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Words for Lesbian Visibility Day 2024

Jan blogs on the evolution of language and finding a comfortable way to describe herself.

Words are a wonderfully precise tool with plenty of choice, and I like to use the right word to be clear what I mean. Words Mean Things! Language evolves, people want new words to describe emerging changes. We now encounter words like "demiflux", "aero gender", "greysexual", and more. There's greater choice and accuracy for expression, without needing to stretch a word already in use, making an awkward fit.

Coming out at the age of 23, I struggled to find a comfortable word to describe myself. "Lesbian" still carried a lot of baggage in the 1980s, it felt shameful and pejorative and it was hard enough telling everyone without the stress of "which word". I'd tucked it away inside myself, terrified of exposure.

"Gay" felt less scary and more trendy. "Homosexual" seemed clunky and medicalised, and what else was there? 40 years later I've embraced many terms including "Dyke"! My cultural references include Sappho and her coterie of followers on Lesbos, so lesbian makes sense. Eventually, I stopped worrying about what I was called or called myself and concentrated on my actual life.

A lesbian is simply a female homosexual. We're exclusively same-sex attracted, even if we've had opposite sex relationships, if we've had a hysterectomy, or no longer produce large, immotile gametes. I mean sex, because without sex there's no sexuality. You may disagree, but if I showed you a picture of an elephant and you wanted to call it something else then I wouldn't be able to agree with you on

that either.

I will celebrate lesbians on our special day, raising a glass to women like Storme DeLaverie, the black lesbian who instigated the Stonewall uprising in 1969. You may have heard differently, but people who were there are still alive!