SECTION 2: TERMINOLOGY

2.1: DEFINITION OF TERMS

When it comes to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression, it is important to have an understanding of basic terms. As language evolves over time, these terms do as well. This list was adapted from the Office of Multicultural Affairs for their Safe Zone Training. For a complete listing of updated terminology, as well as tips on how to effectively approach conversations about sexual and gender diversity, see the Resources website. Source: The Ally's Guide to Terminology, published by GLAAD.

Note: For consistency, we use the acronym LGBTQ+ throughout this guide as an all-inclusive term.

Asexual: An umbrella term used to encompass identities for people who do not experience sexual and/or romantic attraction. **Aromantic** is another term to apply to the latter.

Bisexual/Pansexual: An identity for people who are sexually and/or emotionally attracted to men and/or women and/or individuals who fall outside of the gender binary. Usage of one term or the other may vary from person to person; some may use the terms interchangeably.

Cisgender: A person whose gender identity does not differ significantly from their sex assigned at birth.

Gay: An identity for people who identify as men or nonbinary and who are sexually and/or emotionally attracted to men. This term may also be used as an umbrella term analogous to queer.

Gender-affirming medical interventions: Hormone therapy or surgery to affirm one's gender identity. This may include feminizing or masculinizing hormone therapy, chest/breast surgery, genital reconstructive surgery, and facial feminization surgery. Transgender and nonbinary individuals may or may not undergo one or more gender-affirming medical interventions.

Gender expression: A set of social and emotional traits, often influenced by societal expectations, that classify an individual as feminine, masculine, androgynous, etc.

Gender identity: Self-identification as boy/man, girl/woman, or other gender, such as gender nonbinary or genderqueer.

Gender nonbinary: An umbrella term used to describe gender identities that do not fit within the binary of boy/man, girl/woman. Some nonbinary individuals identify also as transgender; others do not.

Gender nonconforming: A term used by some to describe people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from what is typical or expected based on their sex assigned at birth and the gender binary.

Heterosexism: A term that applies to attitudes, bias, discrimination, and systemic forms of oppression that are in favor of heterosexual sexuality and relationships. It includes the presumption that everyone is or should be straight.

Homophobia: Refers to a fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuality or all LGBQ people. This can be understood as a destructive force that prevents many LGBQ people from securing safer, open, and equal lives.

Intersex: An umbrella term describing people born with internal and/or external sex characteristics that differ from what is typically male or female, also referred to as "difference of sex development."

Lesbian: An identity for people who identify as women or nonbinary and who are sexually and/or emotionally attracted to women.

Puberty suppression: Early medical intervention to halt feminization and masculinization during pubertal development using GnRH analogues.

Queer: Originally a derogatory slur, it has been reclaimed by some to be an inclusive term for those within the LGBTQ+ community. Some individuals claim this identity to recognize the fluidity of sexual attraction and gender identity.

Questioning: An identity for people who are uncertain of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Sex assigned at birth: Assignment as male, female, or a different sex at birth, typically based on the appearance of one's external genitalia.

Transgender: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs significantly from their sex assigned at birth.

Transition: Social and/or physical changes a transgender individual may make to affirm their gender identity.

Transphobia: Refers to a fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against transgender, gender nonbinary, and nonconforming people. A destructive force that prevents members of these communities from securing safer, open, and equal lives.

2.2: PUTTING TERMINOLOGY INTO PRACTICE: PRONOUNS AND NAMES

A growing number of students, staff, and faculty identify as transgender or gender nonbinary. Many use gendered pronouns, such as she/her/hers or he/him/his, consistent with their binary (trans)gender identity. Some use gender-neutral or plural pronouns, such as they/them/theirs, consistent with their nonbinary gender identity.

We often use pronouns without considering their meaning, but they are essential for promoting safety, respect, and care for others (Brown et al. 2020). Understanding the impact of pronouns helps us to interact with others without making assumptions and inadvertently inflicting harm on them.

> *"We can talk about pronouns, a lot, but that isn't enough—not nearly enough—because allyship really isn't one dimensional and it is an ongoing thing . . . implicit biases and a lot of other stuff bleed(s) into a classroom so I feel like . . . there needs to be more. But how to be really inclusive to all the people and not just like say things politically correctly?"*
>
> (Undergraduate student, Morningside)

- **Pronouns are not simply "preferred," but necessary.** The phrase "preferred pronouns" suggests that it is optional to use someone's pronouns. Therefore, simply refer to or ask what pronouns a person "uses" (instead of "prefers"). Pronouns can change based on context, name changes, or a person's identity development or gender journey.

- **Pronouns should not be assumed.** It is acceptable to ask someone for their pronouns, especially during introductions. It can be inclusive to encourage others to share their pronouns in a group context, but it is important to not make sharing pronouns mandatory.

- **It is appropriate to use gender-inclusive terms** such as "everyone/all" (instead of ladies/gentlemen), "partner" (instead of boyfriend/husband and girlfriend/wife), "they" (instead of he/she), "folks" (instead of you guys/ladies), and "person" (instead of man/woman) in order to avoid assuming others' gender identity and pronouns.

- **Adding your pronouns to email signatures or name tags** can show respect, allyship, and increase awareness about the importance of pronouns to affirm gender.

- If you notice that a person is misgendering someone else, **discreetly bring it to their attention**.

- **Avoid outing transgender students accidentally by mentioning their other/official name**. Sometimes faculty and staff know that there is a discrepancy between a person's previous name (because it remains in official Columbia records) and the name they use in class.

(Adapted from *Celebrate Pronoun Diversity! by the Sexual and Gender Minority (SGM) SIG of the Association of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies*)

How do I ask someone for their pronouns?

While it may seem uncomfortable to ask someone for their pronouns, it is crucial to not assume their pronouns. If you do not know someone's pronouns, it is recommended to use their name instead. You can simply ask, "What pronouns do you use?" to learn about their pronouns. You can also share your pronouns in your own introduction to model openness around gender diversity and to normalize sharing of pronouns.

How do I recover from mistakes?

Misgendering occurs when someone accidentally (or, rarely, intentionally) uses incorrect pronouns when referring to or addressing someone else. Misgendering is invalidating and may be experienced as dismissive and alienating. If you accidentally misgender someone, it is important to quickly apologize, correct yourself, and move on. **Deliberately misgendering someone is considered a form of harassment, as defined in the *EOAA Discrimination Policies* (eoaa.columbia.edu).**

Pronouns in Use and Chosen Names at Columbia

Columbia has resources for students who seek to change their name or register their pronouns. Students can now opt to list their pronouns in use in CourseWorks. University Life has created a guide called *Pronouns in Our Community*, which reviews pronouns and contains a glossary of terms.

The Office of the Registrar allows students to identify a Preferred First and/or Middle Name in addition to their Legal Name. Students may request this service through the University Registrar's Office.

To learn more about the use of pronouns, see the Resources website.

> **The Pronouns Project**
> **Acacia O'Connor, Director of Social Media**
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> In September 2020, the Central Communications Video Team received a pitch from General Studies (GS) student and GS Alliance leader Jesse Cheever to produce a video for the entire Columbia community explaining the importance of correct pronouns to queer and trans community members. It took a full pandemic year to execute this project. A brilliant group of staff including Vanessa Gonzalez-Siegel, Ixchel Rosal, Adina Brooks, and Jen Leach collaborated to develop, storyboard, write, edit, direct, and record the video, and Columbia Creative executed it beautifully.
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> For more information, please visit the Resources website.