

The Dictionary Project

Definitions are a lotta fun, ain't they? I mean look at all the fun folks are having "assaulting" the DSM—way wacky stuff. But ya know, only a few thousand DSMs are ever printed whereas several million dictionaries are sold every year. Seems like ya could get a lot more "bang for the buck" if ya altered the dictionaries and thereby influence the educational system and future generations.

The Dictionary Project proposes to enhance the definitions related to gender found in the "manuals" of our "literary language."

Regardless of the vernacular terms used linguistically (of the tongue), our culture "adopts" and "modifies" the formal definitions of words into said manuals (via Usage Panels composed of hundreds), and the majority of people (I think the literate are still the majority) access and learn the language through them. Adoption of a term used linguistically, is not immediate. For example, the term "alright," or "allright," is still not included in our literary language; writers may include the form if writing dialogue by/between characters, but otherwise must write "all right" in order to be literarily correct. The term "crossdresser" must be hyphenated (cross-dresser) in order to be literarily correct—that is why a competent writer will hyphenate certain terms (by the way, the term cross-dresser is not found in most dictionaries, so a person who desires to check the definition, hopefully to increase their understanding, will not be able to do so).

The Dictionary Project proposes to deal only with the few that have been placed in our literary manuals, such as: Gender, Female, Feminine, Male, Man, Masculine, Transvestite, Transsexual, Woman. While there are many other terms associated with gender conflict and gender expression, the scope of the Project will be to enhance those meanings, and to influence a more uniform application of the meanings. For example, while *The American Heritage Dictionary* (Second College Edition © 1985, 200,000 entries) defines **transvestite** as, "(n) A person, esp. a male, who dresses in the clothing of the opposite sex for psychological reasons."; *Websters New World Dictionary* (Paperback © 1970 & 1984, 59,000 entries; 22 million copies in print) defines **transvestite** as, "(n) A person who gets sexual pleasure from dressing in clothes of the opposite sex."; *The Quintessential Dictionary* (Paperback, © 1978, printed 1984) defines **transvestite** as, "(n) A person, who derives sexual pleasure from dressing in the clothes of the opposite sex."; and then defines **transvestitism** as, "The practice of wearing clothing appropriate to the opposite sex, often as a manifestation of homosexuality."

(In a spot check of one bookstore, nine dictionaries were checked for the terms "**cross-**

dresser"—only one listed it, *Websters 9th New Collegiate Dictionary* © 1991 [which also dated the earliest literary inclusion of the term as 1911]; "**transsexual**" [included in 1966] was listed in seven; "**transvestite**" [included in 1922] was listed in all eleven; "**transvestism**" or "**transvestitism**" [no date available] was listed in three.)

In observing the work contributed to the understanding of gender by those who have preceded us, I believe the most important basic elements have been the distinction between sex, gender and sexual orientation. Yet, even the most liberal definition above contains the error that clothing has a sex. There is a simple test to distinguish sex from gender: If I leave my male clothes in contact with my female clothes, will I eventually get baby clothes? If not, then my clothing has no sex. Sex, as a biological classification (a noun) is not synonymous with gender (also a noun)—this distinction is a valuable contribution by the "gender minority" to the culture-at-large, but it needs to be implemented into the language and into the educational system. As does the "incorrect," but prevalent use of synonymously interchanging male and female as adjectives to describe gender attributes such as masculine and feminine.

Reaching out to help make that distinction a part of our literary language will help educate the general culture that biological sex attributes are separate from cultural gender attributes, and that neither biological or gender attributes determine sexual attraction/orientation—e.g. "That male-woman in the chiffon evening gown is my sister's monogamous spouse."

Who will help? So far, American Educational Gender Information Service (AEGIS POB 33724, Decatur GA 30033), Creative Design Services (CDS POB 61263, King of Prussia, PA 19406), Human Outreach and Achievement Institute (HOAI 405 Western Ave, Suite 345, South Portland, ME 04106), TV Guise (an independent, mouthy newsletter published by this writer: 3430 Balmoral Dr, #10, Sacramento, CA 95821) are sponsoring organizations. Various other groups and individuals have indicated future support. Because the individuals/groups mentioned above have limited time/resources, Will you help?

Please.

This Project will not be a debate on the negative connotations of labels, nor will it attempt to define all terms related to all issues of gender. However, Dallas Denny of AEGIS is willing to write a proposal for a long-term Nomenclature Project that would attempt to encompass such a large scope.

Persons interested in socially networking and working to develop the educational resources necessary to effect this outreach effort, are invited to contact any of the addresses above.

— Billie Jean Jones