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# LGBT+: A Guide to Language in Use

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The language we use about people and issues can have a powerful impact. Language about sexual orientation and gender identity has continued to develop as the visibility and awareness of different sections of the LGBT+ community has increased in recent years, and it is important to be sensitive to these social changes. There can be confusion caused by an increase in the diversity of terms and language used, so this guide – although not exhaustive - provides a brief overview of some of the current language in use for discussion of LGBT+ issues and experiences.

## 1. Terminology/Abbreviations used in work UCU has previously engaged with

### Gender Identity

- **Binary Gendered:** individuals who self-identify as either men or women, including trans men and women.
- **Cis-gendered:** individuals who identify with the sex they were assigned at birth (see section 2)
- **Gender Expression:** an individual's choice of how they present themselves in terms of behaviour, clothing, hairstyle, voice etc. this can alter day to day and may not be consistent with gender identity (see section 2)
- **Gender Reassignment:** changing gender from one gender to another, including non-binary (see section 2)

- **Non-Binary Gender:** People who define their gender identity as not solely man or woman. This group includes those who describe themselves as 'Genderqueer' or 'Gender Fluid'.
- **T / Trans:** people who describe their gender identity as different to the sex they were assigned at birth.

## Sexual Orientation

- **Heterosexual:** individuals who identify as either heterosexual or straight.
- **LGB:** lesbian, gay and/or bisexual.
- **LGB+:** individuals who define their sexual orientation as lesbian, gay, bisexual, undecided or 'other'
- **Asexual:** people who do not have a sexual attraction to other people

## LGBT+

- **LGBT+:** is used as an umbrella term to include all those who identify as non-heterosexual, non-cis gender and / or non-binary sex and / or gender. This includes queer, intersex, gender-fluid.
- **LGBT:** lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans
- **Gender Fluid:** A dynamic experience of gender where at one time a person may feel and / or present more toward one binary gender but at another time feel and / or present more toward the other. An individual's experience of their gender at any one time may or may not be outwardly expressed.
- **Genderqueer:** an identity most often adopted when a person does not subscribe to conventional gender distinctions. Queer can also relate to sexual orientation - as in not recognising set reference points for sexual attraction.
- **Intersex:** people who have variations of sex characteristics that do not fit with typical male or female bodies.

## **2. A Brief Guide to Gender Identity**

It is recognised in the report that language for both sexual orientation and gender identity has evolved beyond the terms lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) that have been in stable usage for the past 15 years or so. This leads to a need to adapt our language use. As awareness of diverse gender identification has progressed over the past few years, so the complexity of language use has increased.

### **Assigned Sex**

Assignment of sex is undertaken at birth when determining whether the child is male or female (binary categories). At this stage, observations about external anatomy are made by medical staff (see the term 'Sex' below). This is required to facilitate the registration of sex on a birth certificate. This process is undertaken with the aim of assigning sex which is most likely to be congruent with the child's gender identity. There may be a more extensive assignment process in cases where it's not clear how to assign sex from external and / or observable internal biological indicators.

### **Gender**

Gender refers to psychological, behavioural, social and cultural aspects of being e.g. masculinity / femininity. Gender is distinct from sex in that sex refers to biological features (see the term sex in this document for more information). Distinction between the terms gender and sex is not regularly observed. Many cultures have socially expected gender roles that relate to the sex assigned at birth.

### **Gender Conforming**

Gender conforming and non-conforming refer to personal features including biological, behavioural, psychological etc. as they relate to the sex assigned at birth and the subsequently expected gender role.

## **Gender Dysphoria**

Gender dysphoria is associated with a mismatch of gender identity and sex registered at birth. This can include not identifying with the biological features associated with the registered sex, gender non-conforming, and / or a combination of these. Only some gender-nonconforming people experience gender dysphoria at any point in their lives.

## **Gender Expression**

Presentation including physical appearance, clothing and accessories and behaviours express aspects of gender identity. These may not conform to one's gender identity and / or socially prescribed gender roles.

## **Gender Identity**

The term gender identity relates to how an individual identifies themselves as man, woman, a mix of both or neither. Gender can correlate with or be different to the sex assigned at birth e.g. man (gender) correlates with male (sex). The way someone identifies may not be the way they externally express (present) themselves. Assumptions about how a person self-identifies their gender can lead to misgendering.

## **Gender Reassignment (including transition)**

Gender reassignment is a term used to describe the process of transition that a person goes through when they change from being the sex they were assigned at birth to the one consistent with the gender they identify with. This does not necessarily include medical procedures. Some people call this Gender Confirmation. Gender reassignment is one of 9 protected characteristics in the 2010 Equality Act, although the protected characteristic gender reassignment does not explicitly cover a person who is not living, or not assumed to be living, in a gender other than the sex they were assigned at birth.

## **Misgendering**

Misgendering is when a person or people use language related to one gender (e.g. pronoun or prefix) about an individual or group of people whom do not themselves identify with that gender.

## **Pronoun**

He and She are pronouns associated with the gender binary categories. As awareness of greater diversity of gender has grown more pronouns have emerged such as the singular 'they'. In some circles, it is already common to respect the individual's gender identity and ask them which pronoun they prefer to use rather than assume based on the person's assumed gender.

## **Sex**

Sex refers to a person's physical and biological traits most often based on appearance of external genitalia. Alongside external genitalia there are a number of indicators of biological sex including sex chromosomes and internal reproductive organs. At birth babies are registered into a binary category, male or female. This binary categorisation from the observable biological traits leads to assignment of sex. See assigned sex in this document for more information.

## **Sexual Orientation**

An individual's identity based on attraction (be it emotional, romantic, and / or sexual) to other people. Often described in relation to sex e.g. bisexual, heterosexual, homosexual and pansexual (attracted to others regardless of their biological sex or gender identity).