The Power of Naming:

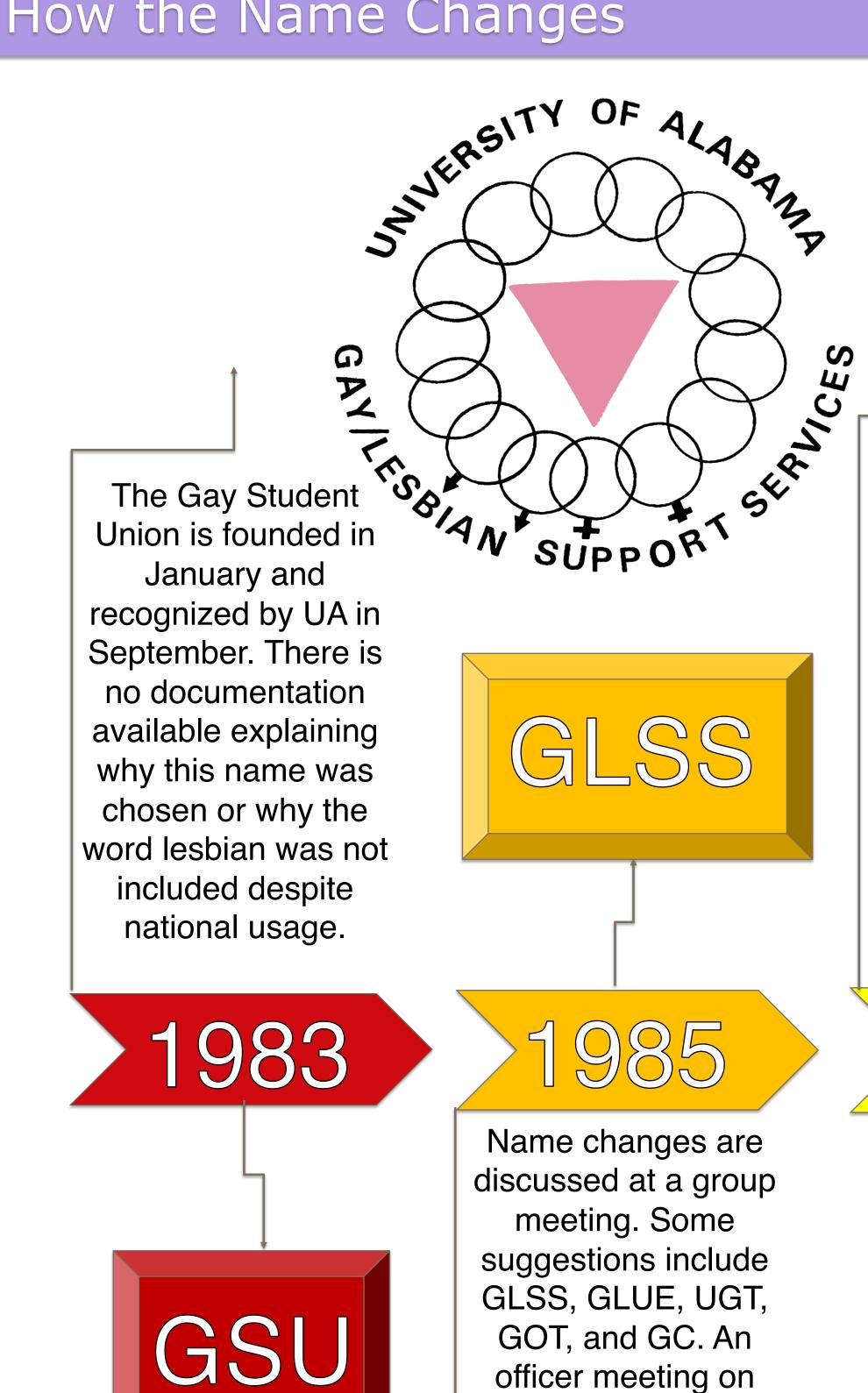
Language and the Construction of Queer Community

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How the Name Changes



There is rising dissent on the validity of "Support Services" as the name for a group that is failing to support non-white and non-male community members. Arguments lead to a vote, this time by the whole group, to replace "Support Services" with "Alliance." 1990

Gay/Lesbian Alliance

esbian isexual lliance GLBA

Bisexuality is

included in the

national acronym in

the 1990's. The

inclusion within the

UA organization was

likely influenced by

an inclusive national

discourse as well as

internal pressure

from the bisexual

members of the

group.

Transgender identity is included in the national acronym in the late 90s, putting the UA organization on track with national progress. This is the first time trans people are included in the name, but gender *identity* has been explicitly mentioned in the membership nondiscrimination policy since 1993.

1999

GLBTA

There is a gap in the available material for Campus." Their

Queer Women on Campus

QSA

2003

Spectrum is chosen as

the new name to align UA

with queer student

organizations across the

nation. By avoiding using

specific identifies within

the name, Spectrum

avoids unintentional

exclusion. Spectrum

indicates that all are

welcome without naming

a distinction between

queer and straight

identities.

Spectrum

2007

this iteration of the group. What is present is the formation of a new secondary group, "Queer Women on emergence fills in the gaps to show that there was internal tension, not about the name, but about function and inclusion.

Introduction

When presented with the opportunity to research an archival collection for the first time, I began by creating a timeline for personal use. I intended to use it as a tool through which I would be able to contextualize what I found in the archive. As my work progressed, I began to see the timeline connecting the actions of the group to the language shifts in the organization's name.

As a public relations student, the first thing I analyze in any organization is their internal relations and how they seek to define themselves. Then, I analyze how well that definition is being communicated externally. Finally, I look at how the organization is being perceived by the people they are reaching.

By analyzing the queer student organization at the University of Alabama, I learned about how they constructed queer community, how they attempted to serve that community, and what function the community played in their lives.

Conclusions

Shared language and the act of naming oneself are two of the central axes of the queer experience. They are part of discovery and acceptance of identity, as well as the discovery and construction of community. This is why I believe following linguistic shifts is an important part of examining our own queer communities on campus, locally, and nationally.

It is important to note that name changes represent more than what gets printed on flyers. The changing organization name is indicative of power and representation. The power given by the name should be reflective of forward progress toward inclusivity and greater democracy. That being said, names are as aspirational as they are powerful. They should represent our actions just as much as our intentions and desires.

REFERENCES

Miller-Stephens LGBTQ UA Student Organization collection, University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections

Frank Susko Papers, Birmingham Public Library, Department of Archives and Manuscripts





"One need only scan the room to realize that GLSS is not meeting the needs of many lesbians and non-white gay men in our campus community. If these people felt that GLSS was for them, they would be here."- The Lavender Tide, Vol.1, No.1





February 10th votes

to approve

Gay/Lesbian Support

Services as the new

name. All officers

present to vote are

male.

