



# LGBTIQA+ communities

## GLOSSARY OF COMMON TERMS

CFCA Resource Sheet — November 2019



### Overview

Understanding and using the language/terminology associated with the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender diverse, intersex, queer, asexual and questioning (LGBTIQA+)<sup>1</sup> communities helps to ensure that services and organisations are inclusive and respectful.<sup>2</sup> 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 safe spaces for clients who are members of these communities.

Research shows that some service providers assume that their clients are heterosexual and use heterosexist language, which can result in discomfort for clients and lead them to not disclose their LGBTIQA+ status (Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC], 2015) or discuss their gender or sexuality. Improving access to appropriate services is important due to the higher rates of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and suicide (National LGBTI Health Alliance, 2016) that are experienced by members of LGBTIQA+ communities compared to their non-LGBTIQA+ peers. Research also indicates that pressures faced by same-gender attracted young people, such as bullying, homelessness and feelings of shame, fear and confusion, do not stem from the nature of their sexual or gender diversity. Rather, they 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 (AHRC, 2015).

It is acknowledged that issues of gender identity are different to issues of sexual orientation; however, for ease of reference, both are included in this resource sheet. Further, it is acknowledged that some terminology is contested and language in this area is evolving (GLHV, 2016). Therefore, practitioners and service providers are



encouraged to use this resource sheet in conjunction with other sources of information (e.g. see the 'Further reading' and 'Resources and organisations' listed at the end of this resource sheet).

There is a great deal of diversity within the LGBTIQ+ communities and a wide range of terms and language related to:

- sex
- bodies
- gender
- sexuality
- sexual attraction
- experiences
- legal and medical classifications (Fileborn, 2012; National LGBTI Health Alliance, 2013a).

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 different times across the life span (National LGBTI Health Alliance, 2013a).

## Glossary

This glossary is organised around the following categories (listed in alphabetical order):

- bodies, gender and gender identities
- sexual orientations
- societal attitudes/issues.

### Bodies, gender and gender identities

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

**Gender:** refers to the socially constructed and hierarchical categories assigned to individuals on the basis of their apparent sex at birth. While other genders are recognised in some cultures, in Western society, people are expected to conform to one of two gender roles matching their apparent sex; for example, male = man/masculine and female = woman/feminine.

Gender norms define how we should dress, act/behave, and the appropriate roles and positions of privilege we have in society (e.g. the power relationships between men and women). Failing to adhere to the norms associated with one's gender can result in ridicule, intimidation and even violence (Aizura, Walsh, Pike, Ward, & Jak, 2010).

Many people do not fit into these narrowly defined and rigid gender norms. Some women may feel masculine, some men may feel more feminine and some people may not feel either, or may reject gender altogether (see Gender identity).

**Gender binary:** the spectrum-based classification of gender into the two categories of either man or woman based on biological sex (see Sex).

**Gender identity:** refers to an inner sense of oneself as man, woman, masculine, feminine, neither, both, or moving around freely between or outside of the gender binary.

**Gender pronouns:** these refer to how a person chooses to publicly express their gender identity through the use of a pronoun, whether it is a gender-specific or a gender-neutral pronoun (GLHV, 2016). This can include the more traditional he or she, as well as gender-neutral pronouns such as they, their, ze, hir and others (see Transgender/Trans/Gender diverse).

**Genderqueer/Non-binary gender:** a term used to describe gender identity that does not conform to traditional gender norms and may be expressed as other than woman or man, 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.

**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. Intersex people may be 'neither wholly female nor wholly male; a combination of female and male; or neither female nor male' (*Sex Discrimination Amendment Act (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Intersex Status) 2013 (Cth)*).

Intersex people may identify as either men, women or non-binary (see Genderqueer/Non-binary gender).



**Sex:** a person's sex is made up of anatomical, chromosomal and hormonal characteristics. Sex is classified as either male or female at birth based on a person's external anatomical features. 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 lifespan.

**Sistergirl/Brotherboy:** terms used for gender diverse people within some Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities. Sistergirls and Brotherboys have distinct cultural identities and roles. Sistergirls are Indigenous people who were classified male at birth but live their lives as women, including taking on traditional cultural female practices (GLHV, 2016). Brotherboys are Indigenous people who were classified as female at birth but who have a male spirit (GLHV, 2016).

**Transgender/Trans/Gender diverse:** umbrella terms used to refer to people whose assigned sex at birth does not match their internal gender identity, regardless of whether their internal gender identity is outside the gender binary or within it. Transgender/trans or gender diverse people may identify as non-binary, that is: they may not identify exclusively as either gender; they may identify as both genders, they may identify as neither gender; they may move around freely in between the gender binary; or they may reject the idea of gender altogether.

Transgender/trans or gender diverse 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. Transgender/trans or gender diverse people may use a variety of terms to describe themselves including but not limited to: man, woman, transwoman, transman, transguy, trans masculine, trans feminine, tranz, gender-diverse, gender-queer, gender-non-conforming, non-binary, poly gendered, pan gendered and many more (see Aizura et al., 2010).

Transgender/trans or gender diverse people have the same range of sexual orientations as the rest of the population. Transgender/trans or gender diverse people's sexuality 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 at birth or male.

Transgender/trans or gender diverse people may also use a variety of different pronouns including he, she, they, hu, fae, ey, ze, zir and hir. Using incorrect pronouns to refer to or describe transgender/trans or gender diverse people is disrespectful and can be harmful (see Misgendering under 'Societal attitudes/issues' below).

## Sexual orientations

**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:** 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. A pansexual may be 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, 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.

**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 identifications – 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

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

**Heteronormativity:** the view that heterosexual relationships are the only natural, normal and legitimate expressions of sexuality and relationships, and that other sexualities or gender identities are unnatural and a threat to society (GLHV, 2016).

**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 and gender identities and intersex varieties (Fileborn, 2012; GLHV, 2016).

**Homonormativity:** a term that describes the privileging of certain people or relationships within the queer community (usually cisgendered, 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 marriage and monogamy are natural and normal.

**Homophobia and biphobia:** refer to negative beliefs, prejudices and stereotypes that exist about people who are not heterosexual.

**Misgendering:** an occurrence where a person is described or addressed using language that does not match their gender identity (GLHV, 2016). This can include the incorrect use of pronouns (she/he/they), familial titles (father, sister, uncle) and, at times, other words that traditionally have gendered applications (pretty, handsome, etc.). It is best to ask a person, at a relevant moment, what words they like to use.

**Transphobia:** refers to negative beliefs, prejudices and stereotypes that exist about transgender/trans and gender diverse people.

## Conclusion

There is significant difference within LGBTIQ+ communities. Having an understanding of LGBTIQ+ terminology and using language that is inclusive demonstrates respect and recognition for how people describe their own genders, bodies and relationships (National LGBTI Health Alliance, 2013b). Inclusive language also makes people feel welcome in organisations including schools, workplaces and services. It is worth noting that considerable debate around language and terminology can exist within and outside LGBTIQ+ communities (GLHV, 2016). Further reading and resources are listed below.

## Further reading

*From blues to rainbows: The mental health and well-being of gender diverse and transgender young people in Australia.* Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society. See [www.latrobe.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/598804/from-blues-to-rainbows-report-sep2014.pdf](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/598804/from-blues-to-rainbows-report-sep2014.pdf)

*Inclusive language guide: Respecting people of intersex, trans and gender diverse experience.* National LGBTI Health Alliance. See [lgbtihealth.org.au/resources/inclusive-language-guide/](http://lgbtihealth.org.au/resources/inclusive-language-guide/)

*Writing themselves in 3: The third national study of the sexual health and wellbeing of same sex attracted and gender questioning young people.* Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society. See [www.acon.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Writing-Themselves-In-3-2010.pdf](http://www.acon.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Writing-Themselves-In-3-2010.pdf)



## Resources and organisations

**Intersex Human Rights Australia** ([ihra.org.au](http://ihra.org.au)): an independent support, education and policy development organisation, by and for people with intersex variations or traits.

**Is your service GLBT\* friendly?** ([www.anothercloset.com.au/s/Is\\_Your\\_Service\\_GLBT\\_friendly.pdf](http://www.anothercloset.com.au/s/Is_Your_Service_GLBT_friendly.pdf)): a resource available from ACON.

**Minus18** ([www.minus18.org.au](http://www.minus18.org.au)): a national youth-led organisation for LGBTIQ young people.

**National LGBTI Health Alliance** ([lgbtihealth.org.au/about/](http://lgbtihealth.org.au/about/)): 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 and intersex people (LGBTI) and other sexuality, gender and bodily diverse people and communities. They also provide training to health and other professionals to improve the quality of services for LGBTI communities (see [lgbtihealth.org.au/trainingpackages/](http://lgbtihealth.org.au/trainingpackages/)).

**QLife** ([qlife.org.au](http://qlife.org.au)): national counselling and referral service for people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and/or intersex (LGBTI).

**queerspace** ([www.queerspace.org.au](http://www.queerspace.org.au)): provides a safe and supportive space to obtain information and support services aimed at improving mental health and wellbeing of Melbourne's LGBTIQA+ community, who consist of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or gender diverse, intersex, queer, questioning and asexual people.

**Rainbow network** ([www.rainbownetwork.com.au](http://www.rainbownetwork.com.au)): resources for young same-sex attracted, intersex, trans and gender diverse Victorians and services that work with them.

**Sisters and Brothers NT** ([www.ntahc.org.au/what-we-do/campaigns/sisters-brothers-nt](http://www.ntahc.org.au/what-we-do/campaigns/sisters-brothers-nt)): an advocacy and support group that celebrates gender, intersex and sexuality diversity.

**twenty10** ([www.twenty10.org.au](http://www.twenty10.org.au)): provides a broad range of specialised services for young people aged 12-25 in New South Wales in the LGBTIQA+ community. Support includes housing, mental health, counselling and social support. Adults can also access social support via telephone and web chat.

## References

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## Endnotes

1 Other common variations of this acronym include LGBTI and LGBTIQ. The author consulted with researchers at queerspace for advice on the most appropriate acronym; in response, LGBTIQA+ has been adopted in this resource sheet to ensure inclusivity, in line with the practice of Australian organisations serving these communities. As terminology evolves, this acronym may be updated in future versions of this resource sheet.

2 There is no *single* LGBTIQA+ community, rather a plurality of identities and experiences (National LGBTI Health Alliance, 2013a).



## Authors and acknowledgements

This resource sheet was updated by Nicole Paterson, Research Officer with the Child Family Community Australia information exchange at the Australian Institute of Family Studies, who consulted with Catherine Wilson at queerspace and Lisa Taylor at Sistersgirls and Brotherboys Australia.

The first edition of this resource sheet was compiled by Monica Campo and Jessica Smart, who consulted with Lottie Turner of cohealth, Starlady of the Zoe Belle Gender Collective Youth Project and Ari Dunphy, counsellor/psychotherapist.



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