The language we use when interacting with others is really important. It has the power to offer the validation and acknowledgment of identities, and also has the power to deny it. This is why it is so important to be aware of the impact of the language you use and the context in which you are using it, and why people need to make a conscious effort to use language that is inclusive and validating for everyone — particularly for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer (LGBTQ+) community.

Inclusive Language

A guide

This guide covers some commonly used words and terms, and their meanings. It's important to remember that, just like our everyday language, words and their meanings are constantly evolving.

Why is language important?

Language is an extremely powerful tool. It can unite people and facilitate shared understanding. Inclusion is influenced by everyday words or phrases that we use. One practical and effective way to demonstrate inclusive behavior is by committing to continuously learning about and using inclusive language.

Inclusive language is the recognition that words matter and that word choice can be used, intentionally or unintentionally, to include or exclude others.

Using inclusive language communicates with people in a way that is respectful and brings everyone into the conversation.

Use people-first language that centers on the individual rather than their descriptor. For example, using "people with disabilities," rather than "disabled people."

Set aside any assumptions about the background and preferences of others; use neutral words related to gender, sexual orientation, and other distinguishing qualities. For example, saying "you all" rather than "you guys," or "spouse or partner" rather than "husband" or "wife".

Listen to others when they share words or phrases they find harmful, e.g., specific to voice/appearance ("can I touch your hair", or "you're so articulate!"), historical weight ("slaving away") , or a lack of cultural sensitivity ("where are you from originally").

What to do when you hear non-inclusive language

■ **Inquire**
Seek to understand where the person is coming from and what the word means to them

■ **Inform**
Help educate them on the context and impact of using that language.

■ **Empathise**
Focus on how it made you feel, and not on other people.

Ally/allies
Someone who does not identify as LGBTQ+ but personally advocates and takes action for fairness and inclusion for all.

Anatomical Sex
Sex (sometimes called biological sex, anatomical sex, or physical sex) is comprised of things like genitals, chromosomes, hormones, body hair, and more. But one thing it's not: gender.

Asexual
The lack of sexual attraction to anyone, or low or absent interest in sexual activity. It may be considered the lack of a sexual orientation, or one of the four variations thereof, alongside heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality.

Assigned Gender
The gender a person is identified as at birth, usually based on their anatomy.

Bisexual (or Bi)
A person emotionally, romantically, sexually and relationally attracted to both men and women. A bisexual person may not be equally attracted to both sexes, and the degree of attraction may vary as sexual identity develops over time.

Cisgender (or Cis)
Cisgender (sometimes cissexual, often abbreviated to cis) is a term for people whose gender identity matches the sex that they were assigned at birth. For example, someone who identifies as a woman and was assigned female at birth is a cisgender woman.

Closeted
Describes a person who is not open about their sexual orientation or an ally who is not open about his/her support for equality. Some people are closeted to different people or different degrees. If someone comes out to you, a great strategy is to ask them if they are out to everyone or just certain people, so you know their boundaries.

Coming out
A process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts and appreciates his or her sexual orientation or gender identity that continues throughout one's life. Many people have different degrees of being out. Some are out to everyone, some are only out to a few people. Often LGBTQ+ people come out to others every day. If you're not sure how 'out' someone is, it is okay to ask them.

Cross-dressing
While anyone may wear clothes associated with a different sex, the term cross-dresser is typically used to refer to heterosexual men who occasionally wear clothes, makeup and accessories culturally associated with women. This activity is a form of gender expression, and not done for entertainment purposes. Cross-dressers do not wish to permanently change their sex or live full-time as women. Replaces the term "transvestite."

Gay
A term used to describe a man or a woman who is emotionally, romantically, sexually and relationally attracted to members of the same sex.

Gender Expression
The ways you present gender, through your actions, clothing, demeanour, and more. Your outward-facing self, and how that's interpreted by others based on gender norms.

Gender Dysphoria
The medical term for stress that is caused by a discrepancy between a person's gender identity and that person's sex assigned at birth (and the associated gender role and/or primary and secondary sex characteristics).

Gender Fluid
An identity that may be used by individuals whose gender identity does not conform to a binary understanding of gender as limited to the categories of man or woman, male or female. Gender fluidity conveys a wider, more flexible range of gender identity and expression, with interests and behaviours that may even change from day to day. Gender fluid individuals do not feel confined by restrictive boundaries of stereotypical expectations of girls or boys.

Gender Identity
One's internal, personal sense of being male or female. For trans people, their birth-assigned sex and their own internal sense of gender identity do not match.

Gender Nonconforming
A descriptive term for people whose gender identity or expression doesn't fit traditional male and female roles and behaviour. It doesn't necessarily mean transgender. For example, someone who was assigned male at birth and who identifies as male but whose gender expression does not fit traditional male roles may consider themselves gender nonconforming but not transgender.

Gender Reassignment
Surgical procedure designed to alter physical appearance and sexual characteristics in order to bring an individual's body into alignment with his or her gender identity.

Heterosexual
When an individual is sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex.

Intersectionality
An approach largely advanced by women of colour, arguing that classifications such as gender, race, class, and others cannot be examined in isolation from one another; they interact and intersect in individuals' lives, in society, in social systems, and are mutually constitutive. It was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989.

Intersex
An intersex individual may at birth have biological characteristics of both the male and the female sexes. That is to say they have both male and female anatomical characteristics, including in varying degrees reproductive organs and secondary sexual characteristics, as a result of an abnormality of the sex chromosomes or a hormonal imbalance during embryo genesis.

Lesbian
A woman who is emotionally, romantically, sexually or relationally attracted to other women. Some lesbians may prefer to identify as gay or as gay women.

LGBT
Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. Often followed by a +, to account for the wider community,

Micro-aggression
Indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalised group.

Non-Binary
A term for people whose gender identities do not fit into the gender binary of male or female. Non-binary people often use the pronoun 'them or they' instead of 'he/him, her/she'.

Pansexual
Describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to people of any gender though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree.

Pronouns
A pronoun is a word that refers to either the people talking ("I" or "you") or someone or something that is being talked about (like "she", "it", "them", and "this"). Gender pronouns specifically refer to the person you are referring to. Pronouns are part of someone's gender expression, and people can have multiple sets of pronouns for themselves. Pronouns are not "preferred" but are required for respectful communication

Privilege
Unearned social power accorded by the formal and informal institutions of society to ALL members of a dominant group (e.g. white privilege, male privilege). Privilege is usually invisible to those who have it because we're taught not to see it, but it nevertheless puts them at an advantage over those who don't have it.

Queer
Traditionally a negative term, queer has been reclaimed by some people in the LGBTQ+ community to describe themselves and/or their community. Some value the term for its defiance, and some like it because it can be inclusive of the entire community. Nevertheless, some within the LGBTQ+ community dislike the term. This word generally should only be used when referring to or quoting someone who self-identifies that way.

Questioning
A person who is still exploring their sexuality or gender identity

Sexual orientation
An enduring emotional, romantic, sexual and relational attraction to another person; may be a same-sex orientation, opposite-sex orientation or bisexual orientation. Use the term 'sexual orientation' not 'sexual preference', because preference alludes to sexuality being a choice as opposed to a natural alignment.

Trans
A term describing the state of a person's gender identity, which does not necessarily match his/her assigned gender at birth. This is often considered to be an 'umbrella term' encompassing a number of identities such as female to male and male to female. Trans people may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically. It is not correct to say 'transgender'. Non-Binary is often included in this umbrella term.

Transsexual
A term to describe a person who began life as one biological sex, then implements the personal process of gender reassignment to complete a transition to appear, and behave as the opposite sex. Those that have completed the process may not regard themselves as transsexual, but as male or female. Unlike trans, transsexual is not an umbrella term and many transgender people do not identify as transsexual. It is best to ask which term an individual prefers, or use the term "trans".

Transition
The process of aligning gender expression with gender identity. Transition is different for every transgender person. Some make social changes, such as using a different name and pronouns, or wearing different clothes. Some use hormone therapy to change themselves physically and emotionally. Others choose surgery. Many choose a combination. Transitioning may be public, including telling family, friends and co-workers. It may include changing your name and gender on legal documents. Or it may be a private journey they are going on.

Want to know more?

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LGBT+
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