LGBTQ+ Lexicon

Introduction

There are many specific words and language concepts that are used to communicate with LGBTQ+ people. All language evolves over time, and the use of new words to describe and define the LGBTQ+ community continues to expand. In fact, this is part of the reason we need the '+' at the end of the 'LGBTQ+' acronym.

This lexicon is a snapshot of the current language used by the community, including definitions, background and guidance for usage. Some of the words we discuss have only emerged in the last two years, and likewise two years from now we expect there will be more new terms.

If someone uses a term you don't understand, you can always ask respectfully for an explanation. Don't worry about memorizing the words, but try to understand why there are so many. The human experience of gender identity and sexuality is very personal, and capturing or expressing the nuance of someone's experience often requires new words. We've tried to capture that nuance in our definitions.

History of LGBTQ+ language

The language used to define and describe the LGBTQ+ community began as a combination of medical terms and slurs. Going back to the beginning of the century, technical terms like 'homosexual' were used in official capacities, while pejorative words like 'faggot', 'dyke', 'queer' and 'queen' were used more commonly in popular culture.

As we entered the 1960s and 1970s, homosexuality was widely removed from the list of mental disorders, and gay people became slightly more visible and accepted. Words like 'gay' and 'lesbian' became more commonplace. As the community gained political and financial traction, it became more alluring to marketers and companies, and so the language continued to change as marketers searched for new ways to reach the community. This is how the acronym LGBT came to be.

The last two decades have brought about marriage equality and broader rights for people of diverse genders and sexual orientations. With those rights (and the growth in the use of the internet) came the expansion of self-identification. The word 'queer' was reclaimed from being a derogatory slur and turned into a proud label used by younger generations. Likewise, 'LGBT' soon became 'LGBTQ', which in turn evolved into 'LGBTQ+'. This is a short way of expressing the expanding group of allied identities that today would take up 19 characters: 'LGBTTQQIAA2SNBGNCPK'.

Gender-inclusive language

Gendered languages pose a unique problem for addressing and interacting with non-binary people, who don't identify as male or female. In some languages, inclusive language sometimes requires simple substitution. In English, we can say 'good morning, everyone' instead of 'good morning, ladies and gentlemen'. We can use the singular 'they' pronoun instead of 'he' or 'she'. Meanwhile, in Spanish, some people are replacing the '-a' and '-o' gendered suffixes with '-e' or '-x', so 'latina' and 'latino' become 'latinx' while 'amigas' and 'amigos' become 'amiges'. This evolution is very much of the moment, and best practices and usage standards are still evolving.

Generational differences in usage

Different generations respond differently to different words. Some words, like 'queer', remain slurs in the minds of older generations but are proudly used by younger people. For some older transgender people, a phrase like 'sex change' is normal because they came of age during an

era where sensitivities around those words weren't as developed. For younger generations, the term 'sex change' has been more thoughtfully reconsidered, and they call it 'gender-confirmation surgery' instead.

All marginalized groups have dealt with evolving language and generations of people who interpret that language in different ways. What was a slur to one generation might be a badge of honor for another. Understanding how and why these generations differ can enrich our understanding of how and why the community uses the language it does today. Remember that all language is fluid and not everyone agrees on what is preferred and what is offensive.

Contextual differences in usage

Context is key when engaging with LGBTQ+ language. How you address someone in a marketing campaign will differ from how you address them on social media or in person.

Marketing campaigns must feel authentic while being true to the values of the company. Just because younger generations of LGBTQ+ people use the term 'queer' doesn't mean a large company will also adopt it. The most appropriate approach for a professional environment is to use language that is safe, respectful and authentic.

On social media, brands can have their ambassadors – LGBTQ+ people with lived experiences – reach out to the market, and those interactions should be far less measured. Allowing queer people to be themselves on social channels means using words that can only be appropriately used by people within the community.

When it comes to in-person interactions, following your guests' lead on language is the key. If they refer to themselves as 'queer', you can too, assuming it feels right to you. If they introduce their partner as their 'spouse', say 'spouse' back. Each medium will have its own contextual rules, and understanding those rules is important for knowing when and how to use appropriate language.

LGBTQ+ lexicon

This list includes terms that define, describe and sometimes demean LGBTQ+ people. They are grouped into these categories:

- **Sexual orientation terms**
  These are terms that describe or pertain to a person's sexual orientation – who they love and who they engage in intimate relationships with.

- **Gender terms**
  These are terms that describe or pertain to someone's gender – who they are and how they present themselves to the world based on biological traits and societal norms that differentiate male and female.

- **Adjacent terms**
  These are terms that are associated with LGBTQ+ people, but which don't necessarily correspond to or inform gender or sexuality.

- **Community terms**
  These are labels that people within the LGBTQ+ community give themselves to define their sub-community or their position within the broader community.

- **Derogatory terms**
  Many of these terms are sometimes used between friends within the community, but almost always insulting if used by someone outside it.

- **Reclaimed terms**
  These are terms once deemed derogatory that have been proudly reclaimed by the LGBTQ+ community. It is okay to use these words in response to someone who has used it with you.

Sexual orientation terms	
English terms	**English definitions**
Sexual orientation	These are words that describe or pertain to people's sexual orientation – who they love and who they engage in intimate relationships with.
Gay	A person who experiences romantic and/or sexual attraction to people of the same gender, and defines their sexuality in that attraction. Usually refers to men, but some women also identify as gay.
Gay (male)	A man who experiences romantic and/or sexual attraction to people of the same gender, and defines his sexuality in that attraction.
Lesbian	A woman who experiences romantic and/or sexual attraction to people of the same gender, and defines her sexuality in that attraction.
Bisexual	A person who experiences romantic and/or sexual attraction to people of the same and opposite gender, and defines their sexuality in that attraction.
Homosexual	This term referring to gay and/or lesbian people carries some stigma, from its history in describing same-sex attraction as a mental illness. Use 'gay' and/or 'lesbian' when referring to people, and use 'same-sex' when referring to attraction.
Pansexual	A person who experiences romantic and/or sexual attraction to adult people of all gender identities/expressions. Often shortened to 'pan'.
Demisexual	A person who experiences sexual attraction only in the context of a strong romantic emotional connection.
Asexual	A person who experiences little or no sexual attraction to others, and/or a lack of interest in sexual relationships/behavior. Sometimes shortened to 'ace'.
Same-sex couple	Two people of the same gender in a romantic or sexual relationship.
Same-sex marriage/marriage equality	These terms are used to describe marriage between two people of the same gender. This is preferable to 'gay marriage', which can imply a lower status to 'marriage'.
Heterosexual/straight	People who experience romantic and/or sexual attraction exlusively or primarily with people of the opposite gender on the male-female binary.
Polygamous	People whose orientation includes a foundational desire for or orientation toward consensual non-monogamous relationships, which may include multiple partners. Often shortened to 'poly'.
Kink/fetish	Non-conventional sexual practices, concepts or fantasies. 'Kink' is increasingly used as an orientation, as the practice often defines the identity of members of the community.
Top/active	A person who takes a more dominant role during sexual interactions. Often refers to the position assumed in insertive sex, but can be used to describe the position in any sexual practice.
Bottom/passive	A person who takes a more submissive role during sexual interactions. Often refers to the position assumed in insertive sex, but can be used to describe the position in any sexual practice.
Vers/switch	A person who enjoys both dominant and submissive roles during sexual interaction. 'Versatile' ('vers') is common in the gay community, while 'switch' is common in the lesbian community.
Side	A person who prefers sexual interaction without penetration (non-penetrative sex).

Gender terms	
English terms	**English definitions**
Gender identity	These are words that describe or pertain to someone's gender – who they are and how they present themselves to the world based on biological traits and societal norms that differentiate male and female.
Transgender	Someone whose gender identity does not correspond to the gender they were assigned as birth. Transgender people are transgender, irrespective of where they might be in their transition.
Cisgender	Someone whose gender identity matches the gender they were assigned at birth. It is the inverse of 'transgender', indicating that a person is not transgender. Often shortened to 'cis', and sometimes combined with a gender, as in 'cis-male' or 'cis-female'.
Intersex	A collection of physical (including hormonal and chromosomal) traits that differ naturally from the expected patterns of male or female. Intersex people are born with or develop at puberty some combination of typically male and typically female sex characteristics. The existence of intersex traits (estimated to include 1.7% of the human population) makes it impossible to scientifically declare all humans as either male or female. Historicaly, intersex people have been called 'hermaphrodites' (or 'hermaphroditic'), outdated names that are now derogatory.
Hermaphrodite	An outdated term previously used to refer to people born with some combination of typically male and typically female sex characteristics. Now considered derogatory, with 'intersex' the preferred term.
Third-gender	People who identify with a gender other than male or female. It means different things to different people, and it is used mostly by contemporary and historic societies that recognise three or more genders.
Two-spirit	People who possess qualities or fulfill roles of both feminine and masculine genders. It is used mostly within Native American communities.
Gender binary	The culturally common but biologically incorrect idea that gender exists solely as either male or female.
Non-binary	A person who does not identify with the binary choice of male or female, and experiences their gender as neither, as both or as some combination of the two.
Gender non-conforming	People whose gender expression doesn't conform to what their society expects of a male or female person. It can be used as a descriptor of gender or adopted as a gender identity label by a person who identifies outside of the gender binary. Often abbreviated as 'GNC'.
Gender fluid	As a gender identity, this label is used by people whose sense of self in relation to gender changes over time. That length of time can vary. As an adjective, it describes a society's or an indvidual's ever-changing (hence 'fluid') relation to gender, in the ways society categorizes gender expression or the ways we express it individually.
Pangender	Pangender is a non-binary gender defined as being more than one gender. A pangender person may consider themselves a member of all genders.
Gender queer	A person who does not subscribe to conventional gender distinctions but identifies with neither, with both or with a combination of male and female genders.

Gender terms	
English terms	**English definitions**
Gender identity	A person's perception of having a particular gender, which may or may not correspond with their birth sex.
Gender expression	The way in which a person expresses their gender identity, typically through their appearance, dress, manerisms and behavior.
Hormone therapy	The use of hormones in medical treatment, often involving testosterone and estrogen, to normalize/restore hormone levels for their gender identity.
Gender confirmation surgery	Surgical procedures by which a transgender person's physical appearance and the function of their existing sexual characteristics are altered to resemble those socially associated with their gender identity.
Sex change	An outdated term that described the combination of gender confirmation surgery and hormone therapy used by transgender people to alter their physical appearance to match their gender identity.
Gender reassignment	An outdated term that has been replaced by 'gender confirmation'. The new term acknowledges that someone's gender identity isn't changing, but that their physical appearance is being changed to match their identity.
Top surgery	Surgery performed on the chest as part of gender confirmation, especially to remove breast tissue and produce a masculine appearance of the chest in female-to-male surgery.
Bottom surgery	Surgery performed on a person's genitals as part of gender confirmation surgery.
Pre-op	Refers to a person planning on having gender confirmation surgery.
Gender marker	The character on a birth certificate, ID or passport that shows someone's biological sex. Previously limited to M (male) and F (female), official recognition has been given by many governments and businesses to X (unspecified) or U (undisclosed).
FTM/F2M	A transgender person who transitioned or is transitioning from female to male.
MTF/M2F	A transgender person who transitioned or is transitioning from male to female.
Transfeminine	A person assigned a male sex at birth who identifies as feminine, but who may not identify wholly as a woman.
Transmasculine	A person assigned a female sex at birth and who identifies as masculine, but who may not identify wholly as a man.
Effeminate	Having or showing characteristics regarded as typical of a woman; unmanly.
Manly	Having or showing characteristcs regarded as typical of a man.
Biological sex	The structural and functional characteristics of a person – genes, hormones and sexual anatomy – that differ by gender and determine whether an individual is male, female or intersex.
Gender diversity	Although used in business to indicate a balance of male and female employees, in the LGBTQ+ community this embodies the concept that gender is more than just male and female, acknowdging the existence of non-binary people.
Agender	A person who doesn't identify as any particular gender.

Gender terms	
English terms	**English definitions**
Androgynous	A person with a gender expression that is both masculine and feminine or in between masculine and feminine.
Mx.	A gender-inclusive honorific that can be used in place of 'Mr.' or 'Ms.'
Dead name	The birth name of someone who has changed to a new name, especially used in the LGBTQ+ community by people who are transgender and elect to go by their chosen name instead of their given name.
Stealth	Transgender people who, after beginning their transition and living as their preferred genders, do not readily tell others about their birth-assigned genders.
Ze/zir/xe/xer	Gender-neutral pronouns used by some genderfluid, gender queer, transgender and non-binary people instead of 'he' or 'she'.

Adjacent terms	
English terms	**English definitions**
Adjacent terms	These are terms that are associated with LGBTQ+ people, but which don't necessarily correspond to or inform gender or sexuality.
Cross-dresser	People who wear clothes, accessories and makeup associated with the opposite sex. Most often heterosexual men who engage in gender expression that is not for entertainment.
Transvestite	An outdated term for people who wear clothes, accessories and makeup associated with the opposite sex. It has been replaced with the more specific and respectful 'cross-dresser', 'drag queen' and 'drag king'.
Drag queen	Men who dress like women and personify female stereotypes for entertainment purposes. A very popular archetype that has moved from the gay community into mainstream.
Drag king	Women who dress like men and personify male stereotypes for entertainment purposes.
Closeted	LGBTQ+ people who have not disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity and aspects of them including sexual identity and sexual behavior. When these people do disclose their orienation or identity, the process is called 'coming out of the closet' or just 'coming out.'.
Coming out	When a closeted LGBTQ+ person discloses their sexual orientation or gender identity to someone. LGBTQ+ people often struggle with coming out and have to do it repeatedly, to friends, families, coworkers and new acquaintences. A person who has broadly disclosed their sexual orienation or gender identity is said to be 'out'.
Butch	A person who identifies as masculine, whether it be physically, mentally or emotionally. In the lesbian community, 'butch' and 'femme' are often adopted as identities. In the gay community, they are more often just descriptors.
Femme	A person who identifies as feminine, whether it be physically, mentally or emotionally. In the lesbian community, 'butch' and 'femme' are often adopted as identities. In the gay community, they are more often just descriptors. 'Femme' is sometimes used in a derogatory way against gay men.

Adjacent terms	
English terms	**English definitions**
Heteronormative	The commonly held perspective that heterosexuality is the normal, preferred and default sexuality of individuals within a society.
SOGI	An acronym for 'sexual orientation/gender identity' that is popular in academic circles as a way to describe the LGBTQ+ community.
Homophobia	The fear, hatred, discomfort with or mistrust of people who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual.
Questioning	Someone figuring out their gender identity and figuring out how they want to identify their sexual orientation.
Ally	A person who supports equal civil rights, gender equality and LGBTQ+ social movements, and who challenges homophobia and transphobia. Most commonly, this label is given to a heterosexual, cis-gendered person who is not a member of the LGBTQ+ community themselves, but members of the community can also be allies to other segments of the community. For instance, a lesbian person can be a transgender ally.
Passing	The ability of a person to be regarded as a member of an identity group or category different from their own. For queer people, passing for a cis-gendered, straight person may result in greater safety, privileges, rewards or acceptance.
HIV/HIV-positive	Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) causes the disease acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), which interferes with the body's ability to fight infections. Untreated, HIV infection is almost always fatal, but HIV-positive (or HIV+) people who take anti-viral drugs are generally able to reduce the virus to a level where it poses minimal health risks to themselves and zero risk of transmission to others.
Poz	Short expression for someone who is HIV-positive. It is used by the community and individuals to refer to themselves and has a powerful, non-derrogatory undertone.
PrEP	Pre-exposure prophylaxis is a medication regimen given to high-risk people who do not have HIV. They regularly take a pill to reduce their risk of HIV infection.
PEP	Post-exposure prophylaxis is a medication regimen given to HIV-negative people who have been exposed to HIV within the previous 72 hours, in order to prevent the virus from replicating into an infection.
Undetectable	An HIV-positive person whose medication is working effectively and who therefore has no detectable virus in their blood. People who are HIV-positive and undetectable cannot transmit HIV to another person.

Community terms	
English terms	**English definitions**
Community terms	These are labels that people within the LGBTQ+ community give themselves to define their sub-community or their position within the broader community.
Bear	A large, hairier man who projects an image of rugged masculinity and cuddliness.

Twink	A young man in his late teens to early twenties whose traits may include general physical attractiveness, little to no body or facial hair, a slim to average build and a youthful appearance that may conceal an older chronological age.
Daddy	An attractive man of an older age.
Leather	A blanket term for a large array of sexual preferences, identities, relationship structures and social organizations loosely tied together by the thread of what is conventionally understood as sadomasochistic sex.
Lipstick	A lesbian person who exhibits a greater amount of feminine gender.

Derogatory terms	
English terms	**English definitions**
Derogatory terms	Many of these terms are sometimes used between friends within the community, but almost always insulting if used by someone outside it.
Fairy	Derogatory term referring to someone perceived as non-heteronormative. Sometimes adopted affirmatively by gay men to refer to themselves.
Homo	Derogatory term referring to a gay man.
Tranny	Derogatory term referring to the transgender community.
Nelly	Disparaging term used for effeminate homosexuals.
Faggot	Pejorative term used chiefly in North America primarily to refer to a gay man or boy.
Queen	A term used to refer to a flamboyant or effeminate gay man. The term can be either pejorative or celebrated as a type of self-identification.
Fag hag	A woman who associates either mostly or exclusively with gay and bisexual men.
Gay	A term that in recent history has been used to dismissively show that something is dull or stupid.

Reclaimed terms	
English terms	**English definitions**
Reclaimed terms	These are terms once deemed derogatory that have been proudly reclaimed by the LGBTQ+ community. It is okay to use these words in response to someone who has used it with you.
Queer	A word used to refer to a range of sexual and gender identities besides those that are heterosexual and cis-gender. Lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people can all identify with the word 'queer'. Many older gay men are uncomfortable with this word, because it was historically used in a derogatory way. It should therefore be used with caution or even avoided, especially with older gay men.
Dyke	A word used to refer to lesbians. Originally meant to be a slur, it has been reclaimed by many lesbians, who might use it to identify themselves in relation to other lesbians. It is considered rude to use the word 'dyke' unless you self-identify as one.