

# LGBT+ Language in Use

A guide for  
UCU members  
and reps

The language we use about people and issues can have a powerful impact. Language used about sexual orientation and gender identity continues to develop as there has been increased visibility, awareness and discussion in recent years. To support and include people it is important to be sensitive to social change. There can be confusion caused by an increase in the diversity of terms and language used. This guide sets out provide suggestions about current use of language and is not exhaustive.

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

### **GENDER IDENTITY**

- ➔ **Binary Gender:** either men or women, including trans men and women.
- ➔ **Cis-gender:** gender that correlates with the sex they were assigned at birth (see section 2)
- ➔ **Agender:** people who do not identify with any gender
- ➔ **Gender Expression:** a person'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:** the personal process of affirming one's own gender in a different way than previously. A protected characteristic in the Equality Act 2010. This includes non-binary (see section 2)
- ➔ **Non-Binary Gender:** gender identity that is not solely man or woman. This group includes those who describe themselves as 'Genderqueer' or 'Gender Fluid'.

- ➔ **T / Trans:** gender that does not correlate with sex assigned at birth.

## SEXUAL ORIENTATION

- ➔ **Heterosexual:** attraction to people of the opposite sex. Some people who identify their gender as different to their assigned sex also use heterosexual if attracted to someone of the opposite gender. This has been assumed by many to be the default sexual orientation, which has led to norms being created on the basis of usual heterosexual life trajectory which is known as heteronormativity
- ➔ **Lesbian / Gay:** attraction to people of the same sex. Some people who identify their gender as different to their assigned sex may use lesbian or gay if attracted to someone of the same gender. It is quite usual to see Lesbian / Gay used together on forms. Lesbian is used by women, Gay is used by both men and women and by some non-binary people.
- ➔ **Pansexual:** attraction to people irrespective of sex or gender
- ➔ **Bisexual:** attraction to people of both binary sexes. However recently bisexual has also been used to refer to attraction to people of any sex or gender, like pansexual.
- ➔ **Queer:** a term used to define sexual orientation in a way other than attraction according to sex. Queer is often used as not the normal way, meaning that the ways usually used to define do not apply. Whilst someone who defines as queer may be usually attracted to same or opposite sex they may also, at times, be attracted to non-binary or the opposite of their usual. Queer can also be used as a political identity to query the classification of sexual orientation as being as simple as attraction on the basis of sex. Negative attitudes towards queer are often known as queerphobia
- ➔ **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 sex 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. Identifying gender with the sex assigned at birth is known as cisgender. This has been understood by many as the default for gender and expectations / norms have been based on the life experience of cisgender people, known as cisnormativity.

### **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. This can alter day to day and may not be consistent with gender identity

## **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 when a person changes their gender from one to another. This does not necessarily include medical procedures. Transition is usually, but not always, changing from the gender that correlates with the sex assigned at birth to the one consistent with gender identity. 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.

