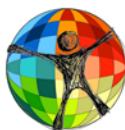


# Is it Really ‘All for One and One for All’? The Strengths and Weaknesses of the ‘LGBTI’ Label in Australian Rights Advocacy



International Human Rights Internships Program - Working Paper Series



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## **Abstract**

The LGBTI initialism is ubiquitous in Australian rights advocacy. Under this banner, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex communities have fought together to achieve important rights advances. Yet, each of these five communities also has its own identity, voice and policy concerns. Despite growing concern from the bisexual, trans and intersex communities that their policy concerns are not being catered to within the LGBTI movement, research is yet to address how the LGBTI label impacts each of its five constituent communities differently. This essay seeks to fill this gap in research, by outlining the historical development of the LGBTI movement and undertaking a discursive analysis of the LGBTI initialism and its use in Australian advocacy. Ultimately, this essay concludes that the LGBTI label holds important linguistic, historical and symbolic significance, however its current usage by many advocates oppresses the bisexual, trans and intersex communities. This essay concludes with a list of steps that can inform how advocates use the LGBTI label and conduct LGBTI advocacy more broadly.

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[Naming is] ultimately a discussion about respect, a discussion about who is given visibility, a discussion about how power is distributed. ... It's not just a debate about an initialism or a set of terminology. That's the proxy for discussion about social change, social power, respect, self respect, visibility—a variety of things that are absolutely essential to people's ability to live in the world and feel that their experience and desire and sense of self is being honoured.<sup>1</sup>

## I. Introduction: A Human Rights Movement at Breaking Point

The LGBTI *initialism*<sup>2</sup> brings together five distinct groups – the *lesbian* (L),<sup>3</sup> *gay* (G),<sup>4</sup> *bisexual* (B),<sup>5</sup> *trans* (T)<sup>6</sup> and *intersex* (I)<sup>7</sup> communities – into one rights movement.

Under this banner (or closely related banners like LGBT or LGBTIQ+),<sup>8</sup> Australian LGBTI advocates have achieved important rights protections for many amongst their

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<sup>1</sup> Gerard Koskovich (Curator, The GLBT History Museum San Francisco), quoted in Emily Zak, 'LGBTQQIAA+ — How We Got Here from Gay', Ms Blog Magazine (online), 1 October 2013 <<http://msmagazine.com/blog/2013/10/01/lgbttqqiiaa-how-we-got-here-from-gay/>>.

<sup>2</sup> '[A]bbreviations which consist of the initial (i.e. first) letters of words and which are pronounced as separate letters when they are spoken', cited in 'Initialisms', *Oxford Dictionary* (online) <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/spelling/initialisms>>.

<sup>3</sup> 'A woman whose enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction is to other women', defined in Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), *GLAAD Media Reference Guide* (2016) <<http://www.glaad.org/reference/lgbtq>>.

<sup>4</sup> '[P]eople whose enduring physical, romantic, and/ or emotional attractions are to people of the same sex', cited in *ibid*.

<sup>5</sup> 'Bisexual people are attracted to people of different genders and may be interested in different sexualities', cited in National LGBTI Health Alliance, 'Bisexual People' (Health Information Sheet, July 2013) <<http://www.lgbtihealth.org.au/sites/default/files/Alliance%20Health%20Information%20Sheet%20-%20Bisexual%20People%20PDF.pdf>>.

<sup>6</sup> '[P]eople whose gender identity or expression is different from that which was assigned at birth or that which is expected of them by society', cited in Transgender Victoria (TGV), 'Mission' <<http://www.transgendervictoria.com>>.

<sup>7</sup> 'Intersex people are born with physical sex characteristics that don't fit medical norms for female or male bodies', cited in Organisation Intersex International Australia (OIIA), 'Welcome to OII Australia', (4 April 2014) <<https://oii.org.au>>.

<sup>8</sup> For more on the other forms of the initialism, see Part III G of this essay.

constituencies.<sup>9</sup> Yet, each letter in the LGBTI initialism represents a distinct community with its own identity, voice and policy concerns. As the LGBTI ‘alphabet soup’<sup>10</sup> grows over time, these constituent communities are grappling with the question of how to align with other communities in the LGBTI family. Now, some have started to question the efficacy of the LGBTI label as an organising concept for advocacy, and whether it serves all communities equally – if at all.

Ostensibly due to the ubiquity of the LGBTI term in advocacy work, academic research is yet to truly consider abandoning the initialism. By canvassing the voices from within the different lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex communities, this paper seeks to fill this gap in research. It undertakes a normative evaluation of the LGBTI initialism for advocacy, by asking one simple question: does the LGBTI label create more problems than it solves?

Ultimately, this paper concludes that it is not the term, but its usage, which is to blame. On one hand, the LGBTI initialism remains a powerful symbol rooted in a rich history, which often allows its five constituent communities to harness their similarities and pursue their agendas more effectively. On the other, current usage is harming the least visible members of the community – namely, trans, bisexual and intersex individuals – and LGBTI advocates must fundamentally reform how and why they use the LGBTI initialism in their work.

## **II. A Note on Methodology & Terminology: What’s in a Word?**

In an essay such as this one, words and their meanings are paramount. As such, the author has four clarifications to make.

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<sup>9</sup> These protections include the decriminalisation of same-sex relations, the criminalisation of hate crimes against LGBTI individuals and the legal recognition of different gender pronouns on government documents (with the notable exception of same-sex marriage). For an overview of LGBTI rights progress in Australia, see, eg, Ben Windsor, ‘A definitive timeline of LGBT+ rights in Australia’, *SBS Australia* (online), 12 August 2016 <<http://www.sbs.com.au/topics/sexuality/agenda/article/2016/08/12/definitive-timeline-lgbt-rights-australia>>.

<sup>10</sup> Ron Suresha, ‘Diversities may enrich ‘LGBTQIA’ alphabet soup’, *The Huffington Post* (online), 19 September 2013 <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ron-suresha/diversities-may-enrich-lgbtqiap-alphabet-soup\\_b\\_3929870.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ron-suresha/diversities-may-enrich-lgbtqiap-alphabet-soup_b_3929870.html)>.

First, the LGBTI initialism – as well as the words ‘lesbian’, ‘gay’, ‘bisexual’, ‘trans’ and ‘intersex’ – are all discursively constructed (and contested) umbrella terms. In terms of methodology, this paper fits into the Liberationist<sup>11</sup> tradition: it is less concerned with theorising LGBTI identities and more concerned with analysing the LGBTI initialism as a historical and cultural phenomenon. As such, it takes peoples’ expressed sexual/gender/sex identity on face value. In addition, it does not critique the normative value of their articulated policy concerns.

Second, this essay has chosen to focus on the LGBTI initialism, as opposed to any of the other longer or shorter initialisms that exist, for example LGBT or LGBTIQ+. This is because LGBTI is the form of the initialism used by the majority of Australian advocacy organisations, in both the public and private sphere.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, other communities are knocking on the door of the LGBTI initialism,<sup>13</sup> and future research must continue to inform how their interests are affected by the label.

Third, this essay often talks about LGBTI *rights* advocacy. As has been well documented elsewhere, the discourse of ‘rights’, particularly ‘human rights’, is contested and problematic in and of itself.<sup>14</sup> These debates – and the complex interaction of the ‘rights’ and ‘LGBTI’ labels – lie beyond the scope of this essay. Nevertheless, this essay would like to reiterate Ackerley’s

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<sup>11</sup> Gay Liberationist discourse borrows on the political successes of gay activism to push forward other peoples’ rights concomitantly. See, eg, W Byne, ‘Forty Years after the Removal of Homosexuality from the DSM: Well on the Way but Not There Yet’ (March 2014) 1(2) *LGBT Health* 67, 67-9; Tiffany Jones et al, ‘Intersex: Stories and Statistics from Australia’, (Open Book Publishers, 1<sup>st</sup> ed, 2016) 33.

<sup>12</sup> This includes the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), the LGBTI Health Alliance, Kaleidoscope Australia, Pride in Diversity, Australian Marriage Equality (AME) and the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. See Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), ‘Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Equality’ <<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sexual-orientation-sex-gender-identity/projects/lesbian-gay-bisexual-trans-and-intersex>>; LGBTI Health Alliance, ‘LGBTI Data’ (Discussion Paper, 2013) <<http://lgbtihealth.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/LGBTI-Data-Online-Version-1.pdf>>; Kaleidoscope Australia, ‘About Us’ (2016) <<http://www.kaleidoscopeaustralia.com/about-us/>>; Pride in Diversity, ‘About Us’ (2015) <<http://www.prideindiversity.com.au>>; Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, ‘About Us’ <<http://www.mardigras.org.au/organisation/>>.

<sup>13</sup> Zak, above n 2.

<sup>14</sup> See, eg, Makau Mutua, ‘Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights’ (2001) 42(1) *Harvard International Journal* 42; Barbara Buvoška, ‘Perpetrating Good: Unintended Consequences of International Human Rights Advocacy’ (2008) 9(5) *International Journal on Human Rights* 1; Brooke Ackerley, ‘Human Rights Enjoyment in Theory and Activism’ (2011) 12(2) *Human Rights Review* 221.

argument that ‘these debates need not be resolved before the privileged can support the human rights struggles of those who experience human rights violations or fear them’.<sup>15</sup>

Fourth, for the sake of clarity, this essay will use the word ‘community’, in the absence of any other qualifier, to refer to the whole LGBTI community. It will use the word ‘subcommunity’ to refer to the five other groups – the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex communities – which constitute the LGBTI community. The author acknowledges that for their members, these subcommunities are, in reality, thriving communities in their own right. In addition, it acknowledges that many members of those subcommunities eschew involvement in the LGBTI movement altogether and so would not consider themselves a subcommunity at all.

### **III. Historical Underpinnings: How the LGBTI Movement Came to Be**

The LGBTI initialism developed after decades of advocacy undertaken by the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex communities, both alone<sup>16</sup> and in conjunction with the other subcommunities. This essay presents the major milestones in the development of the LGBTI movement in Australia.

#### ***A. ‘Camp’***

While the word ‘camp’ does not feature in the current initialism, it was the nevertheless it the first non-derogatory ‘common word’ used by LGBTI Australians to refer to themselves and to fight for their rights.<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, ‘camp’ is unique to Australia: ‘homophile’ and ‘homosexual’ were more popular elsewhere in the world around this time.<sup>18</sup> Historians believe

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<sup>15</sup> Ackerley, above n 15, 222.

<sup>16</sup> Each of these subcommunities has its own individual history of advocacy worthy of scholarly attention. See Graham Willett, *Living Out Loud: A History of Gay and Lesbian Activism in Australia* (Allen & Unwin, 1<sup>st</sup> ed, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> Graham Willett, talking in *Daylesford Stories: What’s in a Name* (Directed by Sarah Rood, Way Back When Consulting Historians, 2016) 0:10:0.

<sup>18</sup> Australia’s ‘camp’ movement emerged relatively late considering LGBTI rights movements such as the Homophile/Homosexual Movements had swept Europe and the United States (US) as early as 1940.<sup>18</sup> Some historians have attributed this late start to the ‘convict stain’: that is, the effort to forget Australia’s convict past and re-brand Australia as a developed country led (paradoxically) to a form of unspoken tolerance for homosexual



the word ‘camp’ existed as underground slang during the 1960s, but was popularised by the activist group Campaign Against Moral Persecution (CAMP), founded in Sydney in June 1970. Within 12 months local CAMP groups had formed in each capital city, creating Australia’s first (informal) LGBTI-related rights network.<sup>19</sup>

### ***B. ‘Gay’ and ‘Gay and Lesbian’***

A mere few years later, the Gay Liberation movement arrived in Australia from the US, and ‘gay’ replaced the use of ‘camp’ over a decade or so.<sup>20</sup> Early Australian use of the word includes the Melbourne Gay Teachers Group and the Sydney Gay Mardi Gras.<sup>21</sup>

The term ‘gay’ was originally understood to encompass both men and women.<sup>22</sup> Yet, as the Gay Liberation movement wore on, lesbian women developed their own distinct identity. Influenced by the concomitant rise of feminism, lesbian groups remarked that gay women had their own distinct priorities and ‘didn’t share the experience of sexism’ with men.<sup>23</sup> In addition, lesbian advocates noted that their priorities were not always best represented by the gay men at the helm of the Gay Liberation movement.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, the word ‘lesbian’ was coined to give lesbian women more visibility and to ‘boost their status to more than a footnote to gay men’.<sup>25</sup> In the context of advocacy, the common

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acts than did not exist in other parts of the world. See, eg, Babette Smith, *Australia's Birthstain: The Startling Legacy of the Convict Era*. (Allen and Unwin, 1<sup>st</sup> ed, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> Willett, above n 17, 1-80.

<sup>20</sup> In the US, the word ‘gay’ had existed as early as the 1940. However, it only became the dominant word for US activist homosexuals to self-describe in public from around the Stonewall riots of 1969, popularly credited as the start of the Gay Liberation Movement.

<sup>21</sup> Graham Willett, talking in *Daylesford Stories: What's in a Name* (Directed by Sarah Rood, Way Back When Consulting Historians, 2016) 0:15:0.

<sup>22</sup> Willet, above n 17, 68.

<sup>23</sup> Anneke Deutsch, talking in *Daylesford Stories: What's in a Name* (Directed by Sarah Rood, Way Back When Consulting Historians, 2016) 0:25:0.

<sup>24</sup> Gerard Koskovich, quoted in Zak, above n 2.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

expression became ‘gay and lesbian’, with early use by the Gay and Lesbian Immigration Task Force (GLITF) and the (re-named) Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras.<sup>26</sup>

### C. ‘GLB’

The earliest iterations of the modern LGBTI label appear to lie in the initialism ‘GLB’. That tag was developed to include the bisexual community in the Gay Liberation movement and first appeared in the mid-to-late 1980s.<sup>27</sup>

This said, it is difficult to state when exactly the GLB term appeared, and even more difficult to state when it became the accepted label for those three subcommunities. This difficulty is due in large part to the fluctuating relationship of gays and lesbians with bisexuals during the Gay Liberation period (and still today). While bisexual individuals had fought within the Gay Liberation Movement since its very beginning,<sup>28</sup> some gays and lesbians maintained theoretical oppositions to bisexuality, which they alleged was not a separate identity to gay or lesbian.<sup>29</sup> On account of this stigma, bisexuals often advocated for their rights independently of gays and lesbians (and vice versa), meaning early usage of the GLB term was haphazard at best.<sup>30</sup>

### D. ‘GLBT’ and ‘LGBT’

LGBT is perhaps the most widespread of all the initialisms globally,<sup>31</sup> notwithstanding it has fallen out of favour amongst Australian rights advocates.

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<sup>26</sup> Willet, above n 17, 60.

<sup>27</sup> Mike Gunderloy, ‘Factsheet Five’ (1985) 32(1) *Initialisms, Initialisms & Abbreviations Dictionary*.

<sup>28</sup> See, eg, Betsy Kuhn, *Gay Power!: The Stonewall Riots and the Gay Rights Movement*, 1969 (Twenty-First Century Books, 1<sup>st</sup> ed, 2011) 65.

<sup>29</sup> Jonathan Alexander and Karen Yescavage, *Bisexuality and Transgenderism: InterSEXions of The Others* (Haworth Press, 1<sup>st</sup> ed, 2004), 45; Lani Kaahumanu, ‘The Bisexual Community: Are We Visible Yet?’ (1987) <<http://lanikaahumanu.com/OUT%20OUTRAGED.pdf>>.

<sup>30</sup> Kaahumanu, above n 30.

<sup>31</sup> Ryan Carey-Mahoney, ‘LGBT-who? Decoding the every-changing acronym’, *The Washington Post* (online), 10 June 2012 <[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/soloish/wp/2016/06/10/lgbt-who-decoding-the-ever-changing-acronym/?utm\\_term=.bdc8da1a320d](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/soloish/wp/2016/06/10/lgbt-who-decoding-the-ever-changing-acronym/?utm_term=.bdc8da1a320d)>.

While trans individuals played an important role in the Gay Liberation movement,<sup>32</sup> it was not until the mid to late 1990s (and the arrival of the internet) that the trans community in Australia mobilised in a true sense.<sup>33</sup> Around this time, they fought for (and gained) explicit inclusion in LGBTI initialism in Australia and globally.

Initially, the ‘T’ stood for various gender identities including transexed, transsexual, transgender, transvestite and transfluid.<sup>34</sup> However, in the 2000s, the ‘T’ was popularly rebranded as ‘transgender’.<sup>35</sup> Recently, it has been shortened again to ‘trans’ (sometimes denoted as ‘trans and gender diverse’).<sup>36</sup>

### ***E. ‘LGBTI’***

This is the form of the initialism with which this essay is concerned.<sup>37</sup> The inclusion of the ‘T’ in the LGBTI initialism is unique to Australia.<sup>38</sup> One reason for this explicit inclusion of the intersex community in the Australian context is that intersex advocates have actively campaigned the explicit inclusion of the ‘T’ (though dissenting voices exist as well).<sup>39</sup> Another reason is international best precedent: it is the initialism used in all parts of *The Activist’s Guide*<sup>40</sup> to the Yogyakarta Principles.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> S Stryker, *Transgender History* (Seal Press, 1<sup>st</sup> ed, 2008), 59-91; Kuhn, above n 29, 65-80.

<sup>33</sup> Tracie O’Keefe, ‘Sex and/or Gender Diverse People and the Death of Transgender as an Umbrella Term’ (Paper presented at Health in Difference 2010: Doing Diversity: 7th National LGBTI Health Conference Sydney, Australia, 29 April -1 May 2010); Interview with Jamie Gardiner, Member at LGBTI Taskforce, Department of Premier & Cabinet, State Government of Victoria (Skype, 10 December 2016); Stryker, above n 33, 137.

<sup>34</sup> Stryker, above n 33, 1-15.

<sup>35</sup> O’Keefe, above n 34.

<sup>36</sup> Transgender Victoria, above n 7.

<sup>37</sup> See above n 13.

<sup>38</sup> Advocates in other countries such as the US prefer the initialism LGBT (or increasingly, LGBTQ) because they understand intersex people as belonging to the ‘T’ or ‘Q’ categories See, eg, Human Rights Campaign (the largest US LGBTQ organisation), ‘HRC Story’ <<http://www.hrc.org/hrc-story>>.

<sup>39</sup> M Carpenter and D Hough, ‘Employers’ Guide to Intersex Inclusion’ (Policy Guide, Pride in Diversity and Organisation Intersex International Australia, 2014) 14.

<sup>40</sup> Sheila Quinn, *An Activist’s Guide to The Yogyakarta Principles* (ARC Publishing, 1<sup>st</sup> ed, 2010).

<sup>41</sup> The Yogyakarta Principles (or the Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of International Human Rights Law in relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity) is a set of principles developed at a meeting of the International Commission of Jurists, the International Service for Human Rights and human rights experts which

## *F. 'LGBTIQ' and beyond*

While outside the scope of this essay, other longer variants of the initialism exist such as:<sup>42</sup>

- LGBTIQ<sup>43</sup>
- LGBTIQA<sup>44</sup>
- LGBTIQA+<sup>45</sup>

It is salient to note that while the initialism LGBTIQ is currently understated in Australian advocacy, it is growing quickly in occurrence,<sup>46</sup> particularly due to the prevalence of 'Q' as an identity category in overseas rights work. Notably, the social networking site Facebook this year widened its choice of gender variants to fifty-three options, including agender, bigender, gender fluid, gender questioning and genderqueer.<sup>47</sup> Given this proliferation of new gender identities in the public sphere, Part VI of this essay will consider whether such identities can be incorporated into the LGBTI initialism.

## **IV. The Case For the LGBTI Label: Power in Numbers**

### *A. Higher Visibility, Louder Voice*

The first argument for the LGBTI movement is a logical corollary of its history: there is power in numbers. Over time, the different subcommunities came together – often explicitly –

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to apply international human rights law standards to address the abuse of humans rights on the basis of gender, sexuality or (briefly) sex identity. The Principles are arguably the most direct and compelling statement of international law on this issue.

<sup>42</sup> For more, see Zak, 'LGBPTTQQIIAA+ — How We Got Here from Gay', above n 2; Dale Ellis, 'LGBT: What does LGBTIQA+ stand for? Part 1', *Cuff Magazine* (online), 2 February 2015 <<http://cuffmagazine.co.uk/2015/02/02/lgbt-what-does-lgbtiqa-stand-for-part-1/>>.

<sup>43</sup> 'Q' stands for 'queer' or 'questioning'. See Zak, above n 2.

<sup>44</sup> 'A' stands for 'asexual'. See Zak, above n 2.

<sup>45</sup> '+' stands for 'other'. See Zak, above n 2.

<sup>46</sup> See, eg, ReachOut, 'LGBTIQ Support Services' <<http://au.reachout.com/lgbtiq-support-services>>.

<sup>47</sup> Dana Beyer, 'Facebook's Gender Identities' *Huffington Post* (online), 19 February 2016 <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dana-beyer/facebook-gender-identities\\_b\\_4811147.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dana-beyer/facebook-gender-identities_b_4811147.html)>.

to pool their respective resources, gain visibility and thereby achieve greater advances for all of their respective agendas.<sup>48</sup> When working individually, they all faced ‘political powerlessness’.<sup>49</sup>

The necessity of working together derives, first, from the size of the five subcommunities.<sup>50</sup> In Australia, the largest subcommunity (going by self-identity) is gay men, who represent approximately 2% of the Australian population.<sup>51</sup> Yet, when the LGBTI community is considered collectively, their size swells to up to 11% of the population.<sup>52</sup>

Second, it is also necessary to consider the type of advocacy undertaken by LGBTI advocates. LGBTI advocates face not only a large, well-orchestrated and well-funded opposition (eg religious groups),<sup>53</sup> but also widespread and institutionalised homo-, trans-, bi- and intersex-phobia.<sup>54</sup> While LGBTI may openly be campaigning for legislative change, often this is a proxy for fighting to change societal views generally: this mammoth task requires visibility.

Other factors supporting a communitarian approach are a lack of financial backing (given LGBTI individuals earn less)<sup>55</sup> and the threat of persecution (in the form of discrimination, violence, rejection etc) faced by LGBTI individuals when they undertake political activity.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Raymond Smith and Donald Haider-Markel, *Gay and Lesbian Americans and Political Participation: A Reference Handbook* (ABC-CLIO, 1<sup>st</sup> ed, 2002) 12-14; Byne, above n 12, 67-9; Interview with Jamie Gardiner, Member at LGBTI Taskforce, Department of Premier & Cabinet, State Government of Victoria (Skype, 10 December 2016).

<sup>49</sup> Kenneth Sherrill, ‘The Political Power of Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals’ (1996) 29(3) *Political Science and Politics* 469, 469-473.

<sup>50</sup> Smith and Haider-Markel, above n 49, 12.

<sup>51</sup> While it is notoriously hard to measure Roy Morgan Research, ‘Is Australia Getting Gay – and How Gay Will We Get?’ (Press Release, No 6263, 2 June 2015).

<sup>52</sup> Department of Health, Australian Government, ‘National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) Ageing and Aged Care Strategy’ (2012), 4.

<sup>53</sup> Sherrill, above n 50, 469.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid; Australian Human Rights Commission, ‘Face the Facts: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People’ <<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/face-facts-lesbian-gay-bisexual-trans-and-intersex-people#fn9>>.

<sup>55</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, ‘Face the Facts: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People’ <<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/face-facts-lesbian-gay-bisexual-trans-and-intersex-people#fn9>>.

<sup>56</sup> Smith and Haider-Markel, above n 49, 12-14.

## ***B. Shared Plight, Practical Efficiencies***

It was not the mere need for critical mass that brought the LGBTI community together: it was also a sense of shared plight. While this sense of commonality differs between advocates and individuals, it can be said that most LGBTI individuals share a sense of not belonging in a society defined by norms of cisgender heterosexual males and females; further, most of them face discrimination because of real or perceived sex, gender and/or sexual difference.

While all the subcommunities have their own distinct (and increasingly divergent) agendas, their sense of shared plight leads to share policy concerns in the course of advocacy. Same-sex marriage is an example of a policy that theoretically stands to benefit all the five subcommunities (while some more than others, as will be discussed in Part IV).

In particular, elder LGBTI advocates can help the younger subcommunities (eg the trans and intersex communities) fight the battles that they have already fought and won. For example, nowadays, intersex and trans advocates campaign to de-pathologise intersex and trans identities in the community consciousness, especially the medical community. Lesbian, gay and bisexual advocates, who waged this war during the 70s, are well placed to aid in this fight.

## ***C. Inclusiveness in Its Own Right***

A third reason for the long initialism is that, historically, the LGBTI community has provided a place of relative safety for vulnerable individuals who are not accepted as a part of any other minority group, irrespective of their specific identity label.

This idea of inclusion for the sake of inclusion, rooted in LGBTI history, remains important today, given sexuality, gender and intersex variations are not only poorly understood by doctors and health professionals, but are also fiercely contested by queer theorists. Drawing firm definitional lines around the gay, lesbian, trans, bisexual and intersex communities is difficult, if not impossible.

Therefore, the LGBTI initialism now serves as a ‘catch-all’ phrase to include all those who feel a sense of not belonging, even if they do not identify with any of the five constituent subcommunities *per se*. In this way, the LGBTI initialism has grown broader than the sum of its parts.

## V. The Case Against: Out of the Frying pan and Into the Fire

### *A. Hierarchies of Power: Bi-, Trans- And Intersex-Phobia Within the LGBTI Community*

The LGBTI movement is a fight against power relations. Paradoxically, one of the biggest arguments against the LGBTI initialism is that it obscures from view – and perpetuates – power relations between its different constituent subcommunities. These ‘hierarchies of power’ include biphobia, cissexism or transphobia, and stigma attached to intersex variations. They are exhibited by gay men and to a lesser extent, lesbian women, and disadvantage the bisexual, trans and intersex individuals.

Since the birth of the LGBTI movement, the bisexual community has noted the biphobia exhibited by gay men and lesbians. While all three groups broadly define their identities around the idea of sexuality, some gay men (and a minority of lesbian women) have maintained theoretical oppositions to bisexuality, either publicly or internally. Some see bisexuality as ‘fence-sitting’ while others see it as a unique form of deviant sexual behaviour in itself. While research has now revealed the detrimental effects of such stigma on the bisexual community (they experience higher rates of mental illness than the gay or lesbian community, for example), biphobia still emanates from the LGBTI community.

Equally, transphobia exhibited by some gays and lesbians is well documented. While this is not to be confused with gay and lesbian separatism, it is undeniable that theoretical opposition to trans inclusion in the LGBTI community has often tipped into transphobia and cissexism, both conscious and unconscious, from the beginning of the LGBTI movement to now. While Enriquez notes the ‘important bonds’ between trans individuals and lesbians (who were, in general, less transphobic), documented transphobia within the LGBTI community ranges from avoidance of trans issues during advocacy to explicit transphobic speech. For example, Enriquez quotes trans advocates who were told by US organisations claiming to be LGBTI that ‘the world isn’t ready’ for advocacy on trans issues and that such issues should be ‘put on the backburner’.

When it comes to intersex stigma, there is little written on discrimination emanating from within the LGBTI community. This said, Organisation Intersex International Australia (OIIA) recounts an instance in which an LGBTI advocate from an unnamed New South Wales (NSW) organisation uses the intersex community ‘as a punchline for a joke’. For a so-called LGBTI advocate to speak in such a way shows, at best, a severe lack of awareness about the intersex community; at worst, conscious intersex-phobia. For this reason, Jones et al note that because the intersex community is a ‘small sub-group’ they stand to be ‘overlooked’ by the other subcommunities.

The relevance of the LGBTI label to these documented instances of ongoing discrimination against the smaller and less visible subcommunities is two-fold. First, the LGBTI label provides gays and lesbians with immunity from criticism when they exhibit such discriminatory behaviour. Implicit in the LGBTI label is the idea that all LGBTI members necessarily have the best interests of other LGBTI individuals at heart. Victims or witnesses of trans-, bi- and intersex-phobia have expressed that is difficult to ‘call out’ perpetrators for fear of being perceived as causing dissent. This means intersex, trans and bisexual individuals have to silently accept stigma and discrimination from the very people who are meant to be their allies.

Second, where biphobia, transphobia and intersex-phobia emanate from within the LGBTI community, this severely hinders the efforts of bisexual, trans and intersex advocates educating the broader public. Biphobia, transphobia and intersex-phobia exhibited by the LGBTI community are all the more damaging because it appears as if such behaviour is condoned or tolerated by intersex, trans and bisexual individuals, even though it is not. This actually validates and reinforces those prejudicial behaviours in a much stronger way than similar prejudice from a non-LGBTI individual or group.

In these two ways, the LGBTI label actually provides a breeding ground for existing social power structures and social orders which oppress bisexual, trans and intersex people. Paradoxically, it is the LGBTI initialism itself which stymies victims’ attempts to deconstruct those social orders because they are silenced: their inclusion in the movement is predicated on showing solidarity with their gay and lesbian allies.



## *B. Hierarchies of Power in Practice: Prioritising Lesbian and Gay Policy Concerns*

The hierarchies of power discussed in subsection A have a very specific manifestation in the course of advocacy: they lead to the prioritisation of lesbian and gay policy concerns and the erasure of trans, bisexual and intersex policy concerns.

The fight for same-sex marriage (SSM) in Australia is the clearest example that the so-called LGBTI rights movement defaults to the representation of gays and lesbians and their attendant priorities. While a majority of gay men and lesbians see SSM as a priority issue, the same cannot be said for the bisexual, trans or intersex communities. Yet, it is undeniable that the SSM issue has dominated LGBTI advocacy efforts in Australia for over a decade – perhaps more than any LGBTI issue ever. In the words of one commentator, it has ‘consumed acres of newsprint, thousands of hours of airtime and polarised social media’. While LGBTI issues have rarely, if ever, found much traction in the commercial sphere, corporate entities have signed onto the SSM cause with gusto, including numerous open letters and full-page advertisements. Financially speaking, LGBTI rights organisations are reluctant to reveal the total costs of their advocating, however the fact that the federal government was ready to pay a \$525 million bill on a national plebiscite is testament to the resources – financial, emotional and otherwise – that have been spent on the SSM issue.

How can there be such an incongruity between the actual priorities of the LGBTI community and how LGBTI advocacy is conducted? One answer to this question has to do with the practice of advocacy in general. Rayside lists factors such as that groups with wide mandates are much harder to manage; that advocacy is nowadays more commonly pursued in response to specific issues; and that advocacy resources are best spent where public opinion is already on-side (as is the case with SSM in Australia). While these issues are important to consider, they do not fully explain the way policy priorities are decided within the LGBTI movement.

The more complete answer to this question identifies that the LGBTI initialism is a discursive tool which allows gays and lesbians, whether consciously or unconsciously, to de-prioritise the policy concerns of the bisexual, trans and intersex communities. The discursive

power of the LGBTI label can be summarised in two assumptions which appear implicit but are actually damaging and oppressive: first, that all five subcommunities share the same policy concerns; and second, that they are all equally in need.

The first assumption communicated by the LGBTI initialism stems both from its plain meaning as well as its history. On its face, the fact of naming the LGBTI movement after its five constituent subcommunities suggests commonality in goals. The sense of a common purpose grounded in sexuality difference is also a historical overhang from the Gay Liberation period.

This assumption, however, is less relevant as the LGBTI initialism gets longer. The addition of each subcommunity – in particular, the trans and intersex subcommunities – has represented a ‘theoretical leap’ in LGBTI advocacy. In particular, trans and intersex issues cannot be understood purely through the lens of sexual difference: trans advocates campaign mostly on issues to do with gender identity; and intersex issues revolve around bodily diversity, a third issue entirely.

The conflation of the policy agendas of all groups under the LGBTI banner can be seen in the way that SSM is being marketed as the ‘last frontier’ for LGBTI rights in Australia. Driven by a sense they have nearly exhausted their own policy agenda, many gays and lesbians assume that the other subcommunities feel a similar sense of achievement by mere virtue of the fact that they are part of the LGBTI community. Yet, as many bisexual, trans and intersex advocates have pointed out, viewing SSM as the last frontier overlooks the fact that their communities face many more pressing (and life-threatening) struggles. The obfuscation of the trans community’s actual policy concerns led the Transgender Law centre in Maine to run a ‘#morethanmarriage’ campaign.

In its most extreme manifestation, the fallacy that all subcommunities have the same policy concerns actually leads to the erasure of those subcommunities themselves. While the SSM marriage debate is yet to run its course in Australia, Ryan Conrad describes the SSM campaign in Maine as a ‘massive sponge’ which absorbed money and volunteer time, leaving ‘little sustenance for other queer groups doing critical work in our communities’. This is because public and private funds were withdrawn from bisexual, trans and intersex organisations and

diverted to the SSM cause, under the mistaken assumption that this was what those subcommunities wanted. This left LGBTI organisations providing vital services for the bisexual, trans and intersex communities in financial ruin.

The second, and perhaps more damaging, assumption implicit in the LGBTI label is that all five subcommunities are equally in need. A movement composed of five groups, each explicitly represented by a single letter in the name of that movement, gives the impression that each group is on an equal footing. Further, elder gay and lesbians still carry a sense of the urgency of their own concerns. Yet, this assumption is as misleading as the first: not all subcommunities are equally as powerful; nor are the individual subcommunities equally as large or mobilised.

If the first assumption blinds gays and lesbians to the actual policy concerns of bisexual, trans and intersex advocates, then the second assumption gives gays and lesbians an excuse not to pursue those concerns in the rare case they are made aware of them. Constituting the majority of the LGBTI movement, gays and lesbians can always choose to pursue their preferred policies, even if their priorities are mutually exclusive with those of other subcommunities. Yet, on account of the fallacy of equal need, advocates can reassure themselves that resources are being put to where they can have most impact. For example, Stryker describes how trans advocates who express dissatisfaction with funding models are invited to form ‘focus groups’ and then must convince their gay and lesbian peers why their policy concerns – often relating to anti-trans violence and murder – are worthy of the attention and funding that SSM receives. This anecdote reveals how damaging the fallacy of equal need can be in today’s climate of ‘all or nothing’ advocacy, whereby often the resources of all LGBTI individuals are pooled and then used to pursue a few specific agenda items.

The intersex, trans and bisexual communities’ actual level of need is further obscured by the fact that often they do support the policy priorities of gays and lesbians in addition to their own priorities. SSM exemplifies this: while SSM may not be a top priority for the bisexual, intersex or trans communities, it does stand to benefit them. For this reason, bisexual, trans and intersex advocate groups do support the fight for SSM by AME. The problem is that when they lend their voice to gay and lesbian priorities in this way, this is erroneously interpreted to mean that they view it as their top priority, even though they do not.

Cumulatively, these two assumptions (that all subcommunities share the same policy concerns and that they are all in equal need), though they seem implicit in the LGBTI initialism, actually rob the less powerful communities of a voice in negotiating the group's priorities while misleading advocates about where their time and attention is needed most. This translates to the systemic de-prioritisation of bisexual, trans and intersex policy concerns. In this way, the explicit inclusion of these subcommunities in the initialism paradoxically makes it harder for them to gain visibility for their policy concerns during advocacy.

It is pertinent to note the role of the media in conflating all the subcommunities' policy agendas. The Australian media has propagated – often unthinkingly and incorrectly – the LGBTI label throughout the public consciousness, in particular in connection with SSM. For example, when reporting on the LGBTQ's Task Force's name change (previously they were the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force), one news article did not even include the word 'bisexual'. While the advocacy organisation in that case had made an attempt to be more inclusive, the significance of the name change was lost on the media. In this way, the media often leads the public to believe that LGBTI is synonymous with 'gay and lesbian issues'.

### ***C. Fair-weather Friends : Promoting Bi-, Trans- and Intersex-Phobic Policies***

A point conceptually related to subsections A and B above, but worthy of particular mention, is how the LGBTI label has sometimes been attached to instances of advocacy which actually contribute to new discrimination against certain LGBTI folk. For example, on 19 October 2013, Tony Briffa of OIIA released a media statement beginning with the words:

I support marriage equality and acknowledge the great work done by Australian Marriage Equality (AME) over the years. I am disappointed however, that they are now pushing legislation in NSW and Tasmania that will exclude some intersex and trans people from marriage.

Briffa went on to point out that because the legislation in question defined SSM on the basis of two people of the same sex, this risked excluding some intersex and trans people from the new law. In essence, AME was potentially campaigning for new legislative discrimination against trans and intersex individuals.

To its credit, AME immediately sought to liaise with trans and intersex leaders and soon withdrew its support for that legislation. Nevertheless, this example shows how the LGBTI movement often proceeds without input from actual trans and intersex individuals.

Further, not all instances of discriminatory advocacy are resolved like this. A recent example is the recruitment of Rainbow Fertility as a sponsor and speaker at the series ‘LGBTIQ’ Inclusion in Higher Education’ at the University of Western Sydney. Rainbow fertility offers ‘pre-implantation genetic diagnosis’ for same-sex couples to screen for and eliminate ‘severe genetic disorders’, which they define to include intersex variations. The sponsorship of so-called LGBTI events by centres that openly participate in such medical procedures is not only setting a precedent against which intersex advocates need to fight; put bluntly, it is advocating for the termination of children carrying certain intersex variations.

While this essay expresses no normative opinion on prenatal screening, this anecdote is nevertheless an urgent moment to consider, as one commentator put it, the ‘nature of community’. If one subcommunity can so flagrantly ignore the agenda of the intersex subcommunity, there is, at best, a severe lack of knowledge about the intersex community; at worst, there exists an active refusal to include intersex people. This must be resolved if intersex (and also trans and bisexual) individuals are going to continue to invest their energies in the LGBTI movement.

#### ***D. Perpetuating Racism, Classism And Other Discrimination***

In fact, the LGBTI movement perpetuates hierarchies of power not just between the different subcommunities, but also hierarchies based on class and race. It is important to remember that the Gay Liberation movement (the predecessor to the LGBTI movement) arose out of a time when issues of racial and class disadvantage had not yet reached the spotlight. Therefore, early LGBTI organisations, many of which still exist today, were not formed with internal structures to mitigate them.

While racism and classism exist broadly in society, it is argued that the LGBTI community provides a space where an individual species of racism and classism thrive. Indigenous Australian, Asian, people of colour (POC) and writers from other racial minorities continuously voice that that racism is particularly endemic in the LGBTI community,

particularly in the attitudes of white gay men. They point to disproportionately high levels of racism within LGBTI spaces (particularly online, such as on social and hook-up apps). It is argued that LGBTI individuals are often unaware of their own capacity to perpetrate oppression (such as through racism) because the dominant narrative of the LGBTI movement has been victimhood. Therefore many perpetrators of racism still see themselves as victims. In addition, the presence of LGBTI-only spaces (such as hook-up apps) shields that racism from the rebuke that may occur in the public arena.

The LGBTI movement not only provides a safe house for these attitudes, but in the context of advocacy, the LGBTI movement serves the agenda of white, wealthy, Western LGBTI folk over poor, non-white LGBTI individuals (and sometimes actively oppresses the latter group). The fight for SSM exemplifies this phenomenon: on its face, the ongoing association of the LGBTI label with the fight for SSM represents the assertion that the LGBTI movement has transcended 'basic issues of health, safety, economic security and social stability'. Yet, this is not the case: SSM is pursued in Australia instead of a suite of reforms that non-white, poor LGBTI folk say they need much more urgently. Examples of areas where reform is more pertinent range from healthcare systems that oppress working class queers to immigration systems that exclude nonwhite LGBTI individuals.

This focus on white, upper-class issues is a product of the LGBTI label which, through its discursive use, puts identity politics in the spotlight: it suggests that the most important identity labels within the LGBTI movement are those that refer to sex, sexuality and gender. In doing so, however, it minimalises the significance of other identities. The victims of racism cited above argue that it is difficult to critique other LGBTI individuals or groups because the LGBTI initialism conjures the notion that identity only exists in terms of sex, gender and sexuality; and what's more, that they owe an allegiance to their so-called fellow LGBTI individuals. And while discrimination on the basis of class and race is cause for alarm in itself, the oppression of non-white, non-Western LGBTI individuals by LGBTI advocacy is even more problematic because research shows that issues of class, race and socio-economic status disproportionately affect LGBTI people.

Despite this extra imperative, white privilege appears entwined with the fabric of LGBTI organisations according both to the testimony of its LGBTI victims and the community's own advocacy record.

### ***E. Promoting Singular Theoretical Narratives And Representations***

Clashes between subcommunities within the LGBTI community extend farther than just their contrasting policy priorities: it also has to do with the ways these groups theorise and represent their identities. Not only do these theoretical narratives matter for how different advocates in the LGBTI movement relate and communicate with each other; it also matters for their advocacy, because so much of advocacy involves educating non-LGBTI individuals on LGBTI identities. In addition, the narratives that advocates disseminate need to provide 'affirming images' for other individuals, inside and outside the community, struggling with their identity.

Unsurprisingly, gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans and intersex people all talk about and theorise themselves in different ways. This plurality of understandings is not a problem *prima facie*: it can add to a diverse and colourful understanding of identity. Yet, where this plurality of narratives is lost, this can result in microaggressions against those LGBTI individuals whose identities do not correspond with the dominant narrative. Such microaggressions come from LGBTI individuals as well as the public, both of whom internalise the narratives which LGBTI advocates propagate.

Unfortunately, in Australian rights work under the LGBTI banner, the actual plurality of narratives which in the LGBTI community has been lost. For example, the primacy of SSM debate has had the effect of overemphasising 'relationships' as the sole determinant and theoretical narrative of LGBTI status. This excludes trans and intersex individuals whose identities revolve around more than just who they form relationships with. In addition, the identity messaging used by human rights workers to progress the SSM campaign has, in practice, revolved around two homosexual individuals, thus excluding bisexual people.

Other times, the narratives used by advocates are actually damaging in themselves. For example, many LGBTI advocates have been using the 'trapped in the wrong body' and 'born a boy/girl' narratives in talking about trans experiences. These outdated narratives pathologise

the trans experience and for this reason, have been explicitly discouraged by trans advocates. While the very existence of trans narratives in the mainstream media would normally be cause for celebration, some of the representations propounded by LGBTI advocates thus do more harm than good.

Equally, Koyama and Weasel have noted that the voiced experiences of intersex people are often used by LGBTI advocates as an intellectual metaphor to deconstruct gender and sexuality in public education campaigns, without actually giving any weight to the actual experiences of the intersex individuals themselves. Recounting the experiences of intersex people only as a means to help people understand lesbian and gay identities not only devalues intersex people and their place in the LGBTI community, but it also does nothing to help actual intersex people struggling with their identity.

## **VI. Moving Forward: Don't Throw The Baby Out With The Bathwater**

There are three options for addressing the problems presented in Part IV:

1. Dissolve the LGBTI movement;
2. Invent a new term for the LGBTI community;
3. Keep the LGBTI term, but use it differently.

This essay argues that the third option is preferable.

### ***A. Dissolving the LGBTI Movement: Should We Disband the Army?***

One solution is to stop using the initialism altogether and to let each of the five subcommunities advocate for its rights separately. It is important to acknowledge the voices



within the different subcommunities who advocate for this option, including gay and lesbian separatists,<sup>57</sup> trans advocates,<sup>58</sup> and intersex advocates.<sup>59</sup>

Nevertheless, with the exception of the intersex community (whose addition is much more recent),<sup>60</sup> this essay argues that attempts by advocates to carve up the LGBTI community would be futile. Not only is the LGBTI movement a product of history, but also the LGBTI initialism has now entered common parlance.

More importantly, there is normative value in the initialism. This is because the LGBTI label holds precious symbolic and linguistic currency. While advocates have an educative role, they also have a role to speak in a way that their constituents understand. The LGBTI label is often the most practical and sensitive way for advocates to communicate with their constituents.

Further, advocating separately for the subcommunities risks severely jeopardising the progress that has been made for certain subcommunities, especially the less visible ones. It is important to note that, despite articulating numerous problems with LGBTI advocacy in general, many bisexual,<sup>61</sup> intersex<sup>62</sup> and trans<sup>63</sup> advocates still support their subcommunities' inclusion in the LGBTI movement.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> See, eg, Julie Hartman, 'The Effects of Lesbian Separatism on Bisexual Women's Identity and Community' (2006) 5(4) *Journal of Bisexuality* 61, 61-76.

<sup>58</sup> O'Keefe, above n 34.

<sup>59</sup> Lauren Guy, 'The struggles faced by the intersex community are different to those faced by the LGBT community', *University Times* (online), 5 November 2016 < <http://www.universitytimes.ie/2016/11/the-struggles-faced-by-the-intersex-community-are-different-to-those-faced-by-the-lgbt-community/> >.

<sup>60</sup> See above n 46-48.

<sup>61</sup> Barker et al, above n 69, 40.

<sup>62</sup> M Carpenter and D Hough, 'Employers' Guide to Intersex Inclusion' (Policy Guide, Pride in Diversity and Organisation Intersex International Australia, 2014), 14.

<sup>63</sup> Enriquez, above n 78, 150.

<sup>64</sup> M Carpenter and D Hough, 'Employers' Guide to Intersex Inclusion' (Policy Guide, Pride in Diversity and Organisation Intersex International Australia, 2014), 14.

## ***B. Back to the Drawing Board: Should We Invent a New Term?***

Unsurprisingly, many have looked for a new term to replace the LGBTI initialism. One such word is ‘queer’. Used pejoratively towards members of the LGBT community in the late 19th century, ‘queer’ was reclaimed in the late 70s. As discussed in Part II, ‘queer’ can be used as a catchall phrase to describe people who do not identify as LGBTI but equally do not identify as cisgender or heterosexual. However, the word ‘queer’ is also sometimes used as a blanket term for anyone belonging to the LGBTI community. Younger, more radical LGBTI individuals often prefer the term ‘queer’ because it is non-binary and politically charged. It is also more inclusive of questioning individuals and others who do not identify with one of the delineated LGBTI subcommunities, such as trans people who have undergone their transition and no longer identify as trans.

Yet, its political charge is precisely the reason many LGBTI folk do not like ‘queer’ as an identity label. ‘Queer’ can trigger many LGBTI individuals, especially gay men who are old enough to have had it used against them as an insult. Second, many intersex people, who often are heterosexual and cisgender, feel that ‘queer’ assumes notions of gender- or sexuality-subversion which do not play a part in their self-identity. Third, many older bisexuals do not identify with the term, given its original reclamation was mainly by gays and lesbians. This said, the word queer might prove useful if used in the initialism LGBTIQ – see below.

Another term coined to replace LGBTI but which has so far failed to gain traction is ‘gender, sex and sexuality minorities’ (GSM) (or variations thereof). This term failed to enter common parlance for similar reasons to ‘queer’: namely, it lacks a historical basis; its meaning is unclear to most people; and it was not inclusive of all subcommunities. While more inclusive of trans communities through its explicit mentioning of ‘gender’, it was contested by the intersex community who felt it ‘too abstract and unrelated to debates in our own movements’. Tellingly, ‘sex diverse’ was not a term that any Australian intersex-led organisation ever adopted or endorsed.

Overall, attempts to create a new label for the LGBTI community have been crippled by their attempt to revise history and their failure to capture the diversity of identities as well as to align with the advocacy vocabulary used in other parts of the world.

### ***C. Rethink, Regroup And Reclaim: Towards a New Way of Using the LGBTI Initialism***

There is no denying that current usage of the LGBTI label is problematic. Yet, as discussed in Part IV, the LGBTI label has a historical significance and symbolic power which can be harnessed by all subcommunities to progress their advocacy efforts. As such, this essay argues that the LGBTI initialism should be kept, however its usage must be more sensitive and proscriptive. The recommendations (1)-(6) below are by no means exhaustive, but are designed to prompt a discussion within the LGBTI community as to how it can reclaim the LGBTI label.

#### *1. Advocates need to educate themselves on bisexual, trans and intersex issues through immediate and ongoing consultation with those subcommunities*

Most of the harms identified in this essay stem, in essence, from ignorance on behalf of LGBTI advocates about the less visible subcommunities and their policy concerns. Such ignorance, however innocent, can lead to real harms for those subcommunities.

As a very first step, organisations holding themselves out as LGBTI need to know what each of those letters represent as well as the complex debates underlying the initialism. Staff in LGBTI organisations should undergo compulsory training on this topic from representatives who actually belong to the different subcommunities.

This education should be ongoing. Each subcommunities' priorities evolve, and different synergies and debates between the different subcommittees wax and wane over time. Therefore, LGBTI advocates and organisations need to constantly liaise with bisexual, trans and intersex communities in the same way that they currently liaise with lesbian and gay organisations.

#### *2. Advocates need to use the LGBTI in a more self-aware and deliberate way*

As identified in Part V, the LGBTI label peppers too many press releases, websites and speeches, creating an odious brand of false inclusion. While this usage has been a useful political tool for gays and lesbians to progress their agendas, it has done little to progress the needs of the most oppressed subcommunities. Oftentimes, it has done more to disfavour them.

This essay's main recommendation is that the LGBTI label needs to be used more proscriptively. Where the LGBTI label is used, it should be to refer to all five subcommunities

denoted by the label. For example, in most cases, LGBTI is not a term appropriate for labeling an individual person. In addition, if a movement, organisation, event or policy does not help a particular subcommunity in any way, then it should not be labeled LGBTI.

Using the LGBTI initialism in a deliberate way extends to acknowledging, explicitly, where certain subcommunities are not represented or may hold divergent views or priorities. Transgender Victoria provides a good model of how different subcommunities can talk about each respectfully:

TGV [Transgender Victoria] recognise Intersex as a separate and distinct group from Trans and Gender Diverse, and does not represent nor seek to represent Intersex issues or people, although it endorses co-operation with and support of Intersex groups where appropriate and of potentially mutual benefit.<sup>65</sup>

Underlying this new way of using the LGBTI initialism should be an important ethical consideration: no LGBTI individual should assume they can speak for a member of another subcommunity without its consent.<sup>66</sup>

### *3. Advocates should acknowledge and encourage 'micro-alliances' within the LGBTI movement*

The LGBTI movement is now so broad that a single organisation cannot feasibly – or efficiently – pursue the rights of all the subcommunities at the same time. For this reason, advocates need to acknowledge and encourage different ‘micro-alliances’ between subcommunities whose policy agendas align in certain areas.

An extension of this idea is that advocates should start using different iterations of the initialism (LGB and TI for example). Traditionally, advocates have erred on the side of being inclusive, for fear of erasing a subcommunity. As discussed, this approach plasters over differences instead of highlighting them, and further oppresses those subcommunities.

This deliberateness in language, even if it means omitting certain letters of the acronym, will actually have the effect of raising awareness about the less visible subcommunities. When

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<sup>65</sup> Transgender Victoria, ‘What we do’ <<http://www.transgendervictoria.com/what-we-do/what-we-do>>.

<sup>66</sup> Editors, ‘ISGD’ and the appropriation of intersex’ (Press Release, Organisation Intersex International Australia, 22 May 2011) <<https://oii.org.au/13651/isgd-and-the-appropriation-of-intersex/>>.

people see LGB, for example, the absence of the letters ‘T’ and ‘I’ is noticeable. This prompts the person to consider why that regime does not serve the priorities of trans or intersex individuals. This draws attention to the various theoretical differences between the different subcommunities which are absent from the current advocacy dialogue.

4. *Advocates should take proactive steps to give the bisexual, trans and intersex communities more visibility*

Reforming use of the LGBTI label is not sufficient, however. The LGBTI community is a site of domination and power against the bisexual, trans and intersex communities. This leads to the systemic de-prioritisation of their policy priorities and often the erasure of those communities themselves.

As such, reclamation of the LGBTI initialism must extend beyond mere use of the term. LGBTI organisations must incorporate new methods to combat internal power politics by actively prioritising the least powerful subcommunities.

Such measures can include:

- Giving additional resources to initiatives which target the trans, intersex and bisexual subcommunities, such as research, speaking opportunities or public education campaigns;
- Ensuring that all the subcommunities are represented in positions of leadership, working groups, speaking panels, initiatives etc;
- Ensuring that decision-making processes acknowledge and delineate different levels of urgency between different subcommunities;
- Where possible, openly acknowledging the hierarchies of power and history of marginalisation which exists *within* the LGBTI community;
- Being deliberate and thorough with language generally, such as by separating out the different issues that affect different groups: for example, instead of writing ‘homophobia’, write ‘biphobia, transphobia, intersex-stigma’.

Racism and classism also disproportionately affect LGBTI individuals, yet current advocacy obscures and compounds that oppression.

Advocates must stress, both to their fellow advocates and the public, that diversity exists in terms of sex, sexuality and gender, but also in relation to class and race. The measures listed under 4 can also be used to increase the visibility of these issues of intersectionality.

5. *Advocates should take proactive steps to give issues to do with race, class and other minority labels more visibility*

Racism and classism also disproportionately affect LGBTI individuals, yet current advocacy obscures and compounds that oppression.

Advocates must stress, both to their fellow advocates and the public, that diversity exists in terms of sex, sexuality and gender, but also in relation to class and race. The measures listed under 4 can also be used to increase the visibility of these issues of intersectionality.

6. *Accounting for fluidity: is it time for LGBTIQ?*

As identified, an impending challenge for LGBTI advocates is accounting for a new generation of young queer people who do not identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or intersex, but nevertheless feel discriminated against on the basis of sex, sexual or gender identity. These individuals need the protection of LGBTI advocates. Nevertheless, the label ‘queer’, when used instead of LGBTI, alienates many of the people presently included in the LGBTI label.

One solution is a longer initialism, LGBTIQ. This label harnesses the power of the term ‘queer’, without forcing the current constituencies of the LGBTI community to adopt it for themselves. The main criticism of the acronym is that it is too long.<sup>67</sup> While this is a legitimate concern, history has shown that time and proper education overcomes this hurdle. Advocacy overseas – for example in the US, where advocacy commonly occurs under the banner ‘LGBTQA’ – shows it is not impossible to introduce new letters and have them accepted by both the LGBTI community and the broader public.

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<sup>67</sup> Suresha, above n 11.

A key challenge in introducing a new letter will be involving LGBTI elders in the decision-making and education process.<sup>68</sup> This should be the focus of future research.

#### *7. Curating a greater plurality of LGBTI narratives*

Another identified harm is the lack of diversity in narratives and voices emerging from LGBTI advocacy. This gives rise to misconceptions about the different subcommunities and in turn, makes it harder for those subcommunities to pursue their own agendas.

Therefore, an important job for LGBTI advocates is to uncover and disseminate the diversity of LGBTI voices that exist. This is more difficult from a branding perspective than focusing on a few key narratives, such as the ‘love is love’ and ‘born this way’ storylines. While cultivating this content takes more effort on the part of the LGBTI organisations, it simplifies the work of subcommunity-specific organisation because they can build off the narratives already in the public domain. In time, the public will become comfortable with the fact that these narratives are diverse and, at times, conflicting.

#### *8. Educate the media and the public on LGBTI history, theory and perspectives*

A final problem identified in Part V is that the media, the public and even LGBTI individuals propagate the LGBTI label without knowing what it represents. This ignorant use extends the reach of the harms inherent in the label.

LGBTI advocates need to ramp up their educative efforts. This ranges from including an expanded form of the LGBTI initialism in all resources on which it is used, to holding public seminars on LGBTI history, advocacy and even the initialism itself. One of the key motivations for writing this paper was the lack of literature on the LGBTI initialism. LGBTI advocates need to work to fill this void.

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<sup>68</sup> Knauer, above n 60, 105-119.

## VII. Conclusion

The LGBTI initialism has a long and rich history. On account of the significance and symbolic power it has accumulated over time, it now provides a meaningful banner under which people have been able to fight successfully for a variety of sexual, gender, sex and other rights.

However, the ostensible inclusiveness of the LGBTI movement obscures the fact that in practice, it facilitates discrimination against many of its most vulnerable constituents - not only those that belong to the least visible subcommunities, but also those whose identities intersect other minorities defined by class or race. Paradoxically, the LGBTI label disempowers those individuals by white-washing the diversity of identities and agendas within the movement; and silences them by suggesting that diversity only exists along the lines of sex, sexuality and gender.

Yet, it is not the LGBTI label itself, but the way that it is used which is to blame. Advocates, constituents, the media and the public alike all currently lack knowledge about what the LGBTI initialism truly stands for. As a result, they use the label insensitively, inaccurately and inordinately.

As such, the way forward must be to reform the way the LGBTI term is used in practice. This is the only way to harness the power of the LGBTI label while also mitigating the voiced concerns of the movement's most vulnerable constituents.

This need for reform derives not only from the moral imperative of protecting those most in need, but also because a failure to reform may doom the LGBTI movement forever. With so many other sexual and gender minorities knocking on the door, certain subcommunities will consider severing themselves and going it alone or with these other eager partners.

On the other hand, if LGBTI advocates can undergo the necessary introspection, there is an opportunity to broaden and strengthen the movement, thus continuing the LGBTI community's long tradition of rights advocacy.



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