

QUEERING IDENTITIES

From "I" to "We"

Identity is one of the most dominant terms in public discourse today: some observers would argue that we live in a time of **identity politics**, wherein issues of power, justice, and experience center on how we define ourselves as members of groups, including the name or names we or others use for such categories. Depending on one's convictions, such a central issue is either a sign of positive affirmation of diversity or a negative sign of divisiveness — and, of course, there are many positions between these polarities. Identity is the name or set of names we use to describe ourselves or others use to describe us, both to ourselves and to others. Notice a few things about this definition that might merit additional clarification or expansion: first, "name or set of names" — identity is always by its very definition **intersectional**, multiple, contingent, requiring that it acknowledge different aspects of any given person, though, depending on the context, one part of identity may be more salient or significant than another.

In this sense, the complexities of intersectional identities may echo some of the findings discussed in Lisa Diamond's theories of sexual desire and romantic attraction in the previous chapter. Even for those individuals who can state with a degree of self-certainty that, for example, they are men who have sexual desire exclusively for other men and romantic attraction only for women, it is doubtful that they could, if they were trying to be completely honest with themselves and with others, simply say, "I am gay" or "I am straight." We are now in a time in which such terms may not suffice for the multiple identities we may possess even in the realm of sexuality (or desire, understood more broadly) itself.

The second phrase in this definition of identity that needs a bit more elaboration is "we . . . or others use." Let's break it down a bit more. Those raised in the United States, especially middle-class, cisgender, straight, white people, tend to put a high premium on individual identity (except, of course, when such individuality seems to threaten the social order) and to believe that all persons have a right to express and enact their individual

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING AND VIEWING

Big Eden. Directed by Thomas Bezucha. Chaiken Films, 2000.

Desert Hearts. Directed by Donna Deitch. Samuel Goldwyn, 1986.

Kaufman, Gershen, and Lev Raphael. *Coming Out of Shame: Transforming Gay and Lesbian Lives*. New York: Doubleday, 1996.

Moonlight. Directed by Barry Jenkins. A24, 2016.

Ochs, Robyn, and Sarah Rowley, eds. *Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals around the World*. 2nd ed. Boston: Bisexual Resource Center, 2009.

Signorile, Michelangelo. *Outing Yourself: How to Come Out as Lesbian or Gay to Your Family, Friends, and Coworkers*. New York: Random House, 1995.

Word Is Out: Stories of Some of Our Lives. Directed by Nancy Adair et al. New Yorker Films, 1977.