

Often words are adopted for use with a new meaning without first understanding the origin of the word. It does not mean that the definition of the word actually changes just that it is being used for another purpose, many times as a derogatory term.

One of the most derogatory words used today is faggot. However, do you know where it actually came from and what it means? Using derogatory terms to describe people is all too common in our society. There seems to be names for every race, sexuality, sex, and country of origin.

In terms of the gay community: Faggot.

Faggot. Origin 1250-1300; Middle English noun, British, Canadian, American

1. a bundle of sticks, twigs, or branches bound together and used as fuel, a fascine, a torch, etc.
2. a bundle; bunch.
3. a bundle of pieces of iron or steel to be welded, hammered, or rolled together at high temperature.
4. a ball of chopped meat, usually pork liver, bound with herbs and bread and eaten fried
5. to work hard : toil, to tire by strenuous activity : exhaust
6. *Extremely Disparaging and Offensive.* a contemptuous term used to refer to a male homosexual.
7. *Offensive.* a contemptible or dislikable person.

Firewood

As with any word, it is usually associated with people and situations. The “Old French” term for a bundle of sticks may have come from an Italian word conversion. When female heretics were burned at the stake in the 1500’s they were put to the “fire and faggot” as a punishment for being a heretic. If the individual repented, they had to wear an embroidered bundle of wood on their sleeve as a reminder of what their punishment would have been.

Meatloaf...It’s true

The economical state of the United Kingdom in the tenth century was just developing. This lack of a working economy forced the poor households to get creative with their food because they could not afford to throw anything away. The meatball or meatloaf was a mixture of organ meats that were usually thrown away. The scraps were mixed with herbs, cooked, and served with vegetables. The term is still in use and has been used for almost 1000 years in the United Kingdom.

Homosexual

"Male homosexual," 1914, American English slang (shortened form fag is from 1921), probably from earlier contemptuous term for "woman" (1590s), especially an old and unpleasant one, in reference to faggot.

It was not until the last 100 years that the term started to be associated with gay men as an insult.

Why resort to using derogatory terms? Psychology speaks for itself. When an individual resorts to putting someone down it stems from an inferiority complex or fear of the person that is being targeted. If the victim takes offense it validates the users complex and makes them feel superior. In reality, it does not accomplish anything as the user will still have an inferiority complex, but they will look for the next person that they can put down.

The tradition in the United States is to teach our children the value of name-calling and to use it when they are upset or feel threatened. When parents decide to teach their children name calling it is usually because it is being passed down from generation to generation.

A better lesson might be to teach children the harm in calling names and teach them to communicate properly instead of deflecting their insecurity.

What if the next time you hear someone use the word faggot you educate them and provide them with the real definition? Would we change the culture?

By hijacking words like this it creates social issues between different English speaking countries. Because one man's meatball is another man's homosexual. When used in or out of context it creates problems.

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References

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