

# Vocabulary Extravaganza

*Large Group 101 Low Trust 20 mins Vocabulary*

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## Necessary supplies

- Participant vocabulary sheet
- Writing utensil

## Goals & objectives

- To provide an opportunity for participants to dig into some of the more nuanced definitions used in the LGBTQ+ community
- To emphasize how powerful language is
- Clear up any misconceptions or questions about terminology or common phrases

## Step-by-step walk through

1. Start the activity by instructing the participants on what the activity will entail. Let them know they're going to have 5 or so minutes to read through the list of terms. When they are reading through they should highlight or star any terms they don't quite get or want to go over more after reading through that word's definition. At the end of reading through the list they should write down any words that they don't see on this list but that they find confusing or want to go over with the group.
2. Once everyone is done you can say that you'd like to go over the terms that they starred or added to the list of words to go over and we'll just go down the list in alphabetical order and any time we get to a word that someone is unclear about we will go over it in detail as a group.
3. Go through the terminology that the group is unsure of. Add tid-bits of your own to highlight important learning beyond just the terms themselves, using the notes below or these: (1) none of these definitions or labels are universal (some folks who identify with these labels will describe their identity differently); it's important to respect how others self-identify, and not use these labels to "diagnose" people; be sure to clarify parts of speech when important.

## Notes

Vocabulary is essential to understanding and exploring LGBTQ issues and identities. Often times folks use specific identity labels to find community and a sense of connection with others who feel and understand identity similar to their experience of identity.

Part of speech, whether a word is a noun, verb, adjective, etc. is an essential part of vocabulary. This is because for a number of words (ex. queer, gay, and trans\*(gender) they should only ever be used as adjectives and never as nouns. Adjectives modify the person whereas nouns may feel they reduce that person down to that identity. Adjectives, therefore, are always a bit safer to opt for.



This definition of terms is ever-updating and changing, as is the cultural use of these terms. Please note that we aim to make our definitions as useful as possible, and that if 51 out of every 100 people we meet who use a specific identity label agree with our definition, we consider that to be a success.

For certain terms the way they are received is just as important as what they mean. Any word might be harmful if used in a negative or derogatory way and it is always important to consider what someone is telling you if they feel hurt or offended by a term.

## All-Star Tip

This is a great activity to [put your own spin on](#) and one that can be modified a lot of different ways. If you're looking for a way to make this activity interactive consider playing it like a matching game with cards cut out of definitions and words where groups have to pair the words with their definitions.



## Full-list of Terms - Facilitator Edition

*The bullets under the terms (with the exception of genderqueer) are tidbits, additional information you can use to flush out participants understandings of the terms.*

**Advocate** - (noun) (1) a person who actively works to end intolerance, educate others, and support social equity for a marginalized group. (verb) (2) to actively support/plea in favor of a particular cause, the action of working to end intolerance, educate others, etc.

**Ally** - (noun ) a (typically straight- or cis-identified) person who supports, and respects for members of the LGBTQ community. While the word doesn't necessitate action, we consider people to be active allies who take action upon this support and respect, this also indicates to others that you are an ally.

- “Coming out” as an ally is when you reveal (or take an action that reveals) your support of the LGBTQ community. Being an active supporter can, at times, be stigmatizing, though it is not usually recognized many allies go through a “coming out process” of their own.

**Androgynous** - (adj; pronounced “an-jrah-jun-ee”) (1) a gender expression that has elements of both masculinity and femininity; (2) occasionally used in place of “intersex” to describe a person with both female and male anatomy

**Androsexual/Androphilic** - (adj) attraction to men, males, and/or masculinity

**Aromantic** - (adj) is a person who experiences little or no romantic attraction to others and/or a lack of interest in forming romantic relationships.

**Asexual** - (adj) having a lack of (or low level of) sexual attraction to others and/or a lack of interest or desire for sex or sexual partners. Asexuality exists on a spectrum from people who experience no sexual attraction or have any desire for sex to those who experience low levels and only after significant amounts of time, many of these different places on the spectrum have their own identity labels. Another term used within the asexual community is “ace,” meaning someone who is asexual.

- Asexuality is different than celibacy in that it is a sexual orientation whereas celibacy is an abstaining from a certain action.
- Not all asexual people are aromantic.

**Bigender** - (adj) a person who fluctuates between traditionally “woman” and “man” gender-based behavior and identities, identifying with both genders (and sometimes a third gender)

**Bicurious** - (adj) a curiosity about having attraction to people of the same gender/sex (similar to questioning)

**Biological Sex** - (noun) a medical term used to refer to the chromosomal, hormonal and anatomical characteristics that are used to classify an individual as female or male or intersex. Often referred to as simply “sex,” “physical sex,” “anatomical sex,” or specifically as “sex assigned [or designated] at birth.”

- Often seen as a binary but as there are many combinations of chromosomes, hormones, and primary/secondary sex characteristics, it's more accurate to view this as a spectrum (which is more inclusive of intersex people as well as trans\*-identified people)

- Is commonly conflated with gender

**Biphobia** - (noun) a range of negative attitudes (e.g., fear, anger, intolerance, resentment, erasure, or discomfort) that one may have/express towards bisexual individuals. Biphobia can come from and be seen within the queer community as well as straight society. Biphobic - (adj) a word used to describe an individual who harbors some elements of this range of negative attitudes towards bisexual people

- Really important to recognize that many of our “stereotypes” of bisexual people - they’re overly sexual, greedy, it’s just a phase - are negative and stigmatizing (and therefore biphobic) and that gay, straight, and many other queer individuals harbor these beliefs.

**Bisexual** - (adj) a person emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to male/men and females/women. Other individuals may use this to indicate an attraction to individuals who identify outside of the gender binary as well and may use bisexual as a way to indicate an interest in more than one gender or sex (i.e. men and genderqueer people). This attraction does not have to be equally split or indicate a level of interest that is the same across the genders or sexes an individual may be attracted to.

- Can simply be shortened to bi
- Because it is the most commonly understood term outside of gay/straight many people who do not believe in the binary categories that bisexual can imply still use the term to indicate their sexual orientation because it is largely understood by others.

**Butch** - (noun & adj) a person who identifies themselves as masculine, whether it be physically, mentally or emotionally. ‘Butch’ is sometimes used as a derogatory term for lesbians, but is also be claimed as an affirmative identity label.

**Cisgender** - (adj; pronounced “siss-jendur”) a person whose gender identity and biological sex assigned at birth align (e.g., man and male-assigned). A simple way to think about it is if a person is not trans\*, they are cisgender.

- “Cis” is a latin prefix that means “on the same side [as]” or “on this side [of]”

**Cisnormativity** - (noun) the assumption, in individuals or in institutions, that everyone is cisgender, and that cisgender identities are superior to trans\* identities or people. Leads to invisibility of non-cisgender identities

**Closeted** - (adj) an individual who is not open to themselves or others about their (queer) sexuality or gender identity. This may be by choice and/or for other reasons such as fear for one’s safety, peer or family rejection or disapproval and/or loss of housing, job, etc. Also known as being “in the closet.” When someone chooses to break this silence they “come out” of the closet. (See coming out)

**Coming Out** - (1) the process by which one accepts and/or comes to identify one’s own sexuality or gender identity (to “come out” to oneself). (2) The process by which one shares one’s sexuality or gender identity with others (to “come out” to friends, etc.).

- This is a continual, life-long process. Everyday, all the time, one has to evaluate and re-evaluate who they are comfortable coming out to, if it is safe, and what the consequences might be.

**Constellation** - (noun) the arrangement or structure of a polyamorous relationship.

**Cross-dresser** - (noun) someone who wears clothes of another gender/sex.

**Demisexual** - (noun) an individual who does not experience sexual attraction unless they have formed a strong emotional connection with another individual. Often within a romantic relationship.

**Drag King** - (noun) someone who performs masculinity theatrically.

**Drag Queen** - (noun) someone who performs femininity theatrically.

**Dyke** - (noun) a term referring to a masculine presenting lesbian. While often used derogatorily, it can be adopted affirmatively by many lesbians (and not necessarily masculine ones) as a positive self-identity term.

**Emotional/Spiritual Attraction** - (noun) an affinity for someone that evokes the want to engage in emotional intimate behavior (e.g., sharing, confiding, trusting, interdepending), experienced in varying degrees (from little-to-non, to intense). Often conflated with **romantic attraction and sexual attraction**.

**Fag(got)** - (noun) derogatory term referring to a gay person, or someone perceived as queer. Occasionally used as a self-identifying affirming term by some gay men, at times in the shortened form 'fag'.

**Feminine Presenting; Masculine Presenting** - (adj) a way to describe someone who expresses gender in a more feminine or masculine way, for example in their hair style, demeanor, clothing choice, or style. Not to be confused with Feminine of Center and Masculine of Center, which often includes a focus on identity as well as expression.

**Feminine of Center; Masculine of Center** - (adj) a word that indicates a range of terms of gender identity and gender presentation for folks who present, understand themselves, relate to others in a more feminine/masculine way. Feminine of center individuals may also identify as femme, submissive, transfeminine, or more; masculine of center individuals may also often identify as butch, stud, aggressive, boi, transmasculine, or more.

**Femme** - (noun & adj) someone who identifies themselves as feminine, whether it be physically, mentally or emotionally. Often used to refer to a feminine-presenting queer woman.

**Fluid(ity)** - (adj) generally with another term attached, like gender-fluid or fluid-sexuality, fluid(ity) describes an identity that may change or shift over time between or within the mix of the options available (e.g., man and woman, bi and straight)

**FtM / F2M; MtF / M2F** - (adj) abbreviation for female-to-male transgender or transsexual person; abbreviation for male-to-female transgender or transsexual person.

**Gay** - (adj) (1) a term used to describe individuals who are primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the same sex and/or gender. More commonly used when referring to males/men-identified ppl who are attracted to males/men-identified ppl, but can be applied to females/women-identified ppl as well. (2) An umbrella term used to refer to the queer community as a whole, or as an individual identity label for anyone who does not identify as heterosexual.

- “Gay” is a word that’s had many different meanings throughout time. In the 12th century it meant “happy,” in the 17th century it was more commonly used to mean “immoral” (describing a loose and pleasure-seeking person), and by the 19th it meant a female prostitute (and a “gay man” was a guy who had sex with female prostitutes a lot). It wasn’t until the 20th century that it started to mean what it means today. Pretty crazy.

**Gender Binary** - (noun) the idea that there are only two genders - male/female or man/woman and that a person must be strictly gendered as either/or.

**Gender Expression** - (noun) the external display of one’s gender, through a combination of dress, demeanor, social behavior, and other factors, generally measured on scales of masculinity and femininity. Also referred to as “gender presentation.”

**Gender Fluid** - (adj) gender fluid is a gender identity best described as a dynamic mix of boy and girl. A person who is gender fluid may always feel like a mix of the two traditional genders, but may feel more man some days, and more woman other days.

**Gender Identity** - (noun) the internal perception of an one’s gender, and how they label themselves, based on how much they align or don’t align with what they understand their options for gender to be. Common identity labels include man, woman, genderqueer, trans, and more.

- Generally confused with biological sex, or sex assigned at birth

**Gender Non-Conforming (GNC)** - (adj) someone whose gender presentation, whether by nature or by choice, does not align in a predicted fashion with gender-based expectations.

**Gender Normative / Gender Straight** - (adj) someone whose gender presentation, whether by nature or by choice, aligns with society’s gender-based expectations.

**Genderqueer** - (adj) a gender identity label often used by people who do not identify with the binary of man/woman; or as an umbrella term for many gender non-conforming or non-binary identities (e.g., agender, bigender, genderfluid). Genderqueer people may think of themselves as one or more of the following, and they may define these terms differently:

- may combine aspects man and woman and other identities (bigender, pangender);
- not having a gender or identifying with a gender (genderless, agender);
- moving between genders (genderfluid);
- third gender or other-gendered; includes those who do not place a name to their gender having an overlap of, or blurred lines between, gender identity and sexual and romantic orientation.

**Gender Variant**- (adj) someone who either by nature or by choice does not conform to gender-based expectations of society (e.g. transgender, transsexual, intersex, gender-queer, cross-dresser, etc.).

**Gynesexual/Gynephilic** - (adj; pronounced “guy-nuh-seks-shu-uhl”) attracted to woman, females, and/or femininity

**Heteronormativity** - (noun) the assumption, in individuals or in institutions, that everyone is heterosexual, and that heterosexuality is superior to all other sexualities. Leads to invisibility and stigmatizing of other sexualities. Often included in this concept is a level of gender normativity and gender roles, the assumption that individuals *should* identify as men and women, and be masculine men and feminine women, and finally that men and women are a complimentary pair.

**Heterosexism** - (noun) behavior that grants preferential treatment to heterosexual people, reinforces the idea that heterosexuality is somehow better or more “right” than queerness, or makes other sexualities invisible

**Heterosexual** - (adj) a person primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the opposite sex. Also known as **straight**.

**Homophobia** - (noun) an umbrella term for a range of negative attitudes (e.g., fear, anger, intolerance, resentment, erasure, or discomfort) that one may have towards members of LGBTQ community. The term can also connote a fear, disgust, or dislike of being perceived as LGBTQ. The term is extended to bisexual and transgender people as well; however, the terms biphobia and transphobia are used to emphasize the specific biases against individuals of bisexual and transgender communities.

- May be experienced inwardly as an individual begins to question their own sexuality

**Homosexual** - (adj) a [medical] term used to describe a person primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the same sex/gender. This term is considered stigmatizing due to its history as a category of mental illness, and is discouraged for common use (use gay or lesbian instead).

- Until 1973 “Homosexuality” was classified as a mental disorder in the DSM Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. This is just one of the reasons that there are such heavy negative and clinical connotations with this term.
- There was a study done prior to DADT (Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell) being revoked about peoples’ feelings towards open queer service members. When asked, “How do you feel about open gay and lesbian service members,” there was about 65% support (at the time).” When the question was changed to, “How do you feel about open homosexual service members,” the same demographic of people being asked - support drops over 20%. There are different connotations to the word homosexual then there are to gay/lesbian individuals that is powerful and salient both to straight and queer people.

**Intersex** - (adj) someone whose combination of chromosomes, gonads, hormones, internal sex organs, and genitals differs from the two expected patterns of male or female. In the medical care of infants the initialism DSD (“Differing/Disorders of Sex Development”). Formerly known as **hermaphrodite** (or hermaphroditic), but these terms are now considered outdated and derogatory.

- Often seen as a problematic condition when babies or young children are identified as intersex, it was for a long term considered an “emergency” and something that doctors moved to “fix” right away in a newborn child. There has been increasing advocacy and awareness brought to this issue and many individuals advocate that intersex individuals should be allowed to remain intersex past infancy and to not treat the condition as an issue or medical emergency.

**Lesbian** - (noun/adj) a term used to describe females/women-identified people attracted romantically, erotically, and/or emotionally to other females/women -identified people.

- The term lesbian is derived from the name of the Greek island of Lesbos and as such is sometimes considered a Eurocentric category that does not necessarily represent the identities of Black women and other non-European ethnic groups.
- Many individual women from diverse ethnic groups, including Black women, embrace the term “lesbian” as an identity label.
- While many women use the term lesbian, many women also will describe themselves as gay, this is a personal choice. Many prefer the term gay because of its use in adjective form.

**LGBTQ / GSM / DSG / + -** (adj) initialisms used as shorthand or umbrella terms for all folks who have a non-normative (or queer) gender or sexuality, there are many different initialisms people prefer. **LGBTQ** is Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender and Queer and/or Questioning (sometimes people at a + at the end in an effort to be more inclusive); **GSM** is Gender and Sexual Minorities; **DSG** is Diverse Genders and Sexualities. Other popular options include the initialism GLBT and the acronym QUILTBAG (Queer [or Questioning] Undecided Intersex Lesbian Trans\* Bisexual Asexual [or Allied] and Gay [or Genderqueer]).

- There is no “correct” initialism or acronym -- what is preferred varies by person, region, and over time
- The efforts to represent more and more identities led to some folks describing the ever-lengthening initialism as “Alphabet Soup,” which was part of the impetus for GSM and DSG

**Lipstick Lesbian** - (noun) Usually refers to a lesbian with a feminine gender expression. Can be used in a positive or a derogatory way. Is sometimes also used to refer to a lesbian who is assumed to be (or passes for) straight.

**Metrosexual** - (noun & adj) a man with a strong aesthetic sense who spends more time, energy, or money on his appearance and grooming than is considered gender normative.

**Masculine of Center** - (adj) a word that indicates a range personal understanding both in terms of gender identity and gender presentation of lesbian/queer women who present, understand themselves, relate to others in a more masculine way. These individuals may also often identify as butch, stud, aggressive, boi, trans-masculine among other identities.

**MSM / WSW** - (noun) initialisms for “men who have sex with men” and “women who have sex with women,” to distinguish sexual behaviors from sexual identities (e.g., because a man is straight, it doesn’t mean he’s not having sex with men). Often used in the field of HIV/Aids education, prevention, and treatment.

**Mx.** - (typically pronounced mix) is a title (e.g. Mr., Ms., etc.) that is gender neutral. It is often the option of choice for folks who do not identify within the cisgender binary.

**Outing** - (verb) involuntary or unwanted disclosure of another person’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or intersex status.

**Pansexual** - (adj) a person who experiences sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction for members of all gender identities/expressions

- sometimes shortened to pan



**Passing** - (verb) (1) a term for trans\* people being accepted as, or able to “pass for,” a member of their self-identified gender/sex identity (regardless of birth sex) without being identified as trans\*. (2) An LGB/queer individual who is believed to be or perceived as straight.

- Passing is a controversial term because it often is focusing on the person who is observing or interacting with the individual who is “passing” and puts the power/authority in observer rather than giving agency to the individual
- While some people are looking to “pass” or perhaps more accurately be accepted for the identity that they feel most aligns with who they are “passing” is not always a positive experience
- Some individuals experience a sense of erasure or a feeling of being invisible to their own community when they are perceived to be part of the dominant group.

**Polyamory/Polyamorous**- (noun/adj) refers to the practice of, desire to, or orientation towards having ethically, honest, consensually non-monogamous relationships (i.e. relationships that may include multiple partners). This may include open relationships, polyfidelity (which involves more than two people being in romantic and/or sexual relationships which is not open to additional partners), amongst many other set ups. Some poly(amorous) people have a “primary” relationship or relationship(s) and then “secondary” relationship(s) which may indicate different allocations of resources, time, or priority.

**Questioning** - (verb ; adjective) - exploring one’s own sexual orientation or gender identity; or an individual who is exploring their own sexual orientation and gender identity.

**Queer** - (adj) used as an umbrella term to describe individuals who don’t identify as straight. Also used to describe people who have non-normative gender identity or as a political affiliation. Due to its historical use as a derogatory term, it is not embraced or used by all members of the LGBTQ community. The term queer can often be use interchangeably with LGBTQ.

- If a person tells you they are not comfortable with you referring to them as queer, don’t. Always respect individual’s preferences when it comes to identity labels, particularly contentious ones (or ones with troubled histories) like this.
- Use the word queer only if you are comfortable explaining to others what it means, because some people feel uncomfortable with the word, it is best to know/feel comfortable explaining why you choose to use it if someone inquires.

**Romantic Attraction** - (noun) an affinity for someone that evokes the want to engage in relational intimate behavior (e.g., flirting, dating, marriage), experienced in varying degrees (from little-to-non, to intense). Often conflated with **sexual attraction** or **emotional/spiritual attraction**.

**Same Gender Loving / SGL** - (adj) a term sometimes used by members of the African-American / Black community to express an alternative sexual orientation without relying on terms and symbols of European descent.

**Sexual Attraction** - (noun) an affinity for someone that evokes the want to engage in physical intimate behavior (e.g., kissing, touching, intercourse), experienced in varying degrees (from little-to-non, to intense). Often conflated with **romantic attraction** or **emotional/spiritual attraction**.

**Sexual Orientation** - (noun) the type of **sexual, romantic, emotional/spiritual attraction** one feels for others, often labeled based on the gender relationship between the person and the people they are attracted to (often mistakenly referred to as sexual preference)

**Sexual Preference** - (1) the types of sexual intercourse, stimulation, and gratification one likes to receive and participate in. (2) Generally when this term is used, it is being mistakenly interchanged with “sexual orientation,” creating an illusion that one has a choice (or “preference”) in who they are attracted to

**Sex Reassignment Surgery / SRS** - A term used by some medical professionals to refer to a group of surgical options that alter a person’s biological sex. “**Gender confirmation surgery**” is considered by many to be a more affirming term. In most cases, one or multiple surgeries are required to achieve legal recognition of gender variance. Some refer to different surgical procedures as “top” surgery and “bottom” surgery to discuss what type of surgery they are having without having to be more explicit.

**Skoliosexual** - (adj) attracted to genderqueer and transsexual people and expressions (people who don’t identify as cisgender)

**Stud** - (noun) an term most commonly used to indicate a Black/African-American and/or Latina masculine lesbian/queer woman. Also known as ‘butch’ or ‘aggressive’.

**Third Gender** - (noun) a term for a person who does not identify with either man or woman, but identifies with another gender. This gender category is used by societies that recognise three or more genders, both contemporary and historic, and is also a conceptual term meaning different things to different people who use it, as a way to move beyond the gender binary.

**Top Surgery** - (noun) this term refers to surgery for the construction of a male-type chest or breast augmentation for a female-type chest.

**Trans\*/Transgender** - (adj) (1) An umbrella term covering a range of identities that transgress socially defined gender norms. Trans with an \* is often used to indicate that you are referring to the larger group nature of the term. (2) A person who lives as a member of a gender other than that expected based on assigned sex at birth.

- Because sexuality labels (e.g., gay, straight, bi) are generally based on the relationship between the person’s gender and the genders they are attracted to, trans\* sexuality can be defined in a couple of ways. Some people may choose to self-identify as straight, gay, bi, lesbian, or pansexual (or others, using their gender identity as a basis), or they might describe their sexuality using other-focused terms like gynosexual, androsexual, or skoliosexual

**Transition(ing)** - (noun & verb) this term is primarily used to refer to the process a trans\* person undergoes when changing their bodily appearance either to be more congruent with the gender/sex they feel themselves to be and/or to be in harmony with their preferred gender expression.

**Transman ; Transwoman** - (noun) An identity label sometimes adopted by female-to-male transgender people or transsexuals to signify that they are men while still affirming their history as assigned female sex at birth. (sometimes referred to as transguy) (2) Identity label sometimes adopted by male-to-female

transsexuals or transgender people to signify that they are women while still affirming their history as assigned male sex at birth.

**Transphobia** - (noun) the fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of trans\* people, the trans\* community, or gender ambiguity. Transphobia can be seen within the queer community, as well as in general society.

**Transsexual** - (noun & adj) a person who identifies psychologically as a gender/sex other than the one to which they were assigned at birth. Transsexuals often wish to transform their bodies hormonally and surgically to match their inner sense of gender/sex.

**Transvestite** - (noun) a person who dresses as the binary opposite gender expression (“cross-dresses”) for any one of many reasons, including relaxation, fun, and sexual gratification (often called a “cross-dresser,” and should not be confused with transsexual)

**Two-Spirit** - (noun) is an umbrella term traditionally used by Native American people to recognize individuals who possess qualities or fulfill roles of both genders

**Ze / Hir** - alternate pronouns that are gender neutral and preferred by some trans\* people. Pronounced /zee/ and /here/ they replace “he” and “she” and “his” and “hers” respectively. Alternatively some people who are not comfortable/do not embrace he/she use the plural pronoun “they/their” as a gender neutral singular pronoun.