

LGBTI Terminology

Language is powerful and has historically been used to discriminate against LGBTI people.

Language can aid learning, however we recognise that long lists of terminology can be intimidating and confusing, particularly for new learners. Language and jargon can also be used to exclude others from a group or community and can be used to facilitate unequal power dynamics. We therefore recommend only using language that is suitable to the setting or the individuals you are working with. Take time to consider this before using this list of terminology.

The important message is to re-affirm that people should ask if they do not know what a word means!

Below is a list of some of the terms that can be useful to define in training, resources and websites. This is in thematic order rather than alphabetical in order to assist with learning:-

- **LGBT** - Acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender
- **LGBTI** - Acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex
- **LGBTQ** – Acronym for Acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning

Understanding Sexual Orientation

- **Sexual orientation** – A person's identity based on emotional and/or physical attraction to individuals of a different gender, the same gender, or more than one gender.

Sexual orientation can also be seen as a complex mix of an individual's identity, attraction and behaviour. However, identity is the most important aspect as sexual orientation can only be determined by the individual; attraction and/or behaviour alone do not determine someone's sexual orientation.

- **Lesbian** - Refers to a woman who is emotionally and/or physically attracted to other women.

- **Gay** - Refers to someone who is emotionally and/or physically attracted to people of the same gender. Some women prefer to refer to themselves as gay women rather than lesbian, although the word gay is most commonly used in reference to men.
- **Bisexual** – A person who is emotionally and/or physically attracted to people of more than one gender or regardless of gender. Historically definitions of bisexual refer to ‘an attraction towards men and women’ however many bisexual people recognise that there are more than two genders.
- **Heterosexual/Straight** - Used to describe people who are emotionally and/or physically attracted to people of the ‘opposite’ gender.
- **Asexual** - A person who does not experience sexual attraction. Asexual people can experience platonic attraction but may have no sexual desire or need within their relationships.
- **Pansexual** – A person who is emotionally and/or physically attracted to people of more than one gender or regardless of gender. Some people use the term pansexual rather than bisexual in order to be more explicitly inclusive of non-binary gender identities.
- **Queer** – An umbrella term used for diverse sexual orientations or gender identities that are not heterosexual and do not fit within a gender binary. It may be used to challenge the idea of labels and categories such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. It is important to note that it is an in-group term, and may be considered offensive to some people.

Other Terms (Sexual Orientation/ Sexuality)

- **Sexuality** – Refers to the sum of various aspects of attraction and behaviour that add up to how a person expresses themselves as a sexual being. This includes the type(s) of partner a person is attracted to, the kinds of sexual activities they prefer and how they organise their relationships for example: monogamy or polyamory. Sexual orientation is an aspect of sexuality and is the more appropriate term when referring to lesbian, gay, bisexual identities.
- **Homosexual** - A person whose emotional and/ or physical attraction is toward people of the same gender as themselves. Historically this term has been used to medicalise or criminalise lesbian and gay people and many experience it as a stigmatising term. It is now considered best practice to avoid it.

- **Demisexual** – Characterised by a lack of sexual attraction toward any person unless they become deeply emotionally or romantically connected with a specific person or persons
- **Polyamorous/ Polyamory** – Polyamory or polyamorous relationships involve more than two intimate partners, with the knowledge and consent of all involved. This relationship structure is not limited to LGBTI people nor do all LGBTI people enter into polyamorous relationships.

Understanding Gender & Sex

- **Sex** – (The noun) refers to physical differences between male and female bodies, including the reproductive system and/or other biological characteristics. Sex is most commonly divided into the categories of male and female however biological sex is much more diverse (see Intersex definition).
- **Intersex** – A person whose chromosomes, reproductive organs or genitalia vary in some way from what is traditionally considered clearly male or female in terms of biological sex. This may be apparent at birth or become apparent later in life - often at puberty, or in the case of some women, when they conceive or try to conceive.

We recognise that this definition uses a medical model however it important to recognise that some people proudly identify with this term.

- **Gender** – Refers to the attitudes, feelings and behaviours that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex. The terms girl/woman, boy/man are assigned at birth on the basis of biological sex and have many socially constructed expectations, standards and norms that can limit and oppress people's gender expression.
- **Gender Binary** – The traditional western system of regarding gender as having only two options: men (with all the traditional notions of masculinity) and women (with all the traditional notions of femininity).
- **Gender Identity** - A person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned to them at birth.

- **Gender Expression** – A person’s external gender related appearance including clothing, speech and mannerisms. Usually defined as connected to masculinity or femininity, however we recognise that people express their gender out with these traditional notions.
- **Cisgender** – Individuals who have a match between the gender they were assigned at birth, their bodies and their personal identity. In other words those who are not, or do not identify as transgender.

Understanding Transgender Identities & the Transgender Umbrella

- **Transgender** - An umbrella term for those whose gender identity or expression differs in some way from the gender assigned to them at birth and conflicts with the ‘norms’ expected by the society they live in. Included in the overall transgender umbrella are transsexual people, non-binary gender identities and cross-dressing people.
- **Transsexual** - When a person's gender identity is different from the gender they were assigned at birth based on their biological sex. Transsexual people may have medical treatment, such as hormone treatment or surgery to bring their physical appearance more into line with their gender.
- **Non-Binary Gender** - Gender identities that are not exclusively male or female are identities which are outside of the gender binary. People can be both male and female, neither, or their gender may be more fluid (i.e. unfixed and changeable over the course of time). Many view gender as a one dimensional spectrum with male on one end, female on the other, and non-binary in the middle – but the reality is that gender is often more complex.
- **Cross-dressing** – The act of wearing items of clothing and other accoutrements commonly associated with the ‘opposite’ sex/ gender within a particular society. The term cross dressing is preferred to the outdated term ‘transvestite’. Although drag performers are referred to as cross-dressing, drag artists (unlike cross dressers) dress with the intention of performance rather than gender expression. What is considered ‘cross dressing’, as with gender, is culturally defined.

- **Trans*** - An umbrella term (similar to transgender) that refers to all the identities in the gender identity spectrum. The asterisk makes special note in an effort to include all transgender, transsexual and non-binary identities.

Useful Terms (associated with 'transsexual')

- **Transition** - A complicated, multi-step process that can take years as transgender people align their anatomy with their gender identity and gender expression.
- **FTM** – Female to male transsexual person; a trans man.
- **MTF** – Male to female transsexual person; a trans woman.
- **Trans Man** - A transgender person who was assigned female at birth but whose gender identity is that of a man. Trans men should be treated as men and male pronouns should be used.
- **Trans Woman** - A transgender person who was assigned male at birth but whose gender identity is that of a woman. Trans women should be treated as women and female pronouns should be used.
- **Passing** - Refers to a person's ability to be regarded at a glance to be either a cisgender man or a cisgender woman. Typically, this involves a mixture of physical gender cues (for example, hair style or clothing) as well as certain behavioural attributes that tend to be associated with masculinity and femininity.
- **(Hormone/Puberty) Blockers** - A group of medications used to inhibit puberty. Puberty blockers stunt the production of hormones; other effects include the suppression of facial hair, deep voices, and adam's apples for boys and the halting of breast growth and menstruation in girls.
- **Binding** - Refers to the process of flattening one's breast tissue in order to create a male-appearing chest. A binder may be a vest, or athletic support top, or be wrapped bandages.

- **GRC (Gender Recognition Certificate)** – The Gender Recognition Act (2004) allows transsexual people who have taken decisive steps to live fully and permanently in their true or ‘acquired’ gender to gain legal recognition of their gender. If a person is successful in their application to the Gender Recognition Panel, they will be issued with a full Gender Recognition Certificate which allows them to update their birth certificate and gives additional legal protections.

Please note GRC is not required for individuals to be treated in line with their gender identity. This is only available to people over 18 and it is unlawful to ask to see someone’s Gender Recognition Certificate.

Useful Terms (associated with non-binary gender)

- **Gender fluid** - Having an overlap of, or constantly changeable gender identity and gender expression. This can include having two or more genders, having no gender, or having a fluctuating gender identity.
- **Gender-neutral pronoun** - A pronoun that is not associated with a particular grammatical or social gender and does not imply male or female. Some English pronouns are gender-neutral, including *they* which can be singular.

Many gender-neutral pronouns have been suggested for the English language, for example ‘zhe, zher, zhim’ and ‘ey, em, eir’. Individuals may prefer to use these pronouns but they are not in regular use and there is limited understanding.

- **Gender Queer** - A person who does not subscribe to conventional gender distinctions but identifies with neither, both, or a combination of male and female genders.
- **Androgyne** - Is a non-binary gender identity associated with androgyny. Androgyne people have a gender which is simultaneously feminine and masculine, although not necessary in equal amounts.
- **Agender** – A person who does not have a specific gender identity or recognisable gender expression.
- **Neutrois** – A person who has a neutral gender or no gender. It has considerable overlap with agender - some people who consider themselves neutrally gendered or genderless may identify as both, while others prefer one term or the other.

- **Bigender** - A person who has two gender identities or some combination of both.
- **Transmasculine** - A term used to describe transgender people who were assigned female at birth, but identify with masculinity to a greater extent than with femininity. Someone who identifies on the masculine side of the gender spectrum may or may not identify as male.
- **Transfeminine** – A term used to describe transgender people who were assigned male at birth, but identify with femininity to a greater extent than with masculinity. Someone who identifies on the feminine side of the gender spectrum may or may not identify as female.

Useful Terms (Cross-dressing)

- **Drag** - A drag queen is usually a male-bodied person who performs as an exaggeratedly feminine character. A drag king is a counterpart of the drag queen, performing an exaggerated masculine character.
- **Transvestite/ Transvestism** - A person, typically a man, who derives pleasure from dressing in clothes generally associated with the opposite sex. Transvestites can be gay or bisexual but are predominately heterosexual men. This term was historically pathologised and is considered outdated. Cross dresser is preferred.

Understanding Prejudice & Discrimination

- **Prejudice** – An unfavourable opinion or feeling formed beforehand without knowledge, fact, or reason.
- **Discrimination** – The unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people. In the UK this usually refers to discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, gender re-assignment/ gender identity, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation
- **Homophobia** - The irrational fear, dislike or prejudice against people who are or are perceived to be lesbian and gay people. It can also be used as an all-encompassing term to include the irrational fear, dislike or prejudice against bisexual people and transgender people.

Homophobia can manifest itself at different levels and may involve, but is not limited to verbal abuse and physical abuse. Institutional homophobia refers to the many ways in which government and other institutions and organisations discriminate against people on the basis of sexual orientation through legislation, policies and practice.

- **Biphobia** - The irrational fear, dislike or prejudice against those who are or are perceived to be bisexual.. Bisexual people can experience homophobia (particularly when in same-sex relationships) and can experience biphobia from both heterosexual and lesbian and gay people.
- **Transphobia** – The irrational fear, dislike or prejudice or discrimination against those who are or are perceived to be transgender. Transgender people can also experience homophobia when in same-sex relationships or for not conforming to gender norms.

Useful Terms (prejudice & discrimination)

- **Protected Characteristics** – The nine personal qualities that are legally covered by the Equality Act 2010; age, disability, gender re-assignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion and belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
- **Hate Crime** – When a crime committed has been motivated by ‘malice or ill-will towards an identifiable social group’. In Scotland, several pieces of legislation are in place to recognise hate crimes as crimes motivated by prejudice based on: race, religion, sexual orientation, transgender identity and disability.

The law is clear that the identity of the victim is irrelevant as to whether something is a hate crime or not. Individuals are protected based on identification, perception, and association. The motivation of the perpetrator is the key factor in defining a hate crime.

- **Multiple Discrimination** – Experiencing discrimination on more than one protected characteristic, either on different occasions or at the same time.
- **Intersectionality** – Identities, experiences or approaches to equality work that fall into more than one protected characteristic. This approach recognises that patterns of oppression and discrimination are not only interrelated but are bound together, and that certain groups can experience multiple forms of discrimination.

- **Heteronormativity** – A view point that preferentially treats heterosexuality as a norm from which people deviate if they have any other sexual orientation. Heteronormativity is reinforced by making assumptions that everyone is heterosexual and not considering other sexual orientations in policy and practice.
- **Heterosexism** – A view point whereby heterosexuality is presumed to be superior to any other sexual orientation and therefore other sexual orientations are deliberately not included in policy and practice.

We recognise that language is constantly evolving and **we welcome feedback**.