

Greater Manchester

GM = EQUAL

Equality Alliance

Inclusive Language
Subgroup



Sex &
Gender

Preamble

- This guidance is the product of discussion and research by members of the GM=EqAl Inclusive Language Subgroup.
- It is part of a series created to help GM=EqAl members and staff be respectful and consistent in how we talk and write about the issues we work on.
- It sets out our agreed definitions and terminology around **SEX AND GENDER** and explains key concepts in line with the values of GM=EqAl.
- GM=EqAl is keen for others to share and adopt our language guidance, and welcomes dialogue with partners in order to keep evolving the documents along with our understanding.
- This guidance has been robustly generated but does not claim absolute authority on any topic.

Short version

DO

- Use gender neutral language where possible.
- Share your pronouns with other people, and allow them space to share theirs with you.
- Remember that different communities and cultures have different relationships to gender.

DON'T

- Use language that assumes that men are the default.
- Make assumptions about someone else's gender or pronouns.

Sex and Gender Language Guidance

- Gender is relevant to everyone. Its distinctions are built into most languages, so it is more than just the words we use.
- With this guidance, GM=EqAl are focussing on our desire for language to be liberatory, to undermine bigotry and prejudice, and to lift up diversity in all its forms.
- The need to avoid sexist terms has gained widespread acceptance thanks to feminist struggle.
- The transition from a male-orientated standard to the language we use today shows that changing our language to be inclusive is achievable and worthwhile.
- Words and grammar are never more important than the people they describe.
- Using inclusive language about sex and gender is a way of treating all people with dignity and respect.

Sex and Gender Language Guidance

- As GM=EqAl we are sensitive to different understandings of sex and gender.
- We champion the cause of separating gender from historically defined roles and stereotypes in the interests of equality and freedom.
- We recognise that gender stereotypes are perpetuated from early childhood, and that language plays a significant part in actively reinforcing sexism and transphobia. Using inclusive language around gender from a young age therefore supports all young people's development and equal access to opportunities
- We respect the importance of gender as a fundamental aspect of personal and cultural identity.
- We are open to receiving feedback in order to evolve this document along with our thinking and learning. We want to take account of different cultural perspectives on gender, and also to affirm people's gender identities, given the powerful position gender occupies in our lives.

Avoiding sexist language

- The English language evolved within a patriarchal system that treated men as the default human and women as a secondary category.
- As women have achieved greater equality in different areas of life, language has shifted to support and reflect that.
- Examples of outdated terms: housewife, fireman, male nurse, woman driver, career girl, actress, woman (lady) doctor etc. These are either patronising or reinforce sexist stereotypes.
- Use 'humankind' or 'humanity' rather than mankind; avoid 'man hours'; use 'to staff' instead of 'to man'; say 'chair', and not 'chairman'.
- Don't default to masculine pronouns - use they/them/theirs to refer to a generic individual in the third person.

Gender affirmative language

- Gender affirmative language means using language that respects a person's gender.
- It is important to keep up with the way understandings of gender are evolving.
- It is less and less possible to try to guess someone's gender from the way they present. This is due to a welcome breakdown in stereotypes about appearance and behaviour, and because increasing numbers of people identify with a different gender from the one they were given at birth.

Key terms

- **Sex** is categorisation based usually on observation of external genitals at birth. A person may be assigned **male**, **female** or **intersex**. However, a person's sex is actually a combination of bodily characteristics including: chromosomes, hormones, internal and external reproductive organs, and secondary sex characteristics.
- **Gender** refers to social roles and behaviours that have been learned, are changeable over time, and have wide variations both within and between cultures.
- **Gender identity** describes someone's personal and intimate sense of their own gender, for example whether someone describes themselves as a woman, or as non-binary. Everybody has a gender identity.
- **Intersex** refers to people who may have the biological attributes associated with both male and female bodies, or whose biological attributes do not fit with societal assumptions about male or female bodies. Intersex people can have any gender identity.

Key terms

- **Trans** is an umbrella term to refer to anyone whose gender identity doesn't completely match the gender they were given at birth, including **trans women**, **trans men**, and **non-binary people**.
- Trans isn't a gender identity, it's a relationship to gender. Trans people may or may not choose to undergo some form of physical or social **transition**. This is sometimes known as **gender reassignment** (not 'sex change').
- Some people who perform in drag or cross dress consider themselves trans, some don't.
- **Cis** is short for 'cisgender', meaning someone who identifies with the gender they were given at birth.
- 'Cis' is Latin for 'on the same side as', whereas 'trans' is Latin for 'crossing from one side to another', or another kind of movement to somewhere.

Key terms

- **Non-binary**: describes someone who identifies as a gender outside of the binary identities of 'man' and 'woman'. This might mean they experience a fluid or fixed gender, multiple genders, a different gender, or no gender ('agender').
- For more information on trans and non-binary identities and how to be a good ally in ways which go beyond language issues, this is a useful guide:

<https://lgbt.foundation/downloads/transalliesguide>

Personal pronouns

- Some languages, like Chinese and Persian, have a gender-neutral form for people built in.
- Languages which do not include gender neutral pronouns have attempted to create them, in the interest of greater equality and to include non-binary people.

- Non-binary people often use **they/them/theirs** pronouns but there are also **neopronouns** such as **ze/zem/zyr** – this is why it's important to ask.

theirs	zim	their	
her	ze	she	his
xe	they	them	xim
hers	xey	him	he

- You can learn more about pronouns here:

<https://uwm.edu/lgbtrc/support/gender-pronouns>

Personal pronouns

- It is helpful to lead by example and introduce your own pronouns, then give people space to optionally tell you theirs.
- Asking and correctly using someone's pronouns is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for that person (and it's not only trans people who get 'misgendered').
- **However:** Everybody makes mistakes sometimes! The best thing to do if you use the wrong pronoun for someone is to say something right away, like 'Sorry, I meant [insert pronoun]'. If you realise your mistake after the fact, apologise in private and move on.
- It will take time for official systems catch up with where language is leading, for example by universal provision of forms which do not restrict gender options.
- Our organisations can lead the way by adopting best practice, following guidelines from organisations such as LGBT Foundation: <https://bit.ly/3xQoxN4>

