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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 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.

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

In the Pride and Prejudice report (Forum 2016) the following terminology was used. Some of these terms are further defined in section 2 of this guide.

### Gender Identity

- **Binary Gendered:** individuals who self-identify as either male or female, including trans men and women.
- **Cis-gendered:** individuals who identify with the gender 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 binary gender to another (see section 2)
- **Non-Binary Gendered:** Individuals who define their gender identity as not male or female. This group includes those who describe themselves as 'Genderqueer', 'X' or 'Other'.
- **T / Trans** individuals who describe their gender identity differently to that assigned at birth.
- **X / Other:** options to describe gender identity to enable anyone who wishes to do so to choose a gender identity that is different to the traditional female and male. In some contexts 'X' is used by intersex people and some trans-identifying people who regard their identity as a third sex.

### 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'

### Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

- **LGBT:** lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or trans - used when referring to previous studies where the focus has been lesbian, gay, bisexual and / or trans identifying people. It has also been used as an umbrella term for organised groups
- **LGBTQ+:** is used as an umbrella term to include all those who identify as non-heterosexual and / or non-binary gendered

## 2. Guide to Gender Identity – UCU 2017

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 to 2017 the

complexity of language use has increased. UCU has approached this in a guide to gender identity 2017.

### **Assigned Sex**

Assignment 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 refer 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 male, female, a blend of both or neither. This can be the same or different as sex assigned at birth. The way someone identifies may not be the way they externally express (present) themselves. Assumption 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, 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 one 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' which is gaining in popularity. 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 (attracted to others regardless of their biological sex or gender identity) pansexual.

### 3. Terminology additional to previously cited work

In addition to the terms used in the Pride and Prejudice report (2016) and the UCU Guide to Gender Identity (2017) UCU identified some that have been in increasing use.

- i. **Gender Fluid:** an individual's experience of their gender which may be outwardly expressed or not. A dynamic experience of gender where at one time a person may feel and / or present more toward one binary but at another time feel and / or present more toward the other
- ii. **Genderqueer:** an identity most often adopted when a person does not subscribe to conventional gender distinctions and may identify with neither, both or a combination of male and female genders.
- iii. **Intersex:** people who have variations of sex characteristics that do not fit with typical male or female bodies.

### 4. LGBT+

UCU has used LGBT as the acronym for its LGBT work. Reflecting

developments in language used the UCU LGBT members standing committee is recommending use of LGBT+. It is considered that whilst there is a desire to be inclusive and representative the language is continuing to change so rather than adding any more letters it seems practical to add the + to denote all other non-heterosexual and non-binary identities.

### **Further Reading**

For more information about gender identity please refer to

the UCU Guide to Gender Identity 2017

[https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/8600/Guide-to-Gender-Identity-May-17/pdf/Guide\\_to\\_gender\\_identity\\_may\\_17.pdf](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/8600/Guide-to-Gender-Identity-May-17/pdf/Guide_to_gender_identity_may_17.pdf)

and the Forum Guidance on trans equality in post-school education (2012)

[https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/5014/Trans-equality-in-post-school-education/pdf/forum\\_trans\\_guide\\_20121.pdf](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/5014/Trans-equality-in-post-school-education/pdf/forum_trans_guide_20121.pdf)

The Forum also produced a survey report about experiences and perceptions of sexual orientation and gender identity equality in post-school education. Pride and Prejudice in Education (2016).

<https://sgforum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Pride-and-Prejudice-in-Education-report.pdf>

UCU has developed a summarised version of this report

[https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/8359/Summary-of-Pride-and-Prejudice-in-Education-report-Oct-16/pdf/Summary\\_of\\_Pride\\_and\\_Prejudice\\_in\\_Education\\_report\\_Oct\\_2016.pdf](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/8359/Summary-of-Pride-and-Prejudice-in-Education-report-Oct-16/pdf/Summary_of_Pride_and_Prejudice_in_Education_report_Oct_2016.pdf)

For more information about sexual orientation equality please refer to UCU Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Rights at Work (2014)

[https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/6890/LGB-equality-at-work-guidance-for-UCU-members-and-branches/pdf/LGB\\_equality\\_at\\_work.pdf](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/6890/LGB-equality-at-work-guidance-for-UCU-members-and-branches/pdf/LGB_equality_at_work.pdf)