



LGBTIQA+ glossary of common terms

CFCA Resource Sheet — February 2022



Overview

Understanding and using the language/terminology associated with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual and other sexually or gender diverse (LGBTIQA+)¹ people helps to ensure that services and organisations are inclusive and respectful.² This resource sheet provides a glossary of terms for practitioners and service providers to help them to better understand the terminology and to use inclusive language in service provision.

Introduction

The information in this resource sheet is intended to help service providers and practitioners create safer spaces for LGBTIQA+ clients. The glossary can be used alongside the CFCA guide to [LGBTIQ+ inclusive language](#).

The assumption that people are heterosexual, cisgender or have sex characteristics that fit medical norms for female or male bodies has a negative effect on the health, education and wellbeing of LGBTIQA+ people. In health settings, a lack of inclusive language can lead to clients not disclosing whether they are LGBTIQA+, not discussing topics related to their gender or sexuality, or refraining from seeking help (Brooks et al., 2018). Improving access and engagement to appropriate services is important due to the poorer mental health and substantially higher rates of depression, anxiety and suicide experienced by LGBTIQA+ people compared to the general population (Perales, 2016).

While legal protections are afforded in Australia, LGBTIQ people continue to face significant stigma and discrimination (Hill, Bourne, McNair, Carman, & Lyons, 2020). Discrimination is associated with being bullied, homelessness and a range of negative socio-economic and health and wellbeing outcomes (Perales, 2016). Negative outcomes do not stem from being LGBTI but are driven by the fear of, or actual, discrimination via institutions that are important in the lives of young people, including schools, health services and welfare



services (Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), 2015). Competent use of LGBT relevant language and an affirmative approach to inclusive communication can help support LGBT people to feel welcome and able to disclose who they are when seeking help (Brooks, 2018; MacCarthy et al., 2021).

There is a great deal of diversity within and across LGBTIQA+ communities; LGBTIQA+ people are not a homogenous group. There is also a wide range of terms and language related to bodies, gender, sexual orientation, sexual attraction, sexual behaviour, and legal and medical processes. Sexual orientation, gender identity and variations of sex characteristics are different concepts, and it is acknowledged that related language constantly evolves.

When working with clients, it is important to acknowledge the complexity of people's lived experiences and recognise that the above aspects may apply to individuals in different ways and at different times across the life span (Carman, Rosenberg, Bourne, & Parsons, 2020). Practitioners and service providers are encouraged to use this resource sheet in conjunction with a person-centred approach that recognises clients are the experts in the language that best reflects their experience. Additional [Further reading](#) and [Resources and organisations](#) that can be used to help build safety and comfort for LGBTIQA+ clients are listed at the end of this resource sheet.

Glossary

This glossary is not exhaustive and should be used as a guide. Terminology is organised around the following categories (listed in alphabetical order):

- [Bodies and variations in sex characteristics](#)
- [Gender](#)
- [Sexual orientations](#)
- [Societal attitudes/issues](#).

Bodies and variations in sex characteristics

Endosex: a term used to describe people whose innate sex characteristics meet medical and conventional understandings of male and female bodies (Intersex Human Rights Australia, 2021).

Intersex: an umbrella term that refers to individuals who have anatomical, chromosomal and hormonal characteristics that differ from medical and conventional understandings of male and female bodies. There are at least 40 different variations that may be apparent at different life stages or may remain unknown to the individual and their medical practitioners. Some people with an intersex variation are LGBTQ, many are heterosexual and most are cisgender.

Sex: a classification that is often made at birth as either male or female based on a person's external anatomical characteristics. However, sex is not always straightforward, as some people may be born with an intersex variation, and anatomical and hormonal characteristics can change over a life span.

Sex characteristics: a term used to refer to physical parts of the body that are related to body development, regulation and reproductive systems. Primary sex characteristics are gonads, chromosomes, genitals and hormones. Secondary sex characteristics emerge at puberty and can include the development of breast tissue, voice pitch, facial and pubic hair, etc.

Gender

Cisgender/cis: a term used to describe people whose gender corresponds to what they were assigned at birth.

Dead name: an informal way to describe the former name a person no longer uses because it does not align with their current experience in the world or their gender. Some people may experience distress when this name is used.

Dysphoria: the distress or unease sometimes experienced from being misgendered and/or when someone's gender and body personally don't feel connected or congruent. Many trans people do not experience gender dysphoria at all and, if they do, they may cease with access to gender affirming healthcare and/or peer support. With or without the presence of gender dysphoria, being trans is not a mental illness. Gender dysphoria does not equal being trans (Transhub, 2021).

Gender/gender identity: one's sense of whether they are a man, woman, non-binary, agender, genderqueer, genderfluid, or a combination of one or more of these definitions. Gender can be binary (either a man or a woman), or non-binary (including people who have no binary gender at all and people who have some relationship to binary gender/s).



Gender affirmation: the personal process or processes a trans person determines is right for them in order to live as their defined gender and so society recognises this. This may involve social, medical and/or legal steps that affirm a person's gender. A trans person who hasn't medically or legally affirmed their gender is no less the man, woman or non-binary person they've always been. A person's circumstances may inhibit their access to steps they want to take to affirm their gender (TransHub, 2021).

Gender binary: something that is binary consists of two things or can refer to one of a pair of things. When talking about genders, binary genders are male and female, and non-binary genders are any genders that are not just male or female, or aren't male or female at all (TransHub, 2021).

Gender euphoria: the experience of comfort, connection and celebration related to a trans person with their internal sense of self and gender. The pride of feeling and being affirmed as who they are.

Gender expression: refers to how a person chooses to publicly express or present their gender. This can include behaviour and outward appearance, including clothing, hair, make-up, body language and voice. Western expectations of gender expression are based on a binary of men as masculine and women as feminine but many people do not fit into binary gender expressions. Failing to adhere to the norms associated with one's gender can result in ridicule, intimidation and violence (Hill et al., 2020; Robinson, Bansel, Denson, Ovenden, & Davies, 2014).

Gender fluid: a term used to describe a person with shifting or changing gender.

Gender pronouns: refer to how a person publicly expresses their gender identity through the use of a pronoun. Pronouns can be gender-specific or gender-neutral (Rainbow Health Australia (formerly GLHV), 2016). This can include the traditional he or she, as well as gender-neutral pronouns such as they, their, ze and hir (see [Transgender/Trans](#)).

Genderqueer: a gender identity that does not conform to traditional gender norms and may be expressed as other than woman or man or both man and woman, including gender neutral and androgynous.

Gender questioning: not necessarily an identity but sometimes used in reference to a person who is unsure which gender, if any, they identify with.

Non-binary: an umbrella term for gender identities that sit within, outside of, across or between the spectrum of the male and female binary. A non-binary person might identify as gender fluid, trans masculine, trans feminine or could be agender (without a feeling of having any gender or having neutral feelings about gender) (TransHub, 2021).

Sistergirl/Brotherboy: terms used for trans people within some Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities. How the words Sistergirl and Brotherboy are used can differ between locations, countries and nations. Sistergirls and Brotherboys have distinct cultural identities and roles. Sistergirls are Indigenous people assigned male at birth but who live their lives as women, including taking on traditional cultural female practices (Rainbow Health Australia, 2016). Brotherboys are Indigenous people assigned female at birth but are a man or have a male spirit (Rainbow Health Australia, 2016).

Transgender/Trans: umbrella terms used to refer to people whose assigned sex at birth does not match their gender identity. Trans people may choose to live their lives with or without modifying their body, dress or legal status, and with or without medical treatment and surgery. Trans people may use a variety of terms to describe themselves including but not limited to: man, woman, trans woman, trans man, non-binary, agender, genderqueer, genderfluid, trans guy, trans masculine/masc, trans feminine/femme.

Trans people have the same range of sexual orientations as the rest of the population. Trans people's sexual orientation is referred to in reference to their gender identity, rather than their sex. For example, a woman may identify as lesbian whether she was assigned female or male at birth.

Trans people may also use a variety of different pronouns (see [Gender pronouns](#)). Using incorrect pronouns to refer to or describe trans people is disrespectful and can be harmful (see [Misgendering](#) under 'Societal attitudes/issues' below).

Sexual orientations

AFAB/AMAB: an acronym for Assigned or presumed Female/Male at Birth.

Aromantic/aro: refers to individuals who do not experience romantic attraction. Aromantic individuals may or may not identify as asexual.

Asexual/ace: a sexual orientation that reflects little to no sexual attraction, either within or outside relationships. People who identify as asexual can still experience romantic attraction across the sexuality continuum. While asexual people do not experience sexual attraction, this does not necessarily imply a lack of libido or sex drive.



Bisexual/bi: an individual who is sexually and/or romantically attracted to people of the same gender and people of another gender. Bisexuality does not necessarily assume there are only two genders (Flanders, LeBreton, Robinson, Bian, & Caravaca-Morera, 2017).

Gay: an individual who identifies as a man and is sexually and/or romantically attracted to other people who identify as men. The term gay can also be used in relation to women who are sexually and romantically attracted to other women.

Heterosexual: an individual who is sexually and/or romantically attracted to the opposite gender.

Lesbian: an individual who identifies as a woman and is sexually and/or romantically attracted to other people who identify as women.

Pansexual: an individual whose sexual and/or romantic attraction to others is not restricted by gender. Pansexuality can include being sexually and/or romantically attracted to any person, regardless of their gender identity.

Queer: a term used to describe a range of sexual orientations and gender identities. Although once used as a derogatory term and still considered derogatory by many older LGBTIQ+ people, the term queer now encapsulates political ideas of resistance to heteronormativity and homonormativity and is often used as an umbrella term to describe the full range of LGBTIQ+ identities.

QTPOC: an acronym for Queer and Trans People of Colour.

Sexual orientation: refers to an individual's sexual and romantic attraction to another person. This can include, but is not limited to, heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual and asexual. It is important to note, however, that these are just a handful of sexual orientations – the reality is that there are an infinite number of ways in which someone might define their sexuality. Further, people can identify with a sexuality or sexual orientation regardless of their sexual or romantic experiences. Some people may identify as sexually fluid; that is, their sexuality is not fixed to any one identity.

Societal attitudes/issues

Biphobia: refers to negative beliefs, prejudice and/or discrimination against bisexual people. This can include a dismissal of bisexuality, questioning whether bisexual identities are authentic or a focus on the sexual desires and practices of bisexual people (Ross et al., 2018).

Cisgenderism: where something is based on a discriminatory social or structural view that positions (either intentionally or otherwise) the trans experience as either not existing or as something to be pathologised. Cisgenderism believes that gender identity is determined at birth and is a fixed and innate identity that is based on sex characteristics (or 'biology') and that only binary (male or female) identities are valid and real (TransHub, 2021).

Cisnormativity: assumes that everyone is cisgender and that all people will continue to identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. Cisnormativity erases the existence of trans people.

Heteronormativity: the view that heterosexual relationships are the natural and normal expression of sexual orientation and relationships. This is an extension of cisgenderism, which is a discriminatory social structure that positions cis and binary genders as the only real or valid experiences of gender.

Heterosexism: describes a social system that privileges heteronormative beliefs, values and practice. Heterosexism provides the social backdrop for homophobic and transphobic prejudices, violence and discrimination against people with non-heteronormative sexualities, gender identities and intersex varieties (McKay, Lindquist, & Misra, 2019).

Homonormativity: a term that describes the privileging of certain people or relationships within the queer community (usually cisgender, white, gay men). This term also refers to the assumption that LGBTIQ+ people will conform to mainstream, heterosexual culture; for example, by adopting the idea that monogamy, marriage and having children is a natural and normal relationship progression.

Homophobia: refers to negative beliefs, prejudices, stereotypes and fears that exist towards same-sex attracted people. It can range from the use of offensive language to bullying, abuse and physical violence; and can include systemic barriers, such as being denied housing or being fired due to a person's sexual orientation.

Misgendering: an occurrence where a person is described or addressed using language that does not match their gender identity (Rainbow Health Australia, 2016). This can include the incorrect use of pronouns (she/he/they), familial titles (dad, sister, uncle, niece) and, at times, other words that traditionally have gendered applications (pretty, handsome, etc.).

Transphobia: refers to negative beliefs, prejudices and stereotypes that exist about trans people.



Conclusion

Having an understanding of LGBTIQ+ terminology and using language that is inclusive demonstrates respect and recognition for how people describe their own gender, bodies and relationships (National LGBTI Health Alliance, 2013a). Inclusive language also makes people feel welcome in organisations including schools, workplaces and services. It is worth noting that while the preferred language of LGBTIQ+ people can change over time, and can be used differently by different age groups, knowledge of LGBTIQ+ language and terminology will increase service users' comfort and the chances of successful engagement (Ayhan et al., 2019).

Further reading

[Research Matters: What does LGBTIQ mean? A fact sheet](#). Rainbow Health Victoria.

[Private Lives 3: The health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ people in Australia](#). Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University.

[Writing themselves in 4: The health and wellbeing of LGBTQA+ young people in Australia](#). Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University.

[What is trans?](#) TransHub, ACON.

Resources and organisations

[Intersex Human Rights Australia](#): an independent support, education and policy development organisation, by and for people with intersex variations or traits.

[LGBTIQ+ Health Australia](#): the national peak health organisation in Australia for organisations and individuals that provide health-related programs, services and research focused on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer people and other sexuality and gender diverse (LGBTIQ+) people and communities.

[Minus18](#): a national youth-led organisation for LGBTQA+ young people.

[QLife](#): Australia-wide anonymous, LGBTI peer support and referral for people wanting to talk about a range of issues including sexuality, identity, gender, bodies, feelings or relationships.

[Queerspace](#): provides a safe and supportive space to obtain information and support services aimed at improving mental health and wellbeing of Melbourne's LGBTIQ+ community.

[Rainbow Network](#): resources for young LGBTIQ+ Victorians.

[Rainbow Tick Standards](#): a framework for LGBTIQ cultural safety that supports organisations to improve the quality of care and services they provide to LGBTIQ service users, staff and volunteers.

[Transhub](#): An initiative of ACON in NSW, Transhub is a digital information and resource platform for all trans people in NSW, loved ones, allies and health providers.

[Twenty10](#): provides a broad range of specialised services for young people aged 12–25 in New South Wales in the LGBTIQ+ community. Support includes housing, mental health, counselling and social support. Adults can also access social support via telephone and web chat.

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Endnotes

- 1 Other variations of this acronym exist. Acronym choice can vary depending on the groups or issues being discussed and the available evidence. The acronyms used in this resource reflect the research conducted.
- 2 There is no single LGBTIQ+ community, rather a plurality of identities and experiences (National LGBTI Health Alliance, 2013b).

Authors and acknowledgements

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