of social norms of women who are “feminine” and men who are “masculine,” such as butch women, effeminate men, drag queens/kings, fairies, bois, and others.

**GENDERQUEER / GENDER VARIANT** 1) A broad political and cultural identity that includes many (but not all) transgender, transsexual, and gender nonconforming people, as well as others who see their gender as falling outside of mainstream norms. 2) People who identify as neither male nor female, both male and female, or who claim an alternate gender identity of their own.

**GENDER TRANSITION** Everyone’s transition looks and feels different. Transition includes some or all of the following cultural, legal, and medical adjustments: telling one’s family, friends, and/or coworkers; changing one’s name and/or sex on legal documents; electrolysis or laser hair removal; hormone therapy; different forms of surgery, including but not limited to chest and genital surgery. Gender transition is not a linear process and is often influenced by one’s access to information, community, and financial resources.

**HETERONORMATIVE** The social, cultural, institutional, and individual beliefs and practices that privilege heterosexuality as the natural, normal sexual orientation.

**HOMOPHOBIA** The irrational fear of love, affection, or sexual behavior between people of the same gender. Expressed as negative feelings, attitudes, actions, and institutional discrimination against those perceived as non-heterosexuals.

**INTERSEX** A general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not seem to fit the normative definitions of female or male. Visit [www.isna.org](http://www.isna.org) for more information about intersex issues. Hermaphrodite is an older term used by the medical community to describe intersex people. It is considered a disrespectful term because it is stigmatizing and does not reflect modern scientific understanding of intersex conditions. If you hear someone use the word hermaphrodite, please let them know that the term ‘intersex’ is preferred.

**LESBIAN** A person who identifies as a woman, and who is emotionally, spiritually, physically, and sexually attracted primarily to members of the same gender and/or sex.

**MTF (Male to Female)** A person who appeared to be – or was assigned at birth to be – male, was raised as a boy, who knows herself to be female, and who wishes to or does live as a female part or all of the time. Some people may also identify as “transwomen” or “trans-feminine.”

**PRONOUNS** An important way to respect trans people, is to refer to them with the gender pronouns of their choosing. Some people want to be referred to as he / him / his, some as she / her / hers, some as a combination. Others want to be referred to with alternative/gender-neutral pronouns, such as ze or xie (“zee”) / hir (“heer”), or they / them / theirs (“Max is doing well. I saw hir yesterday, and ze said to say hi to you”). Some prefer not to use pronouns and all and only use their proper name (“I saw Max yesterday in class. I thought Max gave great answers to the professor’s questions, and I thought Max’s questions were great, too.”). It is always best to ask someone “Do you have a preferred gender pronoun?”

**QUEER** 1) An umbrella term used by some to describe lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. 2) A term used to describe people who transgress social, cultural, and sexual norms. 3) Historically and currently used as a slur targeting those perceived to transgress “norms” of sexual orientation and/or gender expression.

**SEX** A person’s assignment at birth as biologically male, female, or intersex.

**SEXUAL ORIENTATION** A pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions. A sense of one’s personal and social identity based attractions and behaviors expressing them.

**TRANSGENDER or TRANS** An umbrella term for anyone who knows themselves to be a gender that is different than the gender they were assigned at birth. Some trans people may have an alternate gender identity that is neither male nor female, and for some people their gender identity may vary at different points in their lives. Some transgender people modify their bodies through medical means, and some do not.

**TRANSPHOBIA** Irrational fear or hatred of people who break or blur gender roles and sex characteristics, which exists in both the heterosexual and gay communities.

**TRANSSEXUAL** A person who feels that his or her gender identity does not match his or her assigned biological sex. Some transsexuals, though not all, have sex reassignment surgery and/or take hormones to make their bodies look more traditionally male or female.

*These are some of the most common English terms used in the local and national lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and ally communities – there are many others, and more are created every day. It is always best to ask each individual and community what terms they use, and what those terms mean to them.*