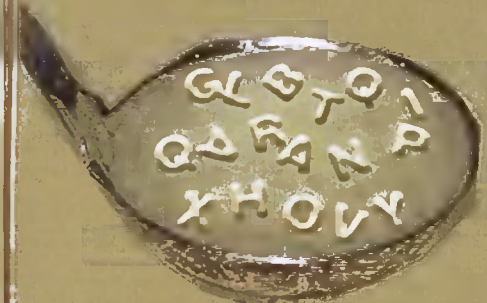


The LGBT...WXYZ Alphabet Soup Recipe

By Jes Malitoris



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There is a community on UNC's campus that celebrates and is largely comprised of people who have a non-normative gender identity and/or sexuality. This community includes those who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, trans*, intersex, queer, genderqueer, asexual, bigendered, allies, and a bunch of other identities I've probably never thought of. Our campus resources for this community are the student group, GLBTSA, and the LGBTQ center on South Campus. Both of these abbreviations have been accepted as easy ways to refer to the community because the sheer number of identities often results in a truly impossible combination of acronyms, sometimes affectionately referred to as "alphabet soup."

However, this acronym is important to the presentation of the LGBTQ community. Certainly to me, as someone who fits within the fairly small genderqueer and pansexual populations, a recognition that homosexuality is not the only sexuality, and that sexual orientation and gender identity are different, is integral.

Consider this: what if we at UNC used "basketball" as an all-encompassing term for "sports"? I think the swim team would get pretty annoyed, since basketball does not reflect the way their sport works at all. The fencing team might protest that not only is basketball not the same as their sport at all, it also makes them, as a much smaller

and less popular sport, invisible.

Such is also the case with the LGBTQ community. Using names like "Gay-Straight Alliance" (GSA) not only makes everyone who isn't gay invisible, it reinforces the binary: you are either gay or straight, ignoring gender identities altogether, and not recognizing the spectrums of sexuality and gender identity. Visibility is a key concept from two sides: on the one hand, using an acronym that recognizes several identities expresses to those outside the community that it is comprised of a collection of non-homogeneous people; on the other, it creates a sense of inclusiveness both for those who are a part of it and who are considering joining.

I am not advocating daily usage of a huge collection of letters to reference our community because, let's face it, saying LGBTQI...WXYZ every single time is annoying but is accurate, and definitely leaves room for humor. GSA, on the other hand, is much more accessible, but highly inaccurate. So how do we reconcile these two extremes? Personally, I'm all for the creation of a new term that is easy to say and doesn't leave anybody out—perhaps we could try using the term Gender and Sexuality Minority or "GSM." But for now, I think it is most important that we be conscious of the identities we recognize and those which we exclude, whether consciously or unconsciously.

