

Documenting their lives: LGBTIQ Identities

NJLA Conference

April 25, 2006

Glossary

"Always allow people to identify themselves how and when they wish, and to always respect those who choose not to label themselves at all" (Siragusa, 2001).

Language is dynamic; it grows, changes, and develops. This is particularly true with the language of diversity and terms (labels) we use to identify ourselves. Language must not demean, exclude, or offend. We must allow others to self identify, for definitions of terms vary for everyone. These definitions were given to provide a starting point for discussion and understanding. (Out for Equity)

Androgyne/Andogynous/Androgyny: From the Latin roots for male and female (andro) and female (gyne). An androgynous person may identify and appear as both male and female, or as neither male nor female, or as in between male and female. This person also may or may not exhibit the behaviors of the two traditional genders, thus making it difficult for others to place them into a specific gender category.

Alternative, Homosexual, or Gay Lifestyle: Unhelpful terms that perpetuate stereotypes that GLBT lifestyles are significantly different from heterosexual ones.

Bisexual: An individual (male or female) who is attracted sexually/erotically and emotionally to both males and females. The term may be used to refer to a socio-political identity, a sexual behavior, or both. Identification with any particular "label" may be culturally, economically, generationally, geographically, or politically influenced.

Coming Out: A developmental process of a gay or lesbian individual who is conciliating and accepting his or her affectional and sexual orientation; initial involvement with others in the gay and lesbian community; a metaphor for telling people about one's total (lesbian or gay) identity.

Cross-dresser: One who dresses, either in public or private, in clothing that society assigns to the opposite sex. Cross dressing is not an indication of one's sexual orientation or gender identity. The formerly used term, "transvestite", is now considered offensive by some.

Domestic Partners: Adults who are not legally married, but who share resources and responsibility for decisions, share values and goals, and have commitments to one another over a period of time.

Drag King: A female who emulates a man in appearance and manner, generally for the purpose of entertainment, and not necessarily because the person identifies as a man.

Drag Queen: A male who emulates a woman in appearance and manner, generally for the purpose of entertainment, and not necessarily because the person identifies as a woman. Considered to be a derogatory term by some.

Dyke: Usually a negative term applied to stereotypical "masculine" women, much as "fairy" has been used to stereotype "feminine" men. Now, however, being adopted as a term of pride by many lesbians.

Fag or Faggot: A negative term used to stereotype "feminine" males. Applied to homosexuals during the Spanish Inquisition when they were burned for their "crimes" (from Latin meaning "a bundle of sticks").

Gay: A generic term said to apply to both men and women who are attracted to the same sex, much in the way that "man" used generically, is meant to encompass both men and women. Some people object to the use of gay when applied to lesbians as well as gay men, and use the word only to mean a homosexual male.

Gender/Gender Role: The set of socially defined and culturally specific behavioral and appearance expectations assigned to females (femininity) and males (masculinity) on the basis of biological sex, including but not limited to dress, hairstyle, professional roles, and family roles, hobbies, and interests. Also called "sex role."

Gender Expression: Refers to the ways in which people externally communicate their gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, hairstyle, voice, and emphasizing, or changing their bodies' characteristics. Gender expression is not necessarily an indication of sexual orientation.

Gender Identity: An individual's innermost sense of self as male/masculine, female/feminine, somewhere in between, or somewhere outside of these gender boundaries. Most people develop a gender identity that socially aligns with their biological sex, but many do not.

GLBT: This acronym for Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender is an umbrella term that covers both sexual orientation and gender identification.

Heterosexism: The institutional assumption that everyone is heterosexual and that heterosexuality is inherently superior to and preferable to homosexuality or bisexuality.

Homophobia: The irrational fear, dislike or hatred of lesbians, gays or bisexuals; can be both personal and institutional prejudice and often results in acts of discrimination; avoidance of homosexuals or the subject of homosexuality; the personal fear of being homosexual; a clinical term.

Homosexuals: Men and women who are attracted sexually/erotically and emotionally to persons of the same sex. Most gay, lesbian, and bisexual people do not like to use this term to define themselves.

In the Closet: A homosexual who can not or will not "come out" to self, peers, parents, family, or others. Homosexuals and bisexuals who have accepted with pride their sexual orientation are "out of the closet".

Internalized Homophobia: The experience of shame, aversion, or self-hatred in reaction to one's own feelings of attraction for a person of the same sex.

Intersexed Individual: People who were born with some combination of both male and female genitalia. Formerly known as hermaphrodites (this term is now considered offensive).

Lesbian: A woman who is attracted sexually/erotically and emotionally to some other female.

Lover/Life Partner/Companion: The partner or significant other of gays or lesbians in a committed relationship.

Queer: Used by some within the GLBT community to refer to a person who is gay, lesbian, or someone who is supportive of GLBT issues. Some people feel this term is inclusive while others feel that it is pejorative.

Sexual Orientation: The range of feelings of affection and sexual attraction towards members of the same sex (homosexual), opposite sex (heterosexual), or both sexes (bisexual); how one perceives oneself fitting in the above categories.

Sexual Preference: Often used improperly instead of sexual orientation. It implies that sexuality is something casually chosen rather than a crucial aspect of one's identity.

Straight: A term referring to heterosexuals; non-gay.

Transgender: A broad umbrella term used to describe the continuum of individuals whose gender identity and expression, to varying degrees, does not correspond with their genetic sex. Some transgender persons wish to change their anatomy to be more congruent with their self-perception; others have no such desire. There is no correlation between sexual orientation and gender identity; transgender person can be heterosexual, gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

Transsexual: Individuals who do not identify with their birth-assigned sex, and sometimes alter their bodies to reconcile their gender identity and their physical body and/or biological sex.

Two-Spirit: The definition of a Two-Spirit person varies across the Native American cultures in which they appear. In general, Two-Spirit people are born one sex, and end up fulfilling roles assigned to both sexes, in addition to roles reserved for Two-Spirit people. They are considered part male and part female (or wholly male and wholly female), often revered as natural peacemakers as well as healers and shamans. The term 'Berdache' coined by European explorers to describe people whose gender they did not understand was replaced by Two-Spirit.

Xenophobia: Fear of difference, actual or perceived.