

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT & TRADEMARK OFFICE

Applicant	:	San Francisco Women' Motorcycle Contingent
Mark	:	DYKES ON BIKES
Serial No.	:	78/281,746
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Commissioner for Trademarks  
P.O. Box 1451  
Alexandria, VA 22313-1451

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DECLARATION OF JESSE SHEIDLLOWER UNDER 37 C.F.R. § 2.20

I, Jesse Sheidlower, being warned that willful false statements and the like are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under 18 U.S.C. § 1001, and that such willful false statements and the like may jeopardize the validity of the application or document or any registration resulting therefrom, declare:

1. I received my AB with special honors in English Language and Literature from the University of Chicago in 1989, where I specialized in linguistics and the history of the English language. I did graduate work in the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic at Cambridge University. From 1991, I held various editorial positions (eventually becoming a Senior Editor) in the Random House Reference Department. While there, I was chiefly responsible for slang and new words. I also served as Project Editor of the *Historical Dictionary of American Slang*, a multivolume scholarly work, and I edited this book's entries for

*dyke* and *bulldyke*. In 1999, I became Principal Editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and since 2004, Editor-at-Large. At the OED, I run the American office and have responsibility for all American entries, continuing to specialize in slang. I am also the author of *The F-Word*, a scholarly book about the history of the word *fuck*. I have published and given numerous papers and talks about issues concerning slang and offensive language.

2. The word *dyke* has a long history in American English. The word is a shortening of *bulldyke(r)*, which is found in homosexual jargon at least as far back as 1906 and which is itself of uncertain origin. The short form *dyke* is found from the early 1930s. Both terms arose among homosexuals; they were not first applied by outsiders to homosexuals. Even at this time, the evidence suggests that the term was not derogatory in in-group use. For example, G. Legman's "The Language of Homosexuality: An American Glossary," printed as an appendix to G. V. Henry's *Sex Variants: A Study of Homosexual Patterns* (1941), one of the earliest glossaries of homosexual slang, includes an entry for *dyke*. This entry notes that the (rare) use of the word referring to male homosexual acts "carries an overtone of derogation", but makes no such comment about the common use of the word referring to lesbianism, thus implying its use among homosexuals referring to lesbianism was not regarded as derogatory.

Especially since the 1970s, *dyke* has been deliberately used as a positive term of self-reference by lesbians. In 1994, when I edited the relevant volume of the *Historical Dictionary of American Slang*, I wrote a note indicating that though the term was frequently disparaging, it was sometimes non-disparaging in recent use. I included


several quotations from mainstream sources to illustrate this non-disparaging use: the *Village Voice* in 1991 writing that a lesbian politician "makes a big pitch for the dyke vote"; *Newsweek* in 1992 quoting a lesbian saying "I'm not a fag...I'm a dyke", and the *Wall Street Journal* in 1993 observing that "Some lesbians prefer 'dyke' ...Lesbians who call themselves dykes 'don't care whether someone is offended with who they are. Dykes are rebellious, strong.'" There were many more such examples available, and the files of the *Oxford English Dictionary* contain many non-disparaging examples of *dyke*.

3. Today, the word *dyke* is frequently used in the lesbian community to evoke various positive aspects, including strength, pride, self-reliance, equality and the like. This use is exemplified by the very many events using "dyke" as part of their name, including many "Dyke Marches," the "DYKES ON BIKES" parade contingent, and its use in book titles, such as *Once upon a Dyke: New Exploits of Fairy Tale Lesbians*, a series by Alison Bechdel called *Dykes to Watch Out For*, *Dyke London* (a travel guide), *Diamonds are a Dyke's Best Friend*, and many others. It is particularly common in the academic community, along with *queer*. It is used as the name for political groups. It is used in personal advertisements. The widespread use of *dyke* in connection with community events, personal advertisements, political groups, popular book titles, and scholarly and academic discourse shows that its positive connotations are today generally and widely accepted among lesbians and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community.
4. Other negative terms have become used as positive terms of self-reference. However, in many of these cases, their use is still fraught. For example, *nigger* is widely used by some African-

Americans, but very many people within that community are upset by this, and feel that such use of the word is inappropriate and hurtful. This is not the case with *dyke*: while not all lesbians use the word, it is very widely viewed as an acceptable term of self-reference. Vanishingly few people feel that the word should not be used at all. In addition, this community is one that has been frequently subjected to verbal and other forms of abuse; thus, if the community itself regards the word *dyke* as a positive, then their choice for a term of self-identification should be given even more weight.

5. The San Francisco Women's Motorcycle Contingent has organized a "DYKES ON BIKES" event as part of the San Francisco Pride Parade for 26 years. This event is attended by hundreds of thousands of people from all over the world, all celebrating their pride as strong, independent people. Far from hiding under the stigma of an offensive term, the participants celebrate themselves by using this word in a context of great solidarity and power. The length of time the "DYKES ON BIKES" event has been held demonstrates that this is not a casual experiment, but a well-established and widely accepted event.
6. The San Francisco Women's Motorcycle Contingent uses *dykes* in their "DYKES ON BIKES" mark in a way that emphasizes the appropriation of a once-negative term for positive purposes. This use exemplifies how the term has been actively reclaimed. It is absolutely inconceivable that the term *dyke* in this context could be regarded by the LGBT community as derogatory, disparaging, or offensive to lesbian, bisexual, or transgender people.

All statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true.

Dated: 21 Apr. '05 By:   
Jesse Sheidlower  
Editor-at-Large  
Oxford English Dictionary