Inclusive language

LGBTIQ+ INCLUSION

This guide explains how to use language respectfully and inclusively when working with and referring to LGBTIQ+ people. By using inclusive language, we demonstrate respect in both our workplaces and in developing and delivering an inclusive learning and teaching environment for our students.

GENDER, SEX AND SEXUALITY ARE ALL SEPARATE CONCEPTS

Gender is part of how you understand who you are and how you interact with other people. Many people understand their gender as being female or male. Some people understand their gender as a combination of these or neither. Gender can be expressed in different ways, such as through behaviour or physical appearance.

Sex refers to a person’s biological sex characteristics. This has historically been understood as either female or male. However, we now know that some people are born with natural variations to sex characteristics.

Sexual orientation or sexuality describes a person’s romantic and/or sexual attraction to others. A person’s gender does not necessarily mean they have particular sex characteristics or sexuality, or vice versa.

LGBTIQ+ TERMINOLOGY IS CONSTANTLY EVOLVING

Language used to describe LGBTIQ+ people changes over time and can differ across cultures and generations. There are also differences in how people individually use this language. You may also encounter outdated or even offensive terms in medical, psychological or legal contexts. For example, from June 2018 the World Health Organization (WHO) declassified being transgender as a mental illness.

This guide gives general advice based on current thinking, however, it’s always best to ask someone how they describe themselves and use these terms.

We acknowledge that no one will get the language 100% right always. The important thing is to keep trying and if you make a mistake, quickly apologise and continue the conversation.

BEING LGBTIQ ISN’T A PREFERENCE OR A LIFESTYLE CHOICE

When we talk about gender, sex characteristics or sexuality, we’re not talking about preferences or choices. We’re just talking about how people are.

COMMONLY USED TERMS

SEXUALITY

A lesbian woman is romantically and/or sexually attracted to other women.

A gay person is romantically and/or sexually attracted to people of the same sex and/or gender as themselves. This term is often used to describe men who are attracted to other men, but some women and gender diverse people may describe themselves as gay.

A bisexual person is romantically and/or sexually attracted to people of their own gender and other genders.

An asexual person does not experience sexual attraction but may experience romantic attraction towards others.

A pansexual person is romantically and/or sexually attracted to people of all genders, binary or non-binary.

A heterosexual or ‘straight’ person is attracted to people of the opposite gender to themselves.

A person who is non-binary is someone who's gender is not exclusively female or male; while a person who is agender has no gender.

Queer is often used as an umbrella term for diverse genders or sexualities. Some people use queer to describe their own gender and/or sexuality if other terms do not fit. For some people, especially older LGBTIQ+ people, ‘queer’ has negative connotations, because in the past it was used as a derogatory term.

Questioning. The ‘Q’ in LGBTIQ+ is used here as ‘Queer and questioning’. Rather than be locked in to a certainty, some people are still exploring or questioning their gender or sexual orientation.

An ally is a person who considers themselves a friend and active supporter of the LGBTIQ+ community. This term can be used for non-LGBTIQ+ allies as well as those within the LGBTIQ+ community who support each other.

GENDER

A trans (short for transgender) person is someone whose gender does not exclusively align with the one they were assigned at birth.

Gender diverse generally refers to a range of genders expressed in different ways. There are many terms used by gender diverse people to describe themselves.

Gender incongruence – is the preferred sexual health classification of transgender and gender diverse people by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Gender affirmation refers to the process where a trans or gender diverse person takes steps to socially and/or physically feel more aligned with their gender. There is a wide range of ways this process differs between people. Some people may change how they interact with others, and others may change their appearance or seek medical assistance to better express their gender.

The terms sistergirls and brotherboys are general terms used in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to describe transgender people and their relationships as a way
of validating and strengthening their gender identities and relationships. The terms sistergirls and brotherboys may also be used by non-trans, but non-conforming Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

A cis (pronounced ‘sis’, short for cisgender) person is someone whose gender aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.

SEX CHARACTERISTICS

An intersex person is born with natural variations to physical or biological sex characteristics such as variations in chromosomes, hormones or anatomy. Intersex traits are a natural part of human bodily diversity. Not all intersex people use the term intersex.

LGBTIQ+ ACRONYM

When writing about LGBTIQ+ people it is best to use the term ‘communities’, as these are many separate and distinct communities within this umbrella term. People may fit more than one of these terms. Heterosexual and cisgender people can be part of LGBTIQ+ communities. For example, there are straight trans and intersex people.

You may encounter other abbreviations. LGBTI is used a lot still within government systems, LGBTIQ+ is more broadly understood and accepted across communities which stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and gender diverse, intersex, queer and questioning, where the + sign is generally used to represent genders and sexualities outside of the letters LGBTIQ, including people who are questioning their gender or sexuality.

You may also encounter more specific umbrella terms, such as QTIPOC (Queer, Trans, Intersex, Person of Colour), or broader terms such as Queer Community or Rainbow Community.

Intersectionality describes how different parts of a person’s identity or circumstances — such as age, race, culture, disability, gender, location or religion — intersect and combine to shape people’s life experiences, including of discrimination. Being LGBTIQ+ is only one part of any person or community. Intersectionality recognises that the different parts of someone’s identity and circumstances cannot be disentangled or considered in isolation.

RELATIONSHIPS AND FAMILIES

There are many kinds of relationships among LGBTIQ people. Some people may live together or separately. Some people may choose to recognise their relationships formally through marriage. Relationships can involve people of the same gender or different genders.

If you need to write or talk about it, ask people how they describe their relationships and use their terminology. There are also many kinds of families. There are complexities in diverse rainbow family forms. This can include single parents, foster parents, blended families, shared parenting and a diverse range of carers. It’s best to ask someone how they describe their family arrangement and use their terms. When talking about families, it’s important to remember that some trans men and gender diverse people can carry pregnancies.

BASICS OF USING INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Using inclusive language makes a real difference to LGBTIQ+ people. Some tips are:

1 If someone discloses to you that they’re from one of the LGBTIQ+ communities, respectfully ask what terms they use to describe themselves, then use those terms.

2 Don’t question or make assumptions. Accept and respect how people define their gender and sexuality. Don’t ask if it’s not necessary.

3 Use language that acknowledges that we have diverse relationships and families. i.e. “partner” or “parents.

PRONOUNS

Pronouns are one-way people refer to each other and themselves. Some people use a gender-neutral pronoun such as ‘they’.

If you’re unsure what someone’s pronoun is, you can ask them respectfully, and preferably privately. Use a Question like “Can I ask what pronoun you use?”

Do not ask “What pronoun do you prefer?”. A person’s pronoun and identity are not a preference. Instead, just ask what pronoun they use.

Some people’s pronouns may be context specific. For example, someone might not use their pronoun in a particular environment or around particular people because they do not feel safe or comfortable to do so.

LANGUAGE THAT SHOULD BE AVOIDED

You should always avoid LGBTIQ+ terminology being used in derogatory way, e.g. the word ‘gay’ when used in a negative way to refer to a situation or event unrelated to sexuality. You Should not use words you’ve heard being used to put down or attack LGBTIQ+ people.

MORE WAYS TO BE INCLUSIVE AT WORK

When you start to consider the different genders, sexualities and sex characteristics across our community, you can start to identify things beyond language that can demonstrate respect and support inclusion. Examples include considering:

- how we reflect the diversity in our communities in photographs and illustrations
- how requirements like dress codes can be restrictive
- how we design, develop and refer to infrastructure, e.g. gender-neutral toilets and change rooms
- how we draft, publish and update forms, surveys and processes that are inclusive of non-binary and gender diverse people.

You can support inclusive policies and practices by getting Ally training for your department/team, becoming an ally or hosting LGBTIQ+ events such as IDAHOBIT or Wear it Purple Day as well as ensuring LGBTIQ+ people know that our Macquarie University welcome them.