

A (non)Exhaustive List of Common Terms and Identities

Lesbian

1. Noun/Adjective. An identity typically used to describe an individual who identifies as a woman, femme or feminine who experiences sexual and/or romantic attraction towards other women, femmes or feminine people.

“I’m the biggest lesbian you’ll see this side of the Mississippi.”

“She’s a lesbian woman.”

Gay

1. Adjective. An identity typically used to describe an individual who experiences same-gender sexual and/or romantic attraction. May imply participation in LGBTQ+ communities, spaces and/or cultures.

“I like women; I’m a gay women.”

2. Adjective. An umbrella term sometimes used to mean any or multiple non-straight sexual or romantic identities. Some individuals with less visible identities may use this form of the word.

“I’m just really gay.”

Bisexual/romantic

1. Noun/Adjective. An identity typically used to describe an individual who experiences sexual and/or romantic attraction to *two or more* genders.

“I like men and women; I’m a bisexual man.”

Pansexual/romantic

1. Adjective. An identity used to describe an individual who experiences sexual and/or romantic attraction to *all* genders.

“There’s no gender I’m not attracted to, and I’m pansexual.”

2. Adjective. An identity used to describe an individual who does not take gender into consideration with regards to sexual and/or romantic attraction.

“A person’s gender has nothing to do with whether or not I fall in love with them; I’m panromantic.”

Homosexual/romantic

1. Noun/Adjective. An identity used to describe an individual who experiences sexual and/or romantic attraction to individuals of the same sex*.

“I identify as a homosexual man because I like men.”

*“sex” is often used synonymously with “gender” in this context

Note: Individuals who identify as homosexual are typically men who experience attraction to men exclusively, or women who experience attraction to women exclusively, though other sex designations besides “male” and “female” and other genders besides “men” and “women” exist.

Heterosexual/romantic

1. Noun/Adjective. An identity used to describe an individual who experiences sexual and/or romantic attraction to individuals of a different sex*.

“I identify as a heterosexual man because I like men.”

*“sex” is often used synonymously with “gender” in this context

Note: Individuals who identify as heterosexual are typically men who experience attraction to women exclusively, or women who experience attraction to men exclusively, though other sex designations besides “male” and “female” and other genders besides “men” and “women” exist.

Demisexual/romantic

1. Noun/Adjective. An identity used to describe an individual who experiences sexual and/or romantic attraction only after an emotional bond is formed with a particular person or persons. Often described as part of the asexual spectrum.

“We’ve been dating for a while, but it was only after I started feeling really connected to them that I felt sexually attracted.”

Asexual/romantic

1. Noun/Adjective. An identity used to describe an individual who experiences little to no sexual and/or romantic attraction. Often described as a spectrum, with some individuals experiencing no sexual or romantic attraction in any way, and some others experiencing limited sexual or romantic attraction. Asexual people may experience a range of different attitudes and feelings about sex, from sex-repulsed to sex-neutral to sex-positive.

“I’m up for cuddling, but no sex please – I’m asexual.”

Men who have Sex with Men (MSM)*

1. Noun. A term typically used to describe men who have sex with men and *do not* identify as being gay, bisexual, pansexual, queer, etc. Said individuals may identify as straight or questioning and/or not describe their sexual encounters with men as indicating any non-straight sexuality. Typically used in more academic or clinical settings.

“Because Rick is a cisgender man and has sex with other cisgender men, I’m going to recommend he be tested for HIV.”

Men Loving Men (mlm)

1. Noun. A term and identity used to describe men who experience romantic attraction to other men, whether or not they identify as gay, bisexual, pansexual, questioning or otherwise.

“I’m looking for a community of men who love men; would you know of any local groups or clubs?”

Women who have Sex with Women (WSW)*

1. Noun. A term typically used to describe women who have sex with women and *do not* identify as being gay, bisexual, pansexual, queer, etc. Said individuals may identify as straight or questioning and/or not describe their sexual encounters with women as indicating any non-straight sexuality. Typically used in more academic or clinical settings.

[help me with an example here Inge, I’m not familiar with how this term is used today in medical professions, if at all]

Women Loving Women (wlw)

1. Noun. A term and identity used to describe women who experience romantic attraction to other women, whether or not they identify as gay, bisexual, pansexual, questioning or otherwise.

“I’m looking for a community of women who love women; would you know of any local groups or clubs?”

Non-monogamy

1. An umbrella term for all sexual and romantic practices outside of being sexually and/or romantically active with one partner at any given time. Some forms/types of non-monogamy include, but are not limited to: polyamory, open relationships, relationship anarchy and swinging.

“José and I don’t have any other partners right now, but ever since we’ve talked about non-monogamy we’ve both felt a lot better about our relationship.

Polyamory

1. A form of non-monogamy in which all partners in a given relationship are aware of and accept that their partners may desire or have additional sexual and/or romantic relationships at the same time. Types of polyamorous relationships include but are not limited to triads (three people who are all dating each other), hierarchical poly (with consented upon primary, secondary and/or tertiary partners) and polyfidelity (where no partners other than those initially in the poly relationship when established are allowed), etc.

“I’m polyamorous – I have my girlfriend and a few friends with benefits, but she’s dating at least four people!”

Queer

1. Adjective. An umbrella term used to describe all people who experience sexuality, sexual identity, intimacy, and/or gender differently from the norm (straight/heterosexual and cisgender).

“The queer community at Stanford is large.”

2. Adjective. An often-political identity indicating a resistance or non-conformity to cultural norms related to sexuality, gender and/or identity. Often has a political connotation of anti-assimilation, radical and revolutionary.

“I identify as a queer man and not a gay man because I oppose the racist, classist

and imperialist politics of the local gay community.”

3. Verb. The act of intentionally disrupting, resisting or making non-normative a space, object or idea with reference to gender and/or sexuality.

“The grumpy bigoted professor in this class seems upset that I’m queering the syllabus. Oops.”

4. Noun. A derogative slur often directed at individuals due to their perceived sexual or gender-nonconformity.

Genderqueer

1. Adjective/Noun. An identity indicating an experience of gender that is intentionally non-conforming or non-normative, often but not always connoting an identification as nonbinary, or not identifying as a man or a woman.

“My pronouns are she/her, but I don’t identify as a woman – I’m genderqueer!”

“Where are my fellow genderqueers here?”

Bigender

1. Adjective. An identity that describes people who experience or identify as two gender identities. They may experience both at once or alternate between one and the other.

“I identify as a man sometimes and as nonbinary other times; I’m bigender.”

Polygender

1. Adjective. An identity that describes people who experience many or multiple gender identities. They may experience them all at once or alternate between them.

“Sometimes I’m a man, sometimes I’m a woman, and sometimes I’m genderqueer. I identify as polygender.”

Transgender (Trans)

1. Adjective. An identity typically used to describe identifying as a gender or genders other than the one assigned at birth. Some transgender people seek to modify their gender expression and/or physical appearances through clothing, makeup, bra inserts, pads, binding, vocal therapy, hormone therapy or surgery

while some do not.

“I think I might be transgender, but I’m struggling to have people use the proper pronouns.”

Transgender man/woman

1. Noun. A transgender man is a man who was assigned a different sex (female or an intersex designation) and gender (girl) at birth.

“I’m a trans man and I’d rather not take testosterone at this point in time.”

2. Noun. A transgender woman is a woman who was assigned a different sex (male or an intersex designation) and gender (boy) at birth.

“I’m a trans woman and I don’t get a period; could you stop asking when my last one was?”

Nonbinary

1. Adjective. A gender identity that is neither man nor woman. May identify as somewhere “between” man and woman or completely outside the gender binary altogether. Nonbinary people may or may not additionally identify as transgender.

“Neither man nor woman fit me, but nonbinary is a term that I feel comfortable with.”

Genderfluid

1. Adjective. An identity typically used to describe an experience of gender that changes over time, whether over hours, days, weeks or months, etc.

“I’m genderfluid – I was a woman for a few weeks but this week I’m really feeling like a man. He/him pronouns please.”

Agender

1. Adjective. An identity used to describe no feeling of identification with any gender identity, and/or the idea of gender itself.

“I don’t feel like my sense of gender is important enough to acknowledge; I identify as agender.”

Two-spirit

1. Noun. A term adopted by the international Indigenous community to typically describe an individual who possesses both masculine and feminine essences, potentially challenging socially defined gender roles, gender expressions and sexualities.

“Colonization demonized indigenous expressions of gender, but I’m glad the elders in my life were able to teach me about two-spirit people.”

Hijra

1. Noun. An umbrella term used in many South and Southeast Asian cultures to refer to any assigned male at birth individual who experiences gender dysphoria.
2. Noun. A term used in many South and Southeast Asian cultures to refer to an assigned male at birth individual who desires or has undergone removal of the penis and scrotum and lives as a woman.
3. Noun. A term used in many South and Southeast Asian cultures to refer to assigned male at birth individuals who identify as women and undergo a formal ritual to enter a hijra community.

Kink

1. Noun. A term used to refer to any one idea or activity outside of those prescribed by normative cultural/societal standards that is perceived as sexually, sensually or intimately desirable or pleasing. Colloquially, used interchangeably with **fetish**.

“I’ve been struggling to admit this for a long time, but being tied up with rope is really my biggest kink.”

2. Noun. An umbrella term used to refer to all forms of non-normative intimacy, from activities to clothing expressions to relationship dynamics. Typically includes BDSM, polyamory, roleplay and fetishism.

“The Bay Area kink community is dispersed, but pretty large.”

BDSM

1. Noun. An acronym standing for “Bondage and Discipline,” “Dominance and Submission” and “Sadomasochism.”

“Most kinky play parties in the Bay Area are pretty BDSM-centric.”

2. Noun. An umbrella term used in kink communities to refer to all forms of non-normative intimacy practiced in the community, including those outside of the traditional acronym.

“BDSM has really been a way for me to find myself sexually.”

S&M

1. Noun. An umbrella term used in BDSM and kink communities to refer to all forms of non-normative intimacy practiced in the community. Typically used in this context by older individuals.

“I’ve been an S&M practitioner for twenty years now.”

2. Noun. Acronym for “Sadism and masochism” or “somasochism;” used specifically to talk about interactions and relationships revolving around the mutually consented upon inflicting of pain from an individual or individuals onto another or others.

“I don’t participate much in the kink community, but when I do it’s mainly for the S&M.”

Scene

1. Noun. A term used typically in BDSM and kink communities to refer to a bounded interaction where a previously consented on set of activities and dynamics plays out.

“Shane’s over there, but he’s in a scene right now – if you want to talk to him, wait a little bit first.”

Negotiation

1. Noun. A term used typically in BDSM and kink communities to refer to the conversation that often takes place before a scene, in which all parties communicate their wants and preferences for the scene – including the desired activities, power dynamics (if any), implements used and other preferences like pronouns – as well as the desired aftercare practices upon the scene’s ending.

“I’ll grab my bag so we can talk about what kind of play you want today; want to meet over here to negotiate the scene five minutes?”

Play

1. Noun. A term typically used in BDSM and kink communities, though also found in many alternative communities that may incorporate BDSM practices or sexuality, to refer to any consensual intimate activity bounded within an agreed-upon time frame, without any expectation of continuation after that time frame.

“I noticed you staring at my bondage scene earlier...would you be up for some play tonight?”

Aftercare

1. Noun. A term typically used in BDSM and kink communities, though also found in many alternative communities that may incorporate BDSM practices or sexuality, describing the practices that take place after a scene in order to debrief, check in and reflect between all parties. Common aftercare practices range from cuddling and massages to critical examination and writing, and vary from person to person.

“Yasmin’s idea of aftercare was just to go to sleep and not talk to anyone, can you believe that? But that was what she wanted, so we did just that.”

Impact play/Percussion play

1. Noun. An umbrella term typically used in BDSM and kink communities to describe any consensual activity or “play” that involves the physical striking of an individual. May be barehanded (slapping, punching, kicking) or involve the use of implements (caning, flogging, whipping, paddling). Impact play/percussion play may be a form of sadomasochism (focusing on pain) or sensation play (focusing on sensation).

“No impact play today, I’m still sore from that flogging on Tuesday!”

Bondage

1. Noun. An umbrella term typically used in BDSM and kink communities to describe any consensual activity or “play” that involves the physical restraining or limiting of mobility of an individual, using implements such as rope, leather cuffs, chains or harnesses.

“I brought my jute rope today – can we do some bondage later?”

Roleplay

1. Noun. An interaction between two or more individuals where each individual assumes a different role or character, and interacts with each other as that role or character.

“I’ll be Harry Potter and you’ll be Gandalf in this roleplay.”

2. Noun. An umbrella term typically used in BDSM and kink communities to describe all types of intimate play involving the taking on of roles, identities or personalities different from those of the participants. Includes petplay (where individuals assume the roles of pets, animals, trainers and/or handlers) and ageplay (where individuals interact as younger or older versions of themselves, or as new characters of any given age) along with other controversial types of roleplay like race play (where individuals interact as themselves, but with different racial identities). Many roleplay scenes concern particular scenarios (interrogation, abduction, assault) or interactions (teacher/student, doctor/patient, CEO/intern) that would be otherwise impossible, inconvenient or unacceptable to experience in reality.

“All of Kris’s roleplay scenes seem to involve strict law professors for some reason.”

Sensation Play

1. Noun. An umbrella term typically used in BDSM and kink communities to describe all types of intimate play involving physical touch or sensation as the focal activity. Types of sensation play include but are not limited to temperature play (using ice cubes, hot wax or other objects with extreme temperatures), sensory deprivation (using earplugs, blindfolds or gloves to dull physical sensation), texture play (brushing over the skin with leather, silk, latex or other objects with unique textures) and erotic tickling.

“My partner Omid introduced me to kink through some light sensation play; it was great!”

Voyeurism

1. Noun. A term used to describe the practice or act of witnessing sexual or intimate behavior conventionally thought of private, often for the voyeuristic individual’s pleasure. In BDSM and kink communities, most parties encourage voyeurism through public play floors where party attendees can watch others as they scene.

“Voyeurs are welcome, but please stay respectful and don’t interact with or interrupt people in the middle of their scenes.”

Exhibitionism

1. Noun. A term used to describe the practice or act of displaying sexual or intimate behavior conventionally thought of private, often for the exhibitionist individual’s pleasure. In BDSM and kink communities, most parties encourage exhibitionism through public play floors where party attendees can go to scene and be watched by others.

“I love watching the exhibitionists at play parties, but I’m way too shy to play in front of all these people...”

Watersports

1. Noun. An umbrella term typically used in BDSM and kink communities to describe all types of intimate play involving urine as the focal activity. Variations of watersports include clothes wetting, urinating into a partner’s mouth or directly onto their skin or diaper play.

“Watersports are encouraged at this event, though please bring your own tarp.”

Top

1. Noun. A term used to describe the individual physically on top of the other in a sexual encounter, regardless of penetration, typically between a cisgender man and a cisgender woman.

“As a woman, guys always react strangely when I tell them I’m a top...”

2. Noun. A term used to describe the individual penetrating in a sexual encounter, typically between two men or two women. Used often in gay men and lesbian communities as a self-identity to indicate sexual preferences.

“Bohai was a top, and made sure to always have extra condoms on him.”

3. Noun. A term used in BDSM and kink communities to describe an individual giving, performing or otherwise administering whatever action has been consented on in a sexual/sensual/intimate encounter. Used often in kink communities as a self-identity to indicate preferences.

“Brun, being a rope top, enjoyed tying their partners up.”

4. Verb. The act of being physically on top, penetrating a partner or performing intimate actions as per the descriptions above.

“I love it when you top me.”

Bottom

1. Noun. A term used to describe the individual physically beneath the other in a sexual encounter, regardless of penetration, typically between a cisgender man and a cisgender woman.

“John’s bottom tonight, I’m excited.”

2. Noun. A term used to describe the individual being penetrated in a sexual encounter, typically between two men or two women. Used often in gay and lesbian communities as a self-identity to indicate sexual preferences.

“Laura was a bottom, and enjoyed being penetrated.”

3. Noun. A term used in BDSM and kink communities to describe an individual receiving whatever action has been consented on in a sexual/sensual/intimate encounter. Used often in kink communities as a self-identity to indicate preferences.

“Mohammad, being a rope bottom, enjoyed being tied up.”

4. Verb. The act of being physically under a partner, being penetrated or receiving intimate actions as per the descriptions above.

“Janette bottomed last night for the first time in our relationship, and it was unexpected!”

Versatile (Vers)

1. Noun. A term used typically in gay and lesbian communities to refer to an individual who both tops and bottoms.

“Shaun identifies as vers, though for some reason he only tops on Tuesdays.”

2. Noun. A term used typically in gay men's communities to describe a lifestyle of flexibility, equality and openness to new experiences.

“Living a versatile lifestyle is the dream, but I keep running into aggressive tops...”

Switch

1. Noun. A term used typically in non-heterosexual communities (gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, etc.) to refer to an individual who both tops and bottoms.

“Jackie is a switch; I'd ask her what she's up for instead of assuming.”

2. Noun. A term used in BDSM and kink communities to describe an individual who can both give and receive sexual/sensual/intimate activities consented on. Used often in kink communities as a self-identity to indicate preferences.

“I'm into both flogging others and being flogged; I'm a switch so maybe we can do both!”

3. Noun. A term used in BDSM and kink communities to describe an individual who can fill both power dynamic roles of dominant and submissive. Some switches in this sense of the word may prefer to switch roles within a short period of time, while others may fill one role during one interaction, and another during a different interaction.

“Despite how she's acting right now, Cassie is a switch, not a sub.”

4. Verb. The act of changing between topping and bottoming, either within an interaction or in a relationship or dynamic, or domming and subbing.

“I know we agreed that you would switch at some point tonight, but I never would have expected you to hide a flogger in your bra!”

Dominant (Dom/Domme)

1. Noun. An identity used typically in BDSM and kink communities indicating a more dominant or powerful individual/role. May be a temporary identity (i.e. restricted to a single interaction) or a stable self-identity to indicate preferences in partner selection and intimate encounters.

“It’s just really nice have a domme to order me around, y’know?”

2. Verb. A shorthand way of describing the enactment of the dominant role elaborated on above.

“You sure you have the energy to dom tonight?”

Submissive (Sub)

1. Noun. An identity used typically in BDSM and kink communities indicating a more submissive or less powerful individual/role. May be a temporary identity (i.e. restricted to a single interaction) or a stable self-identity to indicate preferences in partner selection and intimate encounters.

“Being a submissive isn’t as easy as you’d think; it takes a lot of self-awareness to give up autonomy and power, even temporarily!”

2. Verb. A shorthand way of describing the enactment of the submissive role elaborated on above.!

“You’ve got to see this, Alicia is subbing right now!”

D/s (Dominant/submissive)

1. Adjective. A term typically used in BDSM and kink communities to describe a relationship, dynamic or interaction involving a dominant and a submissive, or themes of dominance and submission.

“Anisha and Baixue’s D/s dynamic is mesmerizing to witness.”

Power Dynamic

1. Noun. A term typically used in BDSM and kink communities, though also found in many alternative communities that may incorporate BDSM practices or sexuality, to describe a *consensual* dynamic between usually two people where one individual has more power than the other.

“While we both are fully competent, self-sufficient adults in the workplace, I really enjoy the power dynamic we’ve agreed on in the bedroom.”

2. Noun. A term used across a variety of communities to denote any dynamic, consensual or not, where any individual or individuals have more power than another or others.

“Though Bea and Luke wanted an egalitarian relationship, Bea found that dating a rich, powerful cisgender white man resulted in a power dynamic that needed a lot of time to work through.”

Sadist

1. Noun. A term used generally to refer to any individual who enjoys hurting or inflicting pain onto other people.

“I swear, from the last three assignments in this class this professor must be a sadist.”

2. Noun. A term and identity typically used in BDSM and kink communities to describe an individual who enjoys the *consensual* hurting or inflicting of pain onto others, whether in the context of a single interaction or in a relationship or dynamic. Often a stable self-identity used to indicate preferences in partner selection and intimate encounters.

“Sam’s a sadist; check out how many whips they have in their bag!”

Masochist

1. Noun. A term used generally to refer to any individual who enjoys being hurt or having pain inflicted onto them.

“I swear, from how much Andy enjoyed these last three assignments he must be a masochist.”

2. Noun. A term and identity typically used in BDSM and kink communities to describe an individual who enjoys being *consensually* hurt or having pain inflicted onto them, whether in the context of a single interaction or in a relationship or dynamic. Often a stable self-identity used to indicate preferences in partner selection and intimate encounters.

“Anastasia’s been getting paddled for two hours now, I’m seriously impressed at how much a masochist she is.”

Subspace

1. Noun. A term typically used in BDSM and kink communities to describe an altered state experienced mostly by bottoms and submissives. While description of this state varies from person to person, it is generally understood to result from

a physically or emotionally intense interaction, and be a state in which pain tolerance is increased and both ability to communicate and self-awareness are impaired. While subspace can happen involuntarily, many view scenes that intentionally induce subspace as riskier, and thus falling into the category of “edgeplay.”

“Going into subspace the first time was scary, but since then I’ve really grown to like how thrilling it is!”

Topspace

1. Noun. A term typically used in BDSM and kink communities to describe an altered state experienced mostly by tops and dominants. While description of this state varies from person to person, it is generally understood to result from a physically or emotionally intense interaction, and be a state in which endurance is increased and both ability to communicate and self-awareness are impaired. While topspace can happen involuntarily, many view scenes that intentionally induce topspace as riskier, and thus falling into the category of “edgeplay.”

“I went into topspace by accident and pushed my partner a little too far, so we’re having a long conversation about it.”

Subdrop

1. Noun. A term typically used in BDSM and kink communities to describe a phenomenon that sometimes occurs (minutes, hours or even days) after a scene where those who bottomed or subbed during the scene experience an emotional drop. This may result from a particularly intense scene that was abruptly stopped, guilt or confusion related to the content of the scene, the feeling of loss that accompanies separation after an intense or highly connective scene, or from any number of other reasons.

“I gave my number to Andrea in case she experiences subdrop; I want her to be able to reach out to me if needed.”

Topdrop

1. Noun. A term typically used in BDSM and kink communities to describe a phenomenon that sometimes occurs (minutes, hours or even days) after a scene where those who topped or dommed during the scene experience an emotional drop. This may result from a particularly intense scene that was abruptly stopped,

guilt or confusion related to the content of the scene, the feeling of loss that accompanies separation after an intense or highly connective scene, or from any number of other reasons.

“I think it’s frustrating that the kink community doesn’t seem to be aware of topdrop as it is of subdrop.”