That’s Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Pansexual, Polyamorous, Trans (Transgender, Transsexual, Tranny), Queer, Queer-Friendly, Questioning, Eunuchs, Intersex, Other, Asexual, Androgynous, Allies, Friends, 2-Spirited, and Same Gender Loving. The Big Tent in the SIP domain (Sexuality / Sexual Orientation, Gender / Sexual Identity, and Sexual Practices), constructed through an initialism that piles up labels for categories in the domain.

In domains of sociocultural significance – foodstuffs and clothing are two others I’ve looked at – we see several common themes:

(1) There are folk categories and any number of more technical or specialized categorizations,
   (1a) each serving some purpose (the categories serve a role in, for instance, welcoming people to Pride events, speaking to them for social-service purposes like AIDS prevention, creating groups for political action or socialization, etc.),
   (1b) and each grounded in some set of beliefs and attitudes (in this case, medical, legal, religious, psychological, etc.).

(2) The lines between these are permeable, with categorizations moving back and forth between contexts of use and changing in time.

(3) The categories don’t cover the domain fully and aren’t always mutually exclusive.

(4) Though some of these categories are labeled, in ordinary or (semi)technical language, many taxons (especially the larger taxons, like SIP) are unlabeled.

(5) Ordinary speakers (and, usually, “scientific” or other specialized analysts) have access to the categories only through the labels, and are likely to assume that the labels are the categories (gay “means” so-and-so), to analytic and social confusion.

(6) The categorizations (and accompanying labels, as in the putative basic vocabulary in the initialism above) compete with one another and are often at cross purposes.

(7) The categorizations, especially at the higher levels, may be in dispute: do they represent (socioculturally or psychologically) real groupings?

(8) The labels pick up associations (or connotations) from their contexts of use, at least as individual speakers experience these, and so are promoted or disfavored.

Two cases in point: the story of homosexual (not in the SIP initialism above) and a bit of the story of gay.