

addressing lgbt health inequalities

an educational resource
2007



Glossary of terms

Introduction

Language is important, but for any community who has been marginalised, pathologised and discriminated against historically, it takes on even greater import.

Remember that much of the terminology associated with the community developed long before there were any legal rights afforded, and homosexuality was illegal.

Language is powerful. It can be used to include or exclude, to affirm or deny, to support or reject...

Language is creative. This is certainly true when we talk about the LGBT community. Words like queer or dyke, once seen only as terms of abuse, have been reclaimed by the community.

This glossary covers some of the terminology in use today, although a few words of caution:

Use of words like queer or dyke, while acceptable to some (but by no means all) people within the LGBT community, take on an entirely different meaning when used by people who are not part of the community.

Language changes over time. It is fluid rather than fixed, and of course debates continue about the use of language. This glossary provides information on language currently in use, but language changes...

Respect for self-definition is a key principle - for anyone serious about acknowledging and addressing LGBT inequalities.

Familiarising yourself with the glossary may well raise awareness of commonly-used terms, but only by listening to (or asking) people will you know how they choose to define and describe themselves.

Asexual	Asexuality is a designation or self-designation for people who lack feelings of sexual attraction and/or sexual desire.
Androgyny	A distinct gender identity that does not conform to the limitations of gender identities within the male/female gender binary. The limitations of language make it difficult to describe gender identity without comparing or contrasting it to binary gender identities, but the point is missed by doing that.
Being out	What happens after coming out; the state of not being in the closet; living so that you do not have to come out to people around you because they know and take for granted your sexual orientation, gender identity or transgender status.
Bi-gender	Bi-gender identified people are people whose gender identity positively encompasses both masculine and feminine.
Biphobia	Biphobia is the irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against bisexual people.
Bisexual	refers to someone who is emotionally and sexually attracted to women and men
Civil partnership	<p>A legal union between two partners of a same-sex relationship carried out by a district registrar (from December 2005).</p> <p>Civil partnership affords pension rights and similar legal rights and responsibilities that marriage provides, including being recognised legally as 'nearest relative'</p>
Closeted	Not being out (or 'in the closet')

<p>Coming out</p>	<p>Acknowledging that you are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender to yourself or to others.</p> <p>An accepted phrase that describes lesbian, gay and bisexual people’s experience of disclosing their sexual orientation and also describes transgender people’s experiences of disclosing their gender identity or transgender status.</p> <p>As the coming out process is never over for LGBT people, this is an ongoing, sometimes daily, decision and can cause the person significant stress.</p>
<p>Cross-dresser</p>	<p>See transvestite. This is another term for transvestite. The term transvestite usually refers to a man dressing in clothes society associates with women. However, women also wear clothes society associates with men, but this is not usually called cross-dressing as the social parameters of what is considered acceptable attire for women has changed dramatically over the past 30+ years.</p> <p>An interesting social construction of what is and what is not accepted for men and women, it highlights the limitations imposed by society on people’s gender expression based on their sex.</p>
<p>Cross-strand</p>	<p>A relatively new term, it is generally accepted as meaning across the 6 equality and diversity ‘strands’, being age, disability, gender, race, religion & belief and sexual orientation.</p> <p>This also refers to other cross-cutting strands, such as poverty and mental health. The purpose of these ‘strands’ is to highlight how oppression in all its manifestations, including institutional discrimination, adversely effect people’s health and wellbeing and leads to inequitable treatment from public services.</p>

Gay	Refers to someone who is emotionally and sexually attracted to people of the same gender. Some women prefer to refer to themselves as gay women rather than lesbian, although the word gay is most commonly used in reference to men.
Gender	This term refers to those personality characteristics and social roles society normally attributes to masculinity or femininity. The terms girl/woman, boy/man, assigned at birth on the basis of biological sex, have many socially constructed expectations, standards and norms that limit and can oppress people's gender expression.
Gender Identity	Gender identity refers to each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms.
Gender Binary	This refers to the categorisation and limitations of gender identity into only two genders based on female and male sexes. Our whole language is constructed within this binary and expressing ourselves, or thinking, critiquing, or being outside of, or other than, those categories of male and female is limited by this.
Gender dysphoria	A clinical term also known as Transsexualism or Gender Identity Disorder. It is a clinical diagnosis assigned to a person who experiences varying degrees, from mild to severe, of unhappiness or discomfort due to their biological sex not fully matching their gender identity. A diagnosis of Gender Dysphoria by a specialist in the field is required by a person who wishes to apply for a Gender Recognition Certificate and be legally recognised as their gender.

<p>Gender Identity Disorder</p>	<p>As above, although the medical term currently used most often is Gender Dysphoria. Many trans people campaign against terms like Gender Identity Disorder because it pathologises the true diversity of gender identity and expression that actually exists. Society has problems with this diversity and it can be argued that society has gender issues and trans people are the ones who experience the oppression and pathologising of their identities because of this.</p>
<p>Gender queer</p>	<p>See androgyny. Also written as one word ‘genderqueer’, or hyphenated, ‘gender-queer’. This term is sometimes used as distinct gender identity that does not conform to the limitations of gender identities within the male/female gender binary. Genderqueer is an identity meant to subvert the limited notions of gender imposed on people based on their sex. The limitations of language make it difficult to describe gender identity without comparing or contrasting it to binary gender identities, but the point is missed by doing that.</p>
<p>Gender stereotyping</p>	<p>This refers to the imposition of limited gender roles and expectations on people because of their sex, which establishes and perpetuates notions about what men are like, what women are like and what relationships they ‘should’ be in. It is also important to note that demonising people who conform to gender roles and expectations does not challenge an oppressive society, but also oppresses that individual. Trans people are sometimes accused of conforming to gender stereotypes in the way they express their gender, but this is not surprising when the vast majority of trans people go through their childhoods, and sometimes well beyond, not being allowed to express their gender identity at all.</p>

<p>Hetero-centrism</p>	<p>An assumption, often unconscious, that everyone is heterosexual and the attitudes associated with that assumption. Heterocentrism often shows up in unintentional ways in everyday life e.g. always referring to a woman's partner as he/him. These people may not have anything against same gender partners but their heterocentrism serves to exclude members of LGB communities.</p>
<p>Hetero-normativity</p>	<p>Used to describe the manner in which many social institutions and social policies are seen to reinforce heterosexist beliefs and belief systems. These include the belief that human beings fall into two distinct and complementary categories, male and female; that sexual and marital relations are normal only when between two people of different sexes; and that each sex has certain natural roles in life.</p> <p>The norms this term describes or criticises might be overt, covert, or implied. Those who identify and criticise heteronormativity say that it distorts discourse by stigmatising alternative concepts of both sexuality and gender and makes certain types of self-expression more difficult.</p>
<p>Heterosexism</p>	<p>The belief that heterosexuality is morally superior to homosexuality or bisexuality, therefore privileging heterosexual people and heterosexuality. It leads to the presumption that everyone is, or would rather be heterosexual, or at least that it would be possible to always tell when someone is not heterosexual. It is this presumption that puts LGB and T (in relation to gender identity or transgender status) people in the unique position of having to come out.</p> <p>Heterosexism can at times be so subtle that institutions such as the NHS are often unaware they are excluding the needs, concerns, cultures and life experiences of LGBT people.</p> <p>Heterosexism is oppression by neglect, omission, erasure and distortion.</p>

Heterosexual	Refers to someone who is emotionally and sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex. Also commonly referred to as straight.
Homophobia	Homophobia is the irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against lesbian, gay and bisexual people.
Homosexual	A person whose primary sexual attraction is toward people of the same sex. This term is used as a formal classification and is a term lesbians, gay men or bisexuals rarely use to define themselves. Historically this term has been used to medicalise or criminalise lesbian and gay people, and many experience it as a stigmatising term. Best practice is to avoid it.
Internalised Homophobia	For many people, regardless of sexual orientation, homophobia can be internal and not always recognised by the individual. However, internalised homophobia, negative feelings about being gay, lesbian or bisexual, can and does cause adverse effects for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. It can affect the way people see themselves and the way others (heterosexual society) treat them. Internalised homophobia often leads to denial of one's sexual orientation in situations that are threatening or require the individual to 'come out'.
Intersex	Intersex people are people born with sex chromosomes, external genitalia, or an internal reproductive system that are not considered 'standard' for either male or female. This definition is a medical model. However, some intersex people identify proudly as intersex. Intersex people are generally assigned a male or female sex as babies by medical staff, sometimes undergoing surgical procedures. Sometimes the person's gender identity matches the sex they were assigned, but some intersex people are not comfortable with how their sex was assigned. Some intersex people do not define as male or female but as intersex. The fact that intersex people exist shows for a fact that there is more to biological sex than just two sexes.

Lesbian	Refers to a woman who is emotionally and sexually attracted to other women
LGBT	Acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender. An inoffensive umbrella term used in European queer politics, and the term most commonly in use in Scotland when speaking formally.
Multiple discrimination	This term refers to a situation that describes people's experience of discrimination based on more than one aspect of their identity. Everyone is made up of many aspects to their identity, but not everyone is oppressed because of their identities. For example, someone who is Asian may be gay and have a disability and experience oppression because of all of those aspects of their identity, but not necessarily always all aspects at the same time, or from the same people or institutions and organisations.
Multiple identities	As above. Everyone is made up of many aspects to their identity. For example, someone who is black may be gay and have a disability.
Organisational or Institutional Homophobia, Transphobia & Heterosexism	Is systematic discrimination of LGBT people by government, business, employers, public services and other organisations. There are now legal protections in place designed to protect LGBT people from this kind of discrimination, such as the Employment (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003. The cultural legacy of institutional heterosexism still exists in 2007 though and still results in LGBT people experiencing homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. This discrimination is not always necessarily deliberate, but generally means that institutions have not considered LGBT identities as an option. For example, in schools this can emerge in sex and relationships education sessions which tend to focus on heterosexuality as the accepted norm for all students. This neglect reinforces the likelihood of young LGBT people experiencing internalised negative feelings about being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender because their identities are never validated.

Out	Being open about your sexual orientation, or transgender identity.
Outing	Having someone else tell other people about your sexual orientation, or transgender identity, usually against your will.
Pride	Annual festival to celebrate being lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, usually held in June or early July, to commemorate the Stonewall riot in the US on Saturday 28th June 1969, and the subsequent July protests.
Queer	A term reclaimed from its derogatory roots, largely by academics, in order to undermine its use as a derogatory term. People identify proudly as queer and there is a whole academic stream of sociology known as Queer Theory. The term is now commonly used among some LGBT people as an umbrella term that includes lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. If you do not identify as queer, it is best to avoid using the term to describe LGBT people because some LGBT people still find it offensive and still think of it as a derogatory term. If speaking formally, it's safer to say LGBT as the preferred term.
Sex	When used as a verb it means sexual contact, meaning acts people do with each other. When used as a noun the term refers to biological, anatomical characteristics, which can be defined as male, female and also intersex. Some sex characteristics can be altered by hormonal and/or surgical interventions. The term 'sex' as a noun is often used interchangeably with the term 'gender', but it is not the same thing and it is important to distinguish them. See gender for a definition.

Sexual Identity	<p>Part of a person's sense of identity defined in relation to the categories of sexual orientation, usually only using the four main terms, lesbian, gay, bisexual and heterosexual, although not limited to those terms. Someone's sexual identity may not necessarily match their sexual behaviour, for example a married man who also has sex with men may identify as heterosexual.</p>
Sexual orientation	<p>Sexual orientation refers to each person's capacity for profound emotional, affectional and sexual attraction to, and intimate and sexual relations with, individuals of a different gender or the same gender or more than one gender.</p>
Sexuality	<p>This term is often used interchangeably with the term 'sexual orientation', although the term 'sexuality' refers more to the expression of physical, psychological, social, emotional, and spiritual makeup of an individual.</p> <p>It can also be seen to encompass aspects of how we express our gender identity, as well as our sexual orientation, attractions, preferences and sensual needs and wants.</p>
Societal or Cultural Homophobia, Transphobia & Heterosexism	<p>This relates to the general assumption of heterosexuality and gender norms in society.</p> <p>This means that social and cultural norms promote or allow discrimination against LGBT people.</p> <p>Homosexuality is always considered as 'different' to be welcomed, tolerated, or despised. This view is backed up by the institutions and organisations that make up society.</p>
Straight	<p>Refers to someone who is emotionally and sexually attracted to people of the opposite gender.</p> <p>See Heterosexual.</p>
Transgender	<p>In the UK this is used as an all-embracing umbrella term for those whose gender identity or presentation conflicts with the 'norms' expected by the society they live in. Included in the overall transgender category are transsexual people, transvestites, intersex people, androgyne people and others (abbreviations: T, TG, trans, ftm, mtf).</p>

Transphobia	Transphobia is the irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against transgender people.
Transsexual	<p>A transsexual person's gender is the opposite to the gender they were assumed to be at birth on the basis of their physical characteristics (sex). Transsexualism is medically recognised, and is also called gender dysphoria, or sometimes, but not usually by trans people, gender identity disorder.</p> <p>Many transsexual people find it impossible to continue to live as the gender they were assigned at birth, and choose to transition to live permanently as their actual gender identity. Many, but not all, will then have medical treatment, such as hormone treatment or surgery, to bring their physical appearance more into line with their gender. This process is often called gender reassignment, or gender alignment.</p>
Transvestite	<p>This is a term used to describe people who, some of the time (not permanently), dress in clothes associated with their opposite gender, as defined by socially accepted norms, but the person still identifies with their biological sex. This is sometimes abbreviated to TV.</p>