

What would you like to say?

My main concern about using alternate role terms (eg. Larks/Ravens) is it being confusing to new dancers to have different role names at different dances. Having been there myself, it is challenging enough to be learning the various figures, especially with nuances many people use, along with learning to swing. Even as an experienced dancer, I'm more wary of switching roles with L/R, since it's easier for me to relate to being a lady in a role than remembering I'm now a raven instead of a lark. Maybe for now, it would make sense to limit alternate role terms to advanced dances, which have no new dancers workshop and few if any new dancers. Regular dances will begin to dwindle and eventually die unless we make it easy and welcoming for new dancers to want to continue contra dancing.

Thank you for your consideration .

Having participated in a lot of dances for the past few years that used the Larks/Ravens terminology, I've concluded that it impairs the ability of many (most?) dancers to participate in the dance. I understand what the intention was in adopting the terms, but I just don't think they're working. It's gotten to the point where I hear experienced dancers saying, "If I'd known these terms were going to be used, I wouldn't have come."

My conclusion is that we've conducted an experiment, and we've found some things out from it. At this point, if we're going to continue the experiment we should adjust the parameters in response to dancer feedback. Better yet, we should just suspend the experiment until we can figure out a better way to proceed. The goal of inclusivity is admirable, but the chosen method may be excluding more than it's including.

I may or may not be at the discussion, so I thought I'd add my thoughts. I'm a proponent of using larks/ravens for gender-free calling. I have heard the thoughts from so many young dancers, especially young LGBTQ dancers, on how they feel more safe and welcoming at dances that have gender-free role terms. I think that is important if you want to attract more dancing youth, as a lot of them live their lives gender-free and feel that gender-free terms speaks more to them.

I also believe that if we don't use gender-free terms, then we at least should promote people dancing both roles, not misgendering people on the dance floor, not assuming that people want to dance a specific gendered role, and not making disrespectful comments when folks encounter a person of a different gender you are expecting in a certain role. I've danced the lady/raven role enough times to hear my fill of such comments, and one male person outright refused to swing me during a dance when I was in such a role.

These are elements of dance safety and inclusiveness. People often say that they are very inclusive, but if people aren't feeling safe and included in the dance, then it's inherent on the community to look into that and discuss what makes a dance feel safe and welcoming to marginalized people. Especially important if you want to attract a young crowd to the dance and keep the dance going several more generations.

That said, I also understand that there are lot of people who simply don't like the gender-free terms. I wish they would understand why some people prefer gender-free terms. But if our community decides to keep the gendered terms, I'd like them to at least try to be more respectful of dancers who like to dance both roles or a role that isn't the same as their gender presentation.

I strongly support gender-neutral calling. I think that calling 'ladies and gents', 'women and men' encourages dancers to think of the roles as corresponding to those genders, which means that they make snide and sarcastic comments when I dance the role that doesn't conform to the gender people think I am. It also encourages dancers to make dancing sexual (specifically heterosexual), which is a huge problem for me.

At the same time, I don't think that changing the dance to non-gendered calling is going to make the Sunday Night dance more welcoming unless and until the dancers there recognize and reckon with their own cissexism, misogyny, homophobia, and sexual attitudes. Every time I go to the Sunday Night dance, I'm hit with intolerable comments about the gender nonconformity of what I'm wearing, I'm sexually harassed with uncomfortable come-ons, I'm shunned and am unable to find a partner, and I'm shifted into the place that the dancers think I should be, even though I've been dancing for almost ten years.

The Sunday night dance is a profoundly alienating experience, and honestly, I think the people who are regulars at the dance like it that way. The dance is to their liking -- a sexualized, heteronormative, misogynistic atmosphere that caters to middle-class white people in their 60s or older. I don't fit, and while it'd be nice for the dance to shift to non-gendered calling, the dance doesn't stand a chance of actually making any change until they recognize that they have created a space that is exclusive to people who aren't like them. And that seems to be fine with the dancers who dance there.

I do not like larks and ravens, but am not opposed to gender free dances as long as they are advertised as such so everyone is free to make their choice. I think Andrea Nettleton's positional calling is a better way to go for gender free. I like the gypsy call and have no issue with the word, not being convinced that it's harmful to anyone.

I think Steve Gester's FB post (at <https://www.facebook.com/events/393113864876567/permalink/393179324870021/>) sums up my thinking extremely well so I'll quote him here: "It's challenging enough for new dancers to learn figures and how to swing, without having to deal with different terms for what role they are dancing. Think L/R should be only used for advanced dances where there are few if any new dancers to confuse."

I agree it's important to make the dances as welcoming as possible to everyone. In addition to those who don't identify as ladies or gents, "everyone" includes the many people trying contra dancing for the very first time who do so identify. I don't know how to make both those groups feel as welcome as possible at the same time so I suggest compromising by using "ladies/gents" every other week alternating with "lark/ravens" every other week (or use each twice/month or so).

I think that it is imperative that Glen Echo uses gender neutral language in its calling. I have attended many dances in Vermont that use this language to great success; people dance with all kinds of other different people, have fun, and as a dancer who identifies as female, I have felt more comfortable trying both roles. Frankly, these word changes represent the values that the contra dance community wants to uphold and if prioritizing openness and inclusion over rigidity and tradition means that some dancers who are clinging on to gendered terms feel uncomfortable, that's their problem.

Social dancing means inclusion is a critical part. Any terms need to be fair and non-objectifying and as inclusive as reasonably possible!

The larks/ravens terms can be confusing sometimes, but overall as long as there are 2 terms (bands and bares, larks and ravens, ladies and gents) it all works out fine. I am amenable to less strongly gendered terms, especially if we can make them less confusing. Contra has a long history of dancers filling the roles they desire, we should continue to honor that and worry less about labels.

The term Gypsy may not be a reference to Romani people at all, it appears in many research efforts to be a twist on a Welsh word for 'gaze' - Gip (hard 'G' in Welsh) from written works on Morris dancing in the 1700's. From Morris dance, later in English country dance and eventually Contra it appears in written records to be twisted to Gip'sies (hard 'G') and eventually the current spelling and soft-'G' - Gypsy. As long as we all understand a suitable replacement term, it should be a non-issue for most people. Shifting over time demonstrates the wonders of a plastic self-defined language like English.

Callers should decide what terms they prefer to use, understanding the history and implications of their choices. Dancers should probably best approach dance terms with a bit less rigidity, much like the rest of a life well lived.

My personal opinion is that I prefer people friendly terms like Gents and ladies, rights and lefts, Lead and Follow, person on right person on left. Calling people animals could be viewed as degrading. Thanks

I understand the desire for gender neutral terms and have no objections to that. However, I do not like the choice of Larks and Ravens. These are two wildly different birds in terms of size and temperament and as someone who dances the ladies role, I find it very difficult to remember I am a Raven, which seems so much larger and masculine than a lark. Before the terms become set in stone (assuming they haven already been) I would like to suggest using Larks and Robins.

Last fall, the Sunday night committee was taking a survey about the terms larks & ravens. Will FSGW be releasing the results of this survey to the public? I would be curious to see them.

The BIDA dance in Cambridge MA took a survey in their community about role terms, the results of which informed their decision to make the switch to larks & ravens for all dances. They published the results here: <https://blog.bidadance.org/2017/04/poll-results-larks-and-ravens.html>

The results of such a survey here in DC might be different, or might not; my point is just that this is a sample way of working on a subject within a community - incorporating dancer feedback and having transparency about that feedback. As we discuss this topic in DC, any data that FSGW has gathered on this subject in our local community would be valuable to other local dances as well.

Thanks for your work

If non-gender calling makes younger and LGBTQ audiences feel more welcome, which it does, then FSGW dances should transition to non-gender role calling.

I don't understand why anyone would find non-gender calling offensive, unless they're homophobic, and I don't think FSGW should cater to the needs of homophobic dancers.

While it is true that using non-gender role calling is initially baffling, it's confusing for a matter of minutes. If dancers cannot make the switch in their heads from ladies and gents to larks and ravens, they're either intentionally being obtuse or they're not very bright. With a little bit of practice, they will get the hang of it: it's a very small price to pay to make everybody feel welcome.

Most inexperienced dancers are not going to be all that thrown off by non-gender role calling because they think about staying on the right side or the left side and finding their partner at the appropriate time in the dance.

Most experienced dancers can predict the sequences of moves in a dance quickly and don't even listen to the calling after a few minutes so it's disingenuous of them to say they cannot adjust to calling changes.

Isn't it up to the callers to decide if they wanted to use traditional or non-gender role calling?

FSGW should make it mandatory that traditional callers can only use ladies and gents. A lot of experienced dancers thought men and women was regressive, and many said that that terminology has not been used at dances for 15+ years, so I think it's perfectly acceptable for FSGW to disallow it.

Larks and ravens is the only non-gender calling I've heard at FSGW dances, and if people really find it so challenging to switch to new calls, then perhaps FSGW should implement larks and ravens as the only non-gender calling option. If that's the terminology being used by the caller, s/he just needs to make sure that dancers know that Larks=Left and Ravens=Right so that dancers don't associate Larks with Ladies.

I feel that using the new gender-free terms would be unnecessarily confusing for many callers and dancers, especially in the fast-paced Contra environment. While I understand this may be preferable for some, I would imagine the majority of dancers, especially new dancers - which we all want to encourage, would find this to be confusing and perhaps even off-putting. Dancers are allowed to dance whichever role they prefer, so while the terms may be "gendered", roles are not assigned, they are understood by everyone and in keeping with the history of Contra dance. I feel similarly about the term "gypsy" and while I know some consider it an ethnic slur, it is a term for a dance move that we all know and understand. In some cases, I've heard callers say something along the lines of "walk around each other while looking in their eyes" which takes too long to say and process. If there is a short term for the "gypsy" that a lot of people want adopted, at least that would be practical. Given the historic nature of Contra, I don't think these terms are a problem, and we already have a diverse and inclusive community in FND. We also have to acknowledge being a part of the greater Contra dance world and being a community that is accessible to dancers from outside FND. Coming in and having to learn new terms, especially for "ladies and gents" would be confusing even for veteran dancers from elsewhere. I would encourage the board to take into consideration not only the feelings of those who want to push for new terms, but also those who enjoy the traditional calling of Contra and would like to see it kept alive.

Short version: Let's try positional calling and other calling without role terms

It's good to see this initiative. I'll be out of town due to a previous commitment, and would like to offer a few comments:

Open process. I hope we are not locked into current terminology, and are open to options could involve creativity, surprise, and "outside-the-box" possibilities, including calling without role terms, positional calling, etc.

Earlier shifts in dance roles. Contra used to have many dances that emphasized active couples, where the inactives were often standing around doing little. It could matter a lot for enjoying a particular dance if you started as a One or a Two. The shift towards more balanced roles for Ones and Twos is an example of change for the better that we might learn from.

Living tradition. Contra dance has been constructed and reconstructed over the years, we're not just repeating or re-enacting, but part of a culture and community that benefits from blending new and old.

Diversity, community, and joy. As a community, we should acknowledge and embrace the diversity of dance experiences and dancers. Whatever happens there's probably nothing that will completely satisfy everyone. Just as previous dancers and callers helped to establish and grow contra dance, I hope we can continue to use creativity and caring to find ways to keep coming together in the joy of dance in a welcoming community.

Any of the gender-neutral terms that are used by the callers should be acknowledged, and used. I also feel that the terms gents & ladies should also be acknowledged, and used.

In FSGW Sunday Night Dances description of the May & June 2019 Newsletter, there is text "FSGW allows callers to choose role names with at least one gender-free dance each month".

What is this supposed to mean?

Should this be two different statements?

1. FSGW allows callers to choose role names.
2. FSGW will have at least one gender-free dance each month.

I agree that FSGW should allow callers to choose the role terms. I don't agree with the stipulation to have at least one dance a month that uses gender-neutral terms. The role terms should be open for any of the role terms that are used.

Those who book the caller need to ask what role terms the caller plan to use. If the caller asks what terms the community is comfortable with, the decision should be made by the caller w/ little to no input from the one that are booking the caller. There is much diversity w/in the dance community, and at this time, there is no consensus for what role terms are accepted.

Part I

I deeply understand the desire of an organization, and individuals, to be responsive, flexible, and inclusive. I deeply understand the desire for any individual to feel represented and seen, acknowledged and celebrated in their community of choice. I am not saying I understand each individual, nor each community. I only speak for myself. I specialize in teaching beginning dancers, and I value offering respect for adult learners and learning, and perceive the need to have language that effectively reaches and communicates effectively to as many people as possible as quickly as possible. I understand the point of view of a dancer who needs clear instruction and prompting. Lastly, I have been engaged in conversations around roles, gender, norms, and stereotypes for more than 50 years, and conversations around community-building in dance communities, inclusion, and dance roles for more than 30. These conversations aren't new. The current feeling of rancor is deeply upsetting, however.

I feel strongly that the terms Gent and Lady are role names and do not refer to gender or sex. I dance both roles.

I also believe, again, quite strongly, that the terms Jet and Ruby, Lark and Raven, and all of the other iterations I have heard are coded sexist language, and reinforce the idea of both a binary way of viewing gender and some very specific and unpleasant, insulting gender stereotypes. I include my own creation of Lake and River, which conforms to the Left/Right, one/two syllable, differing vowel sounds parameters, as possibly offering some unconscious biases.

Continued...

Part II

Please don't get me started on Lead and Follow!!!!!! 1. AMDance is not a led dance form, period; and, 2. HOLY COW! Talk about negative and reinforcing binary stereotypes! Geeze Louise!

I actually think that we can all find a place by using the Right and Left terms, particularly for proper and improper contra, circle, triplet, mescolanza, and sicilian circle formation dances. This is how most of us who call weddings, barn dances, school groups, one night stands, etc. generally refer to the two roles, so that folks who don't identify as "dancers" can jump in and enjoy our tradition with as little jargon as possible.

Square dancing has a whole different set of parameters, as many dances, at least in some of the more popular square dance traditions, use patter (set forms of lyrics) that rhyme and have been passed down over time. These kinds of dances are crucial to our tradition, and will be the hardest to re-work. For experienced square dance callers, re-writing the learned patter of thousands of dances is a steep task.

Summing up, if there is a need to move away from the role terms Gent and Lady, I propose that we use the most descriptive, clearest, easiest to learn for new dancers terms Right and Left.

Thank you for listening

I find the terms Larks & Ravens offensive. I am a woman and not a predatory bird. Aggressive scavengers have nothing to do on the dance floor. Contra dancing is as tolerant, inclusive, and welcoming as no other dance I know - always has been (I have been dancing for 20 years). Why do we have to disturb these fun and social gatherings with political over-correctness??

Terms like Ladies & Gents or Leaders & Followers denote dance roles, nothing more and nothing less. Anybody is free to dance in any role -- there is nothing discriminatory in these roles.

First, I applaud FSGW for creating a forum for discussing this issue. I am disappointed in how the Dance Committee made seemingly arbitrary decisions about the term Gypsy and now gender-based calling terms without discussing this with dancers and callers.

Larks and Ravens (L&R): I think the intent of this is to be more inclusive in removing gender-based terms from calls. One result of this, which I witnessed at a L&R dance is that a number of dancers interpret these calls to indicate not only gender-free calls, but also removing the role of a leader and follower in the roles of the dancers. Contradances are lead-follow dances. I have no objection to anyone dancing either role, but approaching it as not having lead-follow roles presents a possibility for injury. I have had this happen to me, and I find it disturbing enough to not want to dance in such a setting.

Also, most beginners approaching contra dances know which gender role they expect to assume, and do not have to cognitively process gender terms as a result. Adding a new term forces them to take multiple steps to interpret a call (term and call). Calling L&R introduces a new jargon term making it more difficult to understand and interpret. I find myself continually trying to remember which role I am playing in a L&R-called dance, reducing my own fun. The same is not true switching roles (lead/follow) in gender-based calls - I know which position I will take and find it cognitively easy to assume this role and enjoy the dance. Consequently, I refuse to attend L&R dances. Far from being more inclusive, this style of calling is excluding a number of people, myself included. Sad, as I have enjoyed contra dancing for many years, and now have to curtail my attendance. I am still happy to attend the FND but refuse to attend any Sunday night dance where L&R is the calling form. In addition, I used to attend Contra*Stock, but now that it is L&R, I will decline to attend.

No space to discuss Gypsy

Larks and Ravens

I am part of a large body of happy and loving contra dancers who HATE the proposed change of name. Some of us already refuse to attend "lark" dances because the idea is stupid. Worse: it is bullying.

I am a man (by birth, not by choice) and now I have to be a LARK? A song bird? I claim my own freedom of speech to say that imposing "Larks&Ravens" is an aggression against other dancers. Ravens are predators and scavengers. They feed on corpses. They pick at stinking cadavers with their pointy beaks. I do not see women as ravens. I do not see dancers as ravens. Ravens are predators without charm. Dance is charming, or it is nothing.

Imposing "Larks&Ravens" is a form of bullying. It destroys the love, indeed it destroys the very purpose of dance by imposing rules on the joyous freedom of moving with other people in teamwork with wonderful music.

"Leaders and Followers" works: it is no more hierarchical than "driver and passenger" but what is wrong with 'men and women'? with men standing as women if they want, and vice versa.

Dear FSGW, thank you for asking our opinions!

One thing is clear: the minority imposing "LarksAndRavens" has never asked anyone's opinion before this. If there were a free vote, birds would be banished from the dance floor! This PC bullying campaign by small militant groups in coastal urban areas, reveals the same extreme minority groups whose LBGT passions gave us Donald Trump as president (and I am not joking).

In Contra Dance, "Men and Women" are dance terms - like "Circle and Back" or "Leaders + Followers" and they imply neither GENDER nor HIERARCHY. How about "Driver + Passenger" in a motor vehicle: the driver is not "superior" whether (s)he is male or female or neither. This is not hierarchical, nor is gender. I have been contra dancing for 20+ years with men and women on both sides of the dance: men dance with men, women with women, men and women change sides for fun and change back again. For more fun. YES: IT IS FOR FUN.

If dancing is not FUN, then no one will dance any more. Contra dance is joyous, contra dance is free, contra dance provides a forum where men wear skirts and women wear whatever they like.

LarkAndRaven BULLYING is spoiling the FUN. Leave contra dance as it has always been, with MEN and WOMEN having FUN. Down With PC, Down With Bullying, and Down With Stupidity!

I HATE the terms "Larks" and "Ravens". They are confusing (I just figured out that I'm supposed to be a raven since I tend to dance the woman's role - and all along I've been thinking I'm a lark), offensive (I'm not a bird, and certainly NOT a raven - one of my least-favorite birds), and I think they are a barrier to new dancers. Since it isn't even remotely obvious which term refers to which person in a couple, you constantly have to translate as you are dancing. It is hard enough to get new dancers to stick with it and become long-term dancers, and weird, politically-correct terminology doesn't help. I have been dancing for many years and have danced both the man's role and the woman's role - I have always assumed that the terminology referred to my ROLE in the dance and not to anything about me personally. Most of the dancers I know go to dances because they want to DANCE; they are not particularly interested (at least in the context of the dance) in peoples' gender identity, pronoun preference, or any of the other aggressive, "politically-correct" attitudes reflected by this kind of terminology. I have always loved that contra dancing is friendly, welcoming, and inclusive, but I feel that changing from "ladies and gents" or "men and women" to "larks and ravens" is specifically designed to bully people like me and make me feel unwelcome. The traditional terms have no hierarchy and no intent to offend; let's stick with them.

First, I totally understand and appreciate the idea of gender-neutral terms. However, I would prefer terms that are logical and are easily translatable to both new and seasoned dancers. I have no idea what larks and ravens have to do with dancing and as a result whether that puts me on the right or left side of my partner. It really needs to be terms that I understand. If two gents are dancing or any other combination, I get that the gender associated terms don't work. How about something simple like lefts and rights or lead and follow? I would not be surprised if lead and follow even have problems, but we are just dancing and we need to find terms that work with the dance. Sometimes people lead and some follow; it is the nature of the dance and has nothing to do with gender identity. Let's be sensible and not take this to such an extreme that it leads us to the absurdity of two different types of birds. I do not in any way identify with the bird stuff and personally. I find it is ludicrous and takes the joy out of the dance. I have since stopped going to dances that use larks and ravens. I am, however, incredibly grateful that someone saw the need to have a discussion about this and not just force it into the total dance lexicon. Please find other terms that are relatable. I hate to think the tone and essence of the dance changes so much that it takes the joy out of the dance. I don't think it is worth having that type of impact on the dance community for something that seems rather impractical. I vote for adaptation to gender neutral but not absurdity. Thank you

It is long past time that contra dancing retire the offensive term for the Roma people as a dance call. It's unacceptability is obvious.

I also support transitioning to "larks and ravens" rather than "ladies and gents" for normal dances, as the former pairing is more inclusive of individuals with non-binary genders and destigmatizes those who want to dance the role not traditionally associated with their gender.

bring back Gypsy

Has the participation from the Romanian community increased significantly now that you've eliminated "gypsy" from your dance language?

I'm a 30-year-old lady, I like being a lady, and I get upset when people refuse to respect my preferred label, which is LADY. I've got enough pressure from both the queer and straight communities to be ashamed of being born female and afraid of being feminine, and dancing is one of the places I've felt safe and affirmed and welcome to be feminine, a lady....but apparently that's not true anymore. And especially to replace "lady" with "raven"--that's a giant crow--an ugly, croak-voiced, carrion-eating symbol of death. I see no difference between you labeling me a "raven" or a "turkey vulture". And I don't like "lark" any better, just like I wouldn't be happy if you called me a "chick" or a "dodo". I don't have any problem dancing "as a gent", but when I'm not dancing "as a gent", I'm not a bird. I'm a LADY. That's my preference. I'd rather you called me one. However if you're absolutely determined not to....I remember hearing of some group using "jets & rubies", which would at least allow me to dance with a little more dignity. You'd be calling everyone gems, which I think is a positive statement on the value of everyone who comes to dance.

I'm a 25 year contradancer-this was an inclusive, welcoming community. Unpopular individuals (poor dancers, fat, sweating, etc) were welcomed & encouraged to participate. But this has changed in the past few years.

DANCE ETIQUETTE WAS-if a person asked me to dance & I preferred not to dance with that person, I could politely decline. Then I would sit out that dance. I would not insult that person by dancing w/ a preferable partner. Recently some dancers do not use this etiquette. We are not welcoming if we insult unpopular people by refusing to dance with them.

NON-GENDER calling: I have often dance the "other" role, either due to a gender imbalance or if I wanted to dance w/ a specific person. I never encountered hostility when I danced the other role. From my earliest years in contra, some have danced the other role & I have never been aware of any untoward behavior displayed to them.

I heard that changing from traditional "ladies and gents" is to be more inclusive. But who are we excluding? In my view, we have already been inclusive (ex. those wearing skirts or in gender transition)-except when some individuals are rude & refuse to dance with specific individuals.

Why do I resist eliminating ladies/gents? 1-How does this make our dance more inclusive? 2 -As a left-handed person I don't know L/R as a reflex. How many of us use the wrong hand for left (right) hand star? "Larks/ravens" is totally confusing. I don't enjoy coming to a contra dance with non-gender calling which requires so much mental gyrations to know where to go/what to do?

Therefore, I stopped coming to FSGW dances. The extreme joy that I experienced for 20+ years at contra dances has been lost-both due to the non-gender calling & to the loss of common courtesy when individuals rudely refuse to dance w/ specific others.

Eliminating "gypsy"-another loss for our dance experience. Gypsy invited (not required) dancers to flirt/gaze into the eyes of the other. The joy is lost.

Greetings,

I strongly oppose the use of gender free terminology, and am appalled that callers are already discouraged from using the terms "men" and "women". I offer three reasons for opposing gender free terminology:

First, it is confusing to beginners. It is difficult enough getting new people interested in dancing. The confusion caused by gender free terminology is a needless barrier to new dancers.

Second, this represents the introduction of politics into dancing. Dance events should allow people to experience the joy of dance regardless of their political views. Gender free terminology represents a form of bullying by a small minority and their sympathizers. Let's keep verbal bullying out of dance!

Third, the use of ravens to describe women is quite insulting.

I have been dancing contra for almost 40 years, and have been trying to get others involved the entire time. If any group goes to gender free terminology I will stop dancing there. If people who are passionate about the use of gender free terminology want to hold their own dance that is clearly labelled as such that's fine, but to force the entire dance community into that mold is unacceptable.

I am an FSGW member, new to contra since October 2018, and a regular attendee at Friday night dances since then. I dance either role.

I don't have a strong preference for "ladies and gents." I do have a strong preference for changing with the times, and creating an open and inclusive community, and non-gendered terms help with that.

I personally prefer "lead and follow" as non-gendered terms, which I find less confusing and arbitrary than "larks and ravens."

Please let's continue moving forward with more inclusive language! I like Larks and Ravens, but have also heard simply Leads and Follows in other social dance settings.

I am also horrified by gypsy language, and glad that is banned as well.

Thanks for the conversation!

Easy 1 1st: I like avoiding "gypsy" since it potentially offends a segment of the population. I liked "mozy" since it was also 2 syllables and sounded similar, but "walk around," which currently seems the most popular replacement, is clearer & needs less explanation.

I support the concept of gender-neutral replacements for the traditional men/women or gents/ladies, but recognize that those terms are deeply ingrained in the history of contra (and other couple-based) dancing. I am still seeking an optimum replacement pair. Jets/rubies, one of the early popular proposals, has a variety of criticisms: neither term is animate & people are, and Jets reminds some of 1 of the West Side Story gangs. Larks/ravens, the current popular favorite, has even more criticism: dancers don't want to be birds, the potential gender association of smaller-treble/larger-bass is the reverse of the intended usage, lark starts off sounding like lady, etc.

Lead/follow is really not appropriate in contra, where the neither role leads or follows the other, both simply dance the coreography of each dance. Odds/evens, well, who really wants to be thought or called "odd"? All of these, at least, follow the "1-syllable/2-syllable" format so that callers don't need to change their accustomed rhythms.

There has been much discussion about using left/right, port/starboard or terms beginning with L & R, but there is great potential for confusion as to whether one means where the two dancers were at the beginning of the dance or where they are at the moment of the call; my feeling is that positional calling, which uses the latter, is a promising approach, but the former has problems, such as neither role is uniquely L or R in a proper dance. Both need to avoid confusion with left & right as direction (circle left...).

I wholeheartedly agree with the spirit of <https://medium.com/@doemtaryn/contra-dancing-why-larks-ravens-fe4c9d95ddf4?fbclid=IwAR1NopPiF2rWl6e1ocoZ8EADw5juw4yzL1UcDc9WIL8QhfGFHMqmkgwZn9U>

The proposed terms, lark and raven, do not communicate/translate what role someone is. My experience on the dance floor: when the caller says "put the raven on the right" or "larks start a hey" the dancers--both new and experienced--ask each other "which one am I?" They don't know 1) how/why they are being called a raven, 2) how/why the role they are dancing is connected with a lark. Only the most experience dancers care about the differences of being on the left/right. Saying "dance with whoever is coming at you," is dismissive and ignores the confusion that the practice creates within the set, which turns off new people (again, based on personal experience).

The associations make the proposed terms confusing. In conversations, people tell me they associate a raven as male and therefore is the right role. Raven=male may be because it is a bigger bird, but the stronger association is people connecting "lark=lady" because both start with "L." The terms actually work against the dancers.

Perhaps a change from "ladies and gents" may be favorable but a search for better terms than larks and ravens may be the way to go about it.

How will it be measured if the policy changes or non-changes are successful/failure?

I cannot attend the meeting on Sunday, but I would like to make my voice heard. I am 100% totally opposed to referring to men and women as larks and ravens. I don't get to dance at Glen Echo very often, but if this happens, I will not make the trip to dance there again. We are what we are and do no need to be called something we are not. There is nothing wrong with calling a dance move "gypsy". Most every word in the English language has more than one meaning. It is not derogatory to anyone, just another meaning of the word. I like it.

I am part of a large body of fanatical dancers who HATE the proposed change of name. Some of us refuse to attend "lark" dances. I am a man (by birth, not by choice) and now I have to be a LARK? A song bird? I claim my own freedom of speech to say that imposing "Larks&Ravens" is an aggression against other dancers. Ravens are predators and scavengers. They feed on corpses. They pick at stinking cadavers with their pointy beaks. I do not see women as ravens. I do not see dancers as ravens. Ravens are predators without charm. Dance is charming, or it is nothing. Imposing "Larks&Ravens" is a form of bullying. It destroys the love, indeed it destroys the very purpose of dance by imposing rules on the joyous freedom of moving with other people in teamwork with wonderful music.

Hello, I just received a strongly-worded email urging me to write to you, but it was asking me to oppose L&R terms. I will do no such thing. I think L&R terms are the best of all the current options. I fully support the use of L&R at Glen Echo and elsewhere. Any push-back comes from older dancers (around my age) who argue that the terms are inconvenient ("I have to think about which I am."). The inconvenience of experienced older dancers does not weigh heavily for me when compared the the existential threat of our aging community.[Much more in lengthy email letter received by FSGW]

We are totally opposed to being referred to as Larks & Ravens. Being called something you're not is offensive. The truth is we are men and women and common curtesy dictates we be referred to as such. Having to adapt to the whims of a few is unacceptable. If the aim of FSGW is sustainability and attendance growth, then more relevant issues should be addressed and not changing of the names. Dancing should not be thrust into the PC arena. People come to dance to enjoy themselves, not to deal with the unnecessary controversy of the day. We believe there will be a further drop in attendance if this ludicrous suggestion comes to pass, as we will not be dancing as L&R's.

I'm an occasional Glen Echo dancer and about to become more of one with a relocation back up to the DC-area. I think Larks and Ravens is a terrible idea. Besides being confusing as heck (remembering which part is which is a ridiculous thing to have to worry about), it really accomplishes nothing. I am a cis woman and I almost always dance the Lady's/Follower's part. • I really haven't learned the other, and don't plan to because I can't tell which is the Lark and which is the Raven.

- There is nothing about me that is passive, so there is nothing about dancing the Lady's/Follower's part that has ever felt diminutive to me.
- One of the things I love about contra dancing is the gender-bending culture. Everyone knows that's an option, and that's where the fun is.
- There is no fun in bird species-bending – that's just lame. And it will not make me want to dance the other part. It will probably make me not want to dance, period.
- It is the interplay, flirtation and mixing up between gender roles that makes contra dancing so special!