Helpful Terms for Understanding Gender Identities

STRUCTURES OF POWER

Transphobia—encompasses a range of negative attitudes and feelings toward transgender identities or toward people who identify as or are perceived as being transgender, genderqueer, non-binary, gender non-conforming, gender fluid, etc.

Cissexism—a system of attitudes, bias, and discrimination in favor of cisgender identities. It can include the presumption that all people are cisgender and conform to normative gender roles or that cisgender identities are normal and superior. It may structure individual attitudes as well as the ways that transgender people are represented and the ways that societal institutions are structured. (see definition of cisgender below)

PHYSICAL SEX

Intersex—an umbrella term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with anatomy, chromosomes, hormones, or a combination thereof that do not fit the typical definitions of female or male.

GENDER IDENTITY

Gender Identity—one’s internal sense of having a gender or being a gendered person. A person’s gender is not dependent on their physical body, and it may or may not match with the gender they were assigned at birth according to societal norms.

Transgender—an umbrella term used to describe a person whose gender assigned at birth does not match their personal gender identity. People who identify as transgender may or may not live as the gender with which they identify and may or may not use surgery or hormones to physically change their external gender characteristics.

FTM / MTF—female to male transgender person, or someone assigned female at birth who identifies as a man / male to female transgender person, or someone assigned male at birth who identifies as a woman

Transition—the complex process of moving from one gender to another, personally, socially, professionally, and/or physically

Passing—being seen or read as the gender one is presenting externally, rather than being identified as transgender or as the gender one was assigned at birth

Clocked/Spooked/Read/Made—being recognized as transgender or the gender one was assigned at birth rather than the gender one is presenting externally. Being recognized or outed in public carries a threat of danger for transgender people, especially transgender people of color, who are oftentimes victims of harassment and violence. Terms for this vary regionally.

Stealth—when one has gone through a gender transition but does not disclose that fact to others. Many people are out about their transgender identity in some settings and with some people, but not in or with others.
Genderqueer, Gender Nonconforming, Nonbinary—a person who does not subscribe to conventional gender distinctions but identifies with neither, both, or some combination of the genders of man and woman. These terms carry different meanings and nuances for the individuals who identify with them.

Gender Fluid—a person for whom gender identity is not fixed, but rather shifts throughout that person’s life

Cisgender—a person whose gender assigned at birth matches with their personal gender identity according to societal norms. For example, a person assigned male at birth who identifies as a man is considered cisgender.

CROSS-CATEGORY TERMS

Queer—a slang term for an LGBTQ+ person. Also, a set of theories or a political stance that emphasizes opposition to structures of normal, especially in relation to sex, gender identity, and sexuality. The term has been politically reclaimed as positive by some, while remaining offensive and hurtful to others.

Questioning—a person who is exploring their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and questioning whether they may be gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, etc.

Ally—a person who does not identify as LGBT+ but acts in support of LGBT+ people and their interests. People within LGBTQ+ communities can be allies to others with different identities.

1 Identities that fall under the umbrella of transgender identities include but are not limited to transgender, genderqueer, non-binary, gender non-conforming, gender fluid, etc.

ii They/them/their is considered an acceptable singular pronoun as it is more inclusive of those with nonbinary gender identities. Many other singular gender neutral pronouns exist and are used regularly, as well.

iii No single acronym will capture the diversity of identities related to sexual orientation, gender identity, their intersections, and their intersections with other identities such as race/ethnicity or economic class. In addition to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, additional terms include but are not limited to queer, genderqueer, pansexual, two-spirit, same gender loving, fluid, intersex, asexual, etc.