Gender Inclusive Language Guide

This document is intended to facilitate and promote social and academic best practice as regards gender-inclusive language.

Gender inclusive language

Pronouns

When referring to someone whose gender is unknown or irrelevant, such as a hypothetical research participant, consider using the third-person pronouns they/them/themselves rather than "he or she" or "(s)he." It is still grammatically correct to use "they" even when referring to a single individual.

Lancaster University recommends adding your pronouns to your email signature. This helps to prevent misgendering and demonstrates that pronouns should not be assumed. If you are unsure of which pronouns to use when referring to someone, it is best to ask them directly.

Binary pairings

Consider using gender-neutral language rather than terms which reinforce binary gendered dichotomies. For example, you could replace "men and women" with "everyone" or "people" in order to include people of all genders.

Furthermore, avoid gender-based heteronormative language – in other words, do not assume that men will necessarily have wives or girlfriends and women will have husbands or boyfriends. Instead, you could refer to people's "partners" or "spouses" in generic references. This is also inclusive of non-binary people as well as people with different sexualities.

If you do use binary pairings, then both female and male firstness is acceptable, for example you could alternate between "brother(s) and sister(s)" and "sister(s) and brother(s)."

Titles

On some occasions, we tend to associate certain professions with a particular gender. It could be beneficial to avoid bias, such as referring to a doctor with a masculine pronoun even though their gender has not been mentioned (as in, A: "I went to the doctor." B: "What did he say?") and refrain from using phrases such as "male nurse" which imply that it is unusual for a certain gender to hold that position.

Similarly, instead of gendered job titles (e.g. "chairman") consider using their gender-neutral versions (e.g. "chair" or "chairperson") in order to be more inclusive of women and non-binary people.

For honorifics, consider using the parallel titles "Ms" (for women) and Mr (for men), as well as the gender-neutral "Mx" (pronounced "mix") and when applicable, professional gender-neutral titles like "Dr." or "Professor."

Referring to trans people

"Trans" and "transgender" are both adjectives. Therefore, phrasings like "transgender people" or "trans person" are preferable to "transgenders" or "a trans" as they emphasise a person's humanity. Referring to someone as "transgendered" suggests that they *became* transgender or that it was something that happened to them, which is not how most trans people view themselves or their experiences. Similarly, "trans woman" is preferred to "transwoman" as the latter can imply that trans women are an entirely separate and lesser category of women (the same goes for trans men).

Secondly, phrases such as "assigned male at birth" or "designated female at birth" are preferred instead of "born female," "biologically male," or "used to be a man." The latter phrases simplify a very complex subject and furthermore do not match up with how most trans people experience their gender identity. On the other hand, "assigned sex at birth" acknowledges that the issue stems from society misgendering people when they are born.

Finally, when describing someone's gender it is important to avoid minimising or erasing their identity. For example, writing that "Sarah is a woman" but "Alex identifies as agender" could have the effect of minimising Alex's gender identity and give the impression that Alex is not really agender. In such cases it may be more appropriate to write that Jordan *is* agender, just as Sarah *is* a woman. Similarly, rather than refer to someone's "preferred pronouns" or "preferred name" you could simply say "pronouns" or "name."

Gender references and descriptions

Consider how you are referring to different groups of people. For example, using "girls" to refer to female students and members of staff could be considered infantilising, especially if you would not refer to male students and members of staff who are the same age as "boys." Similarly, phrasings such as "Theresa May was the previous Prime Minister before Johnson" could position the two people asymmetrically.

Avoid masculine-turned-generic terms such as "he" or "man" when the gender is unknown or the phenomenon described is not gender-specific – e.g. "all men on this planet need to breathe" could not do justice to who is talked about or referred to. Therefore "all men" could be replaced with "all people" or "everyone."

Gender inclusive academic practices

Citations and examples

If you have data to show, consider using examples of language used or taken from people of all genders. Furthermore, when creating fictional examples it may be worth paying attention to the positioning of different genders, or whether the examples perpetuate gender stereotypes. For example, if it is always a man who is the agent or subject of a sentence.

It is also important to ensure inclusive citation practices. When citing trans scholars, take care to use the correct pronouns when describing their work and do not refer to them by their former name used before their transition. For example, do not say "Jenny, who used to be called John." This is called "deadnaming" and is often extremely upsetting and harmful to trans people.

Participants

If your survey materials involve questions about participants' gender, avoid a binary male/female option as this would exclude non-binary people from taking part. Instead, you could include non-binary genders as well a text option to allow participants to write their own responses. It is also worth allowing participants to opt out of answering this question with a "prefer not to say" option.

Furthermore, avoid having "trans women" or "trans men" as separate options from "women" or "men" as this implies that trans women/men are not truly women/men. Instead, if you need to know whether survey respondents are transgender this could be a separate question, for example "Does your gender identity match your assigned sex at birth?" or "Do you identify as transgender?"

It is also worth reflecting on whether this information about participants' gender is truly necessary for your research. Often, we ask for this information automatically when creating a study without thinking about whether this is something we actually need to know in order to interpret or analyse our findings.

Why is this important?

There are many ways in which language can be indirectly and/or subtly sexist, transphobic, or discriminatory. Sometimes we think that what we say is "just banter" or a "joke." However, we can still discriminate against people (even those who are close to us) by

perpetuating an imbalanced society. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to the language that we are using and ensure we aren't discriminating against or excluding people.

If you are ever unsure of how to describe or refer to someone, the best thing to do is *ask!*

Who we are

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Further resources

Here are some other documents and resources on equality and inclusion that you may find useful:

APA style guide for gender: Here you can find more guidelines for talking about gender "with inclusivity and respect" while following an APA style specifically. Link: https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/gender

Athena Swan Charter: Here you can find out about the Athena Swan charter which aims to recognise and support practices which promote gender equality in higher education. Link: https://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan/about-athena-swan/

BC Centre for Disease Control COVID-19 Language Guide: This document includes guidelines for referring to different gender and sexual identities, as well as racial identities and disabilities. Link: http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/Language-guide.pdf

Lancaster University Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: Here you can find up-to-date information about what the University is doing to promote equality, diversity and inclusion. Link: https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/edi/

Stonewall glossary: Here you can find definitions of terms relating to gender and sexuality, created by the LGBTQ charity Stonewall. Link: https://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/faqs-and-glossary/glossary-terms

Stonewall guide for capturing data on sexual orientation and gender identity in research: this document provides practical guidance for researching gender and sexuality in an inclusive and non-discriminatory manner, including tips on asking about gender in survey materials. Link: https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/do_ask_do_tell_guide_2016.pdf