

Work in
Progress

All Words Matter

An Unfinished Guide
to Word Choices
in the Cultural Sector

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	7	'Slave ship': disrespectful or not?	62
Stijn Schoonderwoerd		<i>Richard Kofi</i>	
Words Matter	13	Diversity, Disability and Words	65
Wayne Modest		Paul van Trigt	
What's in a Title?	18	Against Invisibility?	68
<i>Eveline Sint Nicolaas</i>		<i>Martin Berger</i>	
Museum Labels and Coloniality	21	"LGB" and the Addition of "TQIA2S"	71
Ciraj Rassool		Eliza Steinbock	
Words out of Time	26	May I Call You by That Name?	76
<i>Marijke Kunst</i>		<i>Martin Berger</i>	
Being True to the Catalogue	29	Mechanisms and Tropes of Colonial Narratives	79
Marijke Kunst		Hodan Warsame	
Perspectives Matter	35	Should I Mention His Skin Colour?	86
Simone Zeefuik and Wayne Modest		<i>Robin Lelijveld</i>	
Africa Is Not a Country	40	Glossary of Terms	89
<i>Annette Schmidt</i>		Colophon	146
Language Cannot Be "Cleaned Up"	43		
Esther Peeren			
'Negro' Art from Africa	46		
<i>Simone Vermaat</i>			
Exclusionary "Conviviality"	49		
Anick Vollebergh			
Culture and Other Seemingly Neutral Terms	54		
<i>Lisa Kleeven</i>			
Migrant Art and the Politics of Language	57		
Guno Jones			

For museums,
addressing gender
and sexual diversity may
still be something novel,
but not doing so may
inadvertently contribute
to the ongoing
marginalization of
LGBTQIA people.

Eliza Steinbock is Assistant Professor
at Leiden University Centre for the Arts
in Society.

"LGB" and the Addition of "TQIA2S"

BY

Eliza Steinbock

The representation of gender and sexual diversity should be an important priority for any socially engaged museum today. Currently, activists and interest groups such as Queering the Collections¹⁴ are working to push this agenda within museums in the Netherlands. This short essay contributes to these attempts by addressing the importance of the terminology museums use to represent gender and sexual diversity. What are the terms that people use to describe their own identities and how have these changed over time? How do these terms differ from those museums have used? What kind of politics of inclusion or exclusion has influenced the emergence of these terms? And how can museums contribute to ongoing attempts to achieve equality?

"Lesbian," "gay" and "bisexual" are commonly used terms to refer to non-heterosexual sexualities. These community-derived descriptors are preferable to the general medical and legal term of "homosexual." Homosexuality as such was invented in the mid-nineteenth century to distinguish a person who engaged in sexual acts with another of the same sex, but before that time partaking in such practices did not necessarily indicate a different kind of identity, though doing so might be considered sinful. Homosexuality has been, and continues to be in some nation-states, considered a mental illness, and it has been given criminal status through statutes against sodomy and cross-dressing. To avoid the further stigmatization of this group, the acronym "LGB" has become

avored to indicate the plurality of sexual diversity. The phrase "gender and sexuality diversity" or "GSD" is also used, though less frequently so outside of community organizing. Should museums adopt such terminology?

How best to refer to non-heterosexual identities continues to be an important discussion, as people seek to account for meanings related to specific historical and cultural contexts. In general, lesbianism and gayness tend to be understood as orientations towards people of the same sex, including romantic feelings, sexual desires and erotic acts. But pervasive sexism resulted in lesbians being long excluded from archives of non-heterosexual life and activism; for this reason, the "L" is usually placed before the "G" to try to correct the regular omission of lesbian lives. Bisexual men and women, attracted to both men and women, have been less culturally visible and stigmatized by both heterosexual and homosexual cultures; beginning to use "LGB" instead of "gay" was then an important step toward inclusion.

In addition to these sexual identifications, other terms have been added through related though distinct political struggles. The LGB acronym is most often extended to include "T" for **transgender/transsexual/transvestite**, referring to experiences and identities that concern gender transition. **Trans** (or **trans***) people can also be L or G or B, or heterosexual, or other sexual identities, and their sexual orientation may or may not change in conjunction with their social, medical or legal gender transition. The inclusion of trans identities raises the issue of gender identity for everyone; people may identify as "gender non-conforming" or "non-binary," or they may feel that their assigned gender matches their gender identity

(cisgender). Hence, one might describe someone or themselves as being a "cisgender gay man," or a "lesbian trans woman," or a "non-binary queer." The "Q" is for the word **queer**, which has been reclaimed as a political and sexual identity from earlier etymological usages that meant strange, aslant, or curious.¹⁵ "Queer" has, however, been and still is used as a slur against people perceived to be sexually deviant. Over time, and particularly since the 1980s, "queer" has served as an umbrella term for sexual interests and identities that challenge social norms for sexual behavior. "Queer" then is not only shorthand for "LGBT" but also the full range of human sexuality, such as people who have particular sexual fetishes, practice polyamory (being in a romantic or sexual relationship with more than one person), or identify as pansexual (attracted to people regardless of gender or sexual identity), and so on.

The "I" stands for intersex, an adjective used to describe at least twenty naturally occurring differences in primary and secondary sex characteristics that do not fit into society's definitions of male and female; one should refer to "an individual with an intersex condition," or an "intersex person" and not use the outdated and inaccurate term "**hermaphrodite**." The "A," which stands for asexual, refers to a sexual orientation generally characterized by not being interested in partnered sexuality or sexual desire, and may involve having no sex or only intimate friendships. Being trans, intersex or asexual are all relatively more common experiences than previously acknowledged, and are today entering public discussions through media and other cultural forums.

The acronym “LGBTQIA” has been critiqued for being **Western**-centric, or for its use of concepts related to the imperial and colonial histories of American and European sexology. Culture-specific identities often do not fall under these dominant categories. In China and Hong Kong, for example, the term “*lala*” is the preferred term for “lesbian.” Similarly, “2S” refers to the “Two-Spirit” identity, which is a translation of an Ojibwe phrase, a language of the **Indigenous** people of Turtle Island/North America. “Two-Spirit” became popularized in the 1990s to unite native sexual traditions that had been misrecognized by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century anthropologists who described men who had sex with men or engaged in cross-dressing when studying “berdache” sexual cultures. The Two-Spirit identity had also been misrecognized by settler cultures of LGBTQ people. Like “2S,” all of these terms have histories intertwined with colonialism, criminality, pathology and Westernization that should be understood when describing sexual cultures and practices and gender identities.

For museums, addressing gender and sexual diversity may still be something novel, but not doing so may inadvertently contribute to the ongoing marginalization of LGBTQIA people. Museums like the National Museum of World Cultures are important places where such work against structural injustices can be fought. Not only do they have objects and archives related to the Two-Spirit identity described above but they also hold collections that show other forms of gender diversity across the world, for example in Japan and Indonesia. These can be foregrounded. Such objects and their collection histories offer us important entryways into the entanglement of colonialism, racism, and sexism and the ways that sexual

and gender diversity has been lived and experienced in the past and continues to be in the present. Using the correct terminology in describing such diversity is part of this process.

14 A collective working towards more inclusive museum practices in relation to LGBT communities.

15 See Peeren in this publication on words gaining new meanings or being claimed as empowering nicknames.

