Terms You Need to Know to Be an Effective Ally

**Appropriate Group Terminology**

**Bisexual People:** Individuals who are romantically and physically attracted to people of different genders. Bisexual people need not have equal attraction to or sexual experience with men and women.

**Cisgender People:** Individuals who are gender-typical or non-transgender.

**Gay Men:** Men who are romantically and physically attracted to some other men.

**Heterosexual People:** Individuals who are romantically and physically attracted to people of a different gender than themselves.

**Intersex People:** People whose sex chromosomes, secondary sex characteristics, and/or genitalia are determined to be neither exclusively male nor female. About 1 in 1,500-2,000 children are born visibly intersex.

**LGBT People:** An abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people.

**Lesbians:** Women who are romantically and physically attracted to some other women.

**Queer:** Traditionally a pejorative term for LGBT people, the word has been reclaimed by some LGBT people to describe themselves. It is not universally accepted within the LGBT community, and if used by heterosexuals who are not allies, it is still often considered derogatory.

**Trans** or **Transgender People:** Most commonly used as an umbrella term for individuals whose gender identity and/or expression is sometimes or always different from the gender assigned to them at birth. Transgender people include transsexuals, crossdressers, drag queens and kings, genderqueers, and others who cross traditional gender categories.

- **Crossdressers:** Individuals who, regardless of motivation, wear clothing, makeup, etc. that are considered by the culture to be appropriate for another gender but not one’s own.

- **Drag Kings** and **Drag Queens:** Female-bodied crossdressers (typically lesbians) and male-bodied crossdressers (typically gay men), respectively, who present in public, often for entertainment purposes.

- **Genderqueer Individuals:** People who identify as neither male nor female, as both, or as somewhere in between, and who often seek to blur gender lines. It is a particularly common identity among transgender youth.

- **Transsexual People:** Individuals whose gender identity is different from their assigned gender at birth. Transsexual people often undergo hormone treatments and gender confirmation surgeries to align their anatomy with their core identity, but not all desire or are able to do so.
Appropriate Social Justice Terminology

**Genderism:** The societal, institutional, and individual beliefs and practices that privilege cisgender or gender-typical people and subordinate and disparage transgender and gender-diverse people. The critical element that differentiates genderism from anti-transgender prejudice and discrimination is the use of institutional power and authority to support prejudice and enforce discriminatory behavior in systematic ways with far-reaching outcomes and effects.

**Heterosexism:** The societal, institutional, and individual beliefs and practices that privilege heterosexuals and subordinate and disparage lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals.

**Gender-Normative Privilege:** The benefits and advantages that gender-normative people receive in a genderist culture. It also includes the benefits that transgender people receive as a result of claiming a gender-normative identity and denying their transgender selves. There is also **heterosexual privilege**.

**Sexual Prejudice:** Negative attitudes toward individuals because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation (preferred term to “homophobia”). There is also **gender prejudice**.

Inappropriate Terminology

**Hermaphrodite:** An inaccurate clinical term for intersex people. Most intersex activists reject the word because it stigmatizes their experiences and is a mythological fallacy (no one is born fully male and fully female; earthworms and snails are hermaphroditic, not humans).

**Homosexual:** A clinical term for gay men and sometimes lesbians. Although the word is still frequently used in the media and by some older gay men, it is rejected by most members of the gay community because of its anachronistic nature and because of how “homosexuals” were pathologized by the medical profession.

**Transvestite:** An outdated clinical term for crossdressers. Most crossdressers object to the word because it is commonly understood to describe men who are sexually gratified by wearing traditionally women’s clothes, which does not apply to the vast majority of male crossdressers, who are not fetishists. They are simply more comfortable and more themselves in “women’s” clothing. The term also does not recognize that women can crossdress too.
What Does It Mean to Be Biased Against LGBT People?

Examples of Anti-Bisexual Prejudice:
- Assuming that everyone you meet is either heterosexual or lesbian/gay
- Assuming that two women together are lesbian, that two men together are gay, or that a man and a woman together are heterosexual
- Believing that bisexual people are confused or indecisive about their sexuality
- Thinking that bisexual people are promiscuous or cannot live monogamously
- Assuming that bisexual people need at least one male and one female partner
- Thinking that bisexual people are attracted to everyone
- Assuming that people who identify as bisexual are “really” lesbian or gay, but are in denial
- Believing that people who are bisexual spread HIV/AIDS and other STDs
- Thinking that people identify as bisexual because it is “trendy”
- Not wanting to date someone who is bisexual because you assume that the person will eventually leave you for someone of another gender

Examples of Anti-Lesbian/Gay Prejudice:
- Harassing or engaging in violence against individuals who are or are perceived as lesbian or gay
- Denying equal treatment to individuals who are or are perceived as lesbian or gay
- Indicating discomfort or disgust toward individuals who are or are perceived as lesbian or gay
- Feeling repulsed by displays of affection between same-sex couples, but accepting affectionate displays between different-sex couples
- Assuming everyone you meet is heterosexual
- Thinking you can “spot one”
- Using a disparaging phrase such as “that’s so gay”
- Being afraid of social or physical interactions with people who are lesbian or gay
- Avoiding social situations or activities where you might be perceived as lesbian or gay
- Not confronting an anti-gay/lesbian remark for fear of being identified as gay/lesbian
- Assuming that lesbians and gay men will be attracted to everyone of the same sex

Examples of Anti-Transgender Prejudice:
- Harassing or engaging in violence against individuals who are or are perceived as transgender
- Denying equal treatment to individuals who are or are perceived as transgender
- Indicating discomfort or disgust toward individuals who are or are perceived as transgender
- Thinking that transsexual people are mentally ill
- Believing that transsexual men and transsexual women are not “real” men and women
- Intentionally using inappropriate gender pronouns to refer to transgender people or calling them “it”
- Believing that crossdressing is a sexual perversion or that people who crossdress do so for sexual gratification
- Thinking that identifying as genderqueer is a phase or fad
How to Be an Ally to LGBT People

- Use the words “gay” and “lesbian” instead of “homosexual.” The overwhelming majority of gay men and lesbians do not identify with or use the word “homosexual” to describe themselves.

- Use the word “crossdresser” instead of “transvestite,” which is often considered pejorative.

- Use non-gender specific language. Ask “Are you seeing someone?” or “Are you in a committed relationship?,” instead of “Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend?” or “Are you married?” Use the word “partner” or “significant other” instead of “boyfriend/girlfriend” or “husband/wife.”

- Do not assume the sexual orientation of another person by virtue of whom they are dating. People who are bisexual are made invisible this way. Also, do not assume that a transgender person is of any particular sexual orientation; gender identity is separate from sexual orientation.

- Do not assume that a gay, lesbian, or bisexual person is attracted to you just because they have disclosed their sexual identity. If any interest is shown, be flattered, not flustered. Treat any interest that someone might show just as you would if it came from someone who is heterosexual.

- Challenge your own conceptions about gender-appropriate roles and behaviors. Do not expect people to conform to society’s beliefs about “women” and “men.”

- Validate people’s gender expression. In other words, if someone identifies as female, then refer to the person as “she”; if someone identifies as male, refer to the person as “he.” If you are not sure, ask them. Never use the word “it” when referring to someone who is transgender. To do so is incredibly insulting and disrespectful. Some transgender people prefer to use gender-neutral pronouns: “hir” instead of “her” and “his,” and “sie” or “ze” instead of “she” and “he.”

- Never ask transgender people about how they have sex or what their genitals look like. This is inappropriate in every situation.

- Speak out against statements and jokes that attack LGBT people. Letting others know that you find anti-LGBT statements and jokes offensive and unacceptable can go a long way toward reducing sexual and gender prejudice.

- Educate yourself about LGBT histories, cultures, and concerns. Read LGBT-themed books and publications and attend LGBT events (you can learn about the LGBT events being held in the Pioneer Valley by subscribing to the Stonewall Center’s Queer-e listserv or by going to our website: www.umass.edu/stonewall).

- Support and involve yourself in LGBT organizations and causes. Donate money or volunteer time to LGBT organizations, such as the Stonewall Center. Write letters to your political representatives asking them to support legislation that positively affects LGBT people. Support local LGBT businesses and LGBT-friendly national chain stores (see the Human Rights Campaign’s website for information on LGBT-supportive corporations: www.hrc.org).