

Kort's Korner



Volume 1, Issue 15 - ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

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Queer Eye for the Straight Community

10 Smart Terms Gays and Lesbians Use to Self-identify

Over the years other minority groups have changed how they wish to be referred to in an attempt to change how they are treated. A good example of this is the African American community has changed the way they self-identify going from "negro" to "colored" to "black" to "people of color" to the now politically correct term "African American" that they wish to be called today. Actually, "negro" and "colored" were labels coming from non-African Americans.

These days, the GLBTQ (Gay, Lesbian, Bi-attractional, Transgendered and Questioning) community have also changed how we self identify. "Homosexual" has become a negative word as the words "negro" and "colored" would be to call an African American person. The best thing these days is to ask how someone self-identifies. Even many women, both lesbian and straight, are starting to write the word "women" as "womyn" so to recognize their separation and difference from men.

For us all to get along it is important to be respectful of each other's self-identification. As a therapist, I may not like to use the word "homosexual" however if a client comes in and does not identify with the word "gay" and self-identifies as "homosexual" that is the word I use. Using the word "gay" is affirmative and refers to a lifestyle of being out and open about one's sexual and romantic orientation. Many folks in the beginning of coming out are not comfortable with using the word "gay". Likewise, a heterosexual who enjoys sex with the same gender however might identify as hetero-emotional and not see themselves as gay or homosexual. They would refer to the word "homosexual" as a "freaky" side to themselves in behavior only.

When I was a young boy, degrading, humiliating names like "faggot" and "queer" were hurled at me repeatedly. Today, younger kids and teenagers use the word "gay" to degrade and humiliate others. "That is so gay!" you can hear in school corridors and in the malls. It's reminiscent of slang expressions like, "I Jewed him down," or "I was gypped." These verbs have become so overused that people use them without even knowing where they originated or how it offends people.

Today, however, we see the word "queer," once a pejorative, often being used in a positive way. Dozens of books and articles are getting published with Queer in their titles, and the term has come into common, affirmative usage by lesbians and gays as well. Originally, the adjective "homosexual" was mostly derogatory or pathological, as in calling someone a "known homosexual." Today's "homosexuals" don't want to own that title, because its negative connotations remind us of the bad old days. The "sexual" part of the word reflected the homophobic belief that homosexuality is primarily or "only" about sex, which it isn't.

The labels "gay" and "lesbian" were therefore adopted, to the extent that today's reparative therapies often refuse to use the word "gay" because of its affirmative connotation!

Then bisexuals were included. These days—again, removing "sex" from the word—the politically correct term would be "bi-attractional."

Gay culture then adopted the acronym GLB to welcome in bi-attractionals. Next to come on board was "transgendered," an umbrella term for drag queens, drag

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kings, transvestites and pre-and post-op sex reassignment individuals; and so the acronym changed to GLBT. When those questioning their orientation came into the fold, the acronym expanded again to GLBTQ.

As a result of the addition of letters maybe it all just seemed to much and the best letter for us is just "Q" for Queer. We see it in the media "Queer as Folk" on Showtime and now the hysterically funny and well done "Queer Eye on the Straight Guy."

These days it is important to know these terms:

1. Lesbian: A woman or young woman who forms her primary loving and sexual relationships with other women; a woman or young woman who has a continuing affectional, emotional, romantic, and/or erotic attraction to someone of the same sex. Some lesbians prefer to call themselves "lesbian" and they use the term "gay" to refer to gay men; others use the term "gay" to refer to both gay males and lesbian females.

2. Gay Male: An affirmative word for a man or young man who forms his primary romantic and sexual relationships with other men; a man or young man who has a continuing affectional, emotional, romantic, and/or erotic attraction to someone of the same sex. Women use this word as well (see above).

NOTE:

"Homosexual" is an outdated term and offensive: It historically refers to a lesbian or a gay male. Homosexual is a clinical and technical term that is not generally used by lesbians or gay men to refer to themselves or their community. For example, a person refers to themselves as gay or openly gay not admittedly homosexual or a practicing homosexual. These latter terms have negative stigmatized connotations. This term is also widely used by Reparative Therapists and Religious organizations to reinforce that homosexuality is negative and that "gay" is an affirmative lifestyle.

3. Bisexual or Bi-Attractional: A person or young person who has the potential for or forms affectionate, emotional, romantic, and/or erotic attraction with members of either gender.

4. Transgendered: A person who is expanding the societal boundaries of female and male genders. This includes people who are undergoing sex/gender reassignment (transsexuals) and transvestites/cross dressers. Transsexuals and transvestites may be heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual. An example might be of a heterosexual woman becoming gender

reassigned as a man and now self-identifies as a gay man. His gender is now changed however his sexual and romantic orientation has not.

5. Homoerotic: The enjoyment of watching two men or two women being sexual with one another. It is also a man eroticizing his sexual contact with another man and a woman eroticizing her sexual behavior with another woman. The person enjoying this might be straight, gay or bi.

6. Hetero-emotional: A man or woman who is heterosexually emotionally attached and drawn to members of the opposite gender and sexually attracted to members of either same gender and/or opposite gender.

7. Homo-emotional: A man or woman who is emotionally attracted and drawn to members of the same gender and sexually attracted to members of one's own gender and/or opposite gender.

8, Questioning: A person who is undecided and/or confused about their sexual and romantic orientation.

9. LGBTQ: An umbrella acronym to refer to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered and Questioning community.

10. Queer: A mostly political term to describe gay, lesbian, bi-attractional and transgender persons. It is an umbrella term to refer to the gay community as a whole. This can be a simpler way to refer to the queer community without all the letters! Examples in media that this is becoming more acceptable are "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy" and "Queer as Folk". Many gay and lesbian self-help books now use the word queer in its titles and contents.

I have to admit I still cringe when I hear the word queer. It takes me back to the playground where I was made fun of and put down. However, I am getting used to it as it is used more and more. When in relationship with someone "queer" my judgment is the best thing to do is to ask them how do they self identify and what would they like to be called. I prefer to be called gay. That is how I self-identify. How do you self-identify?

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