



SIGN IN CREATE ACCOUNT

+ ENGLISH


 Video TV News Tech Rec Room Life Horoscopes
[Identity](#)

How Black Queers Made 'Sis' a Gender Neutral Term of Endearment

"Sis" is an evolved expression, rooted in the Christian church and revolutionized by queer Black people—and it's not a term everyone can or should use.

SR

By [Starrene Rhett Rocque](#)February 13, 2019, 12:21pm [Share](#) [Tweet](#) [Snap](#)

ART BY BREANNA WRIGHT

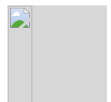
In [Browsing Black History](#), we celebrate Black History Month by exploring the origins of internet trends and icons popularized by Black cultural producers, too often left uncredited for their work.

On February 10, 2016, [an anonymous Quora user](#) asked, "Is it rude to call an African American Woman sister or sis?" To which user, De'Ontrey Reddish,

MORE LIKE THIS

[Identity](#)

What is Edging? The Art of Building Up to Extremely Intense Orgasms

[Identity](#)

What is Edging? The Art of Building Up to Extremely Intense Orgasms

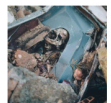


ANNA PULLEY

11.28.23

[Identity](#)

Inside the Cemetery Where the Dead Don't Rest in Peace



AURÉLIEN BUTTIN

11.27.23

replied, "It isn't an issue if you truly have developed a sibling-like bond. If you are saying it like, 'Right on, my sister,' it can come off as you're just a white person trying to fit in. But, it's nothing derogatory about it." Fast forward three years and there have been articles written that count sis among popular internet words to sound cool; Google Trends shows a growing interest in the term sis and tea sis; and the word is inescapable on Twitter.

You may also like



ADVERTISEMENT



There's a profound interest in sis. Truth is, it may seem like a novel term but it actually has roots deeply embedded in the Black church and queer communities. And despite its popularity due to digital appropriation, many believe the word is for and by African Americans exclusively.

Naima Muhammad co-host of the pop culture podcast, Tea With Queen and I, describes an unwelcome use of the word sis online. Muhammad got irritated with one Facebook commenter to their show's page who used the word sis in a condescending manner toward her. She posted an article about how lynching is now considered a federal crime, to which a commenter said, "Naima, what I'm saying is murder is already illegal and is a federal crime along with credit card fraud and kidnapping and child porn. Regardless of how you do it, you still committed the crime. So I don't know what you're getting at, sis."

Naima muted the post and decided not to respond to the commenter, but she was so irritated that she utilized a segment of her podcast, where she and her co-host "throw someone in the pit," to react.

"You're not my sister, don't sis me if you're not a Black woman or a person impacted by misogynoir," Muhammad said on air. "Because if you

Identity

The UK Appoints a 'Minister for Common Sense'. No, Seriously

JAMIE CLIFTON

11.15.23



Identity

Some Of Us Hate Being Touched After Sex. Why?

VINCENZO LIGRESTI

11.10.23



Identity

My Friend Is in an Unhealthy Relationship. How Do I Tell Her?

VINCENZO LIGRESTI

11.09.23



understood sisterhood in the way in which Black people say it and how we say sis to each other, then I wouldn't have to explain to you why this fucking lynching federal hate crime thing is something that's important to me.”

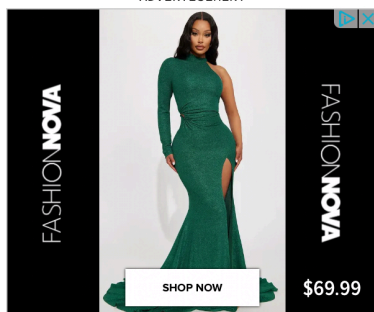
ADVERTISEMENT



According to [Merriam-Webster](#), *sis* is a derivative of *sister* that originated before 900 AD. *Systir*, one of many variants, is Middle English. Other variants include *zuster* (Dutch), *schwester* (German), *soror* (Latin), and *siur* (Old Irish). The most commonly used application of *sister* is a female offspring having parents in common, but it is also used to acknowledge a member of a women's religious order that includes the Roman Catholic and the Christian church.

Nicole R. Holliday an assistant linguistics professor at Pomona College asserts that while we have a shared understanding of what words mean, we process meaning, especially for things that are more social, in its context. She believes *sis*—in addition to being a religious title—represents kinship and power amongst marginalized groups, especially in the LGBTQ community.

ADVERTISEMENT



“For [gay men] it's [sis] subversive because they challenge hegemonic masculinity,” Holliday says. “By calling each other women, they're taking back the power. ‘Well, fuck this structure. We have our own thing.’ It's kind of like the n-word within Black communities or like women calling each other ‘bitch,’” she says.

In its most recent iteration, we've seen *sis* go from a devout term with religious overtone to Black LGBTQ nomenclature that captures a sense of endearment and communalism sacred to the community.

“I think that the thing about the internet and the meme culture is that usually, it tends to try to tackle really, really big subjects with one word like *sis*, right?,” Myles E. Johnson, Afropunk's senior content editor tells Broadly. “So I think the real thing that's happening around the word *sis* is this gender

revolution, that kind of non-binary conversation.”

ADVERTISEMENT



Johnson, who grew up in Atlanta, which is considered the “the epicenter of the gay South,” picked up the word sis in salons frequented by what he describes as feminine gay men, cis women, and trans women. “I really think there’s this reckoning happening about who owns femininity now, and who owns Black femininity, and who owns the capital in the economy that birthed out of Black femininity,” he contends.

Adding, “To put it plainly, it’s like Beyoncé used to be the face of it [Black femininity], right? And the Black gay men who would choreograph her or who’d pick out her clothes, or the Black women who may not be able to be as embraced by the mainstream, aka white society; maybe they’re helping her in another way that’s still behind the scenes. And I think right now is kind of reckoning of like, OK, what is Black femininity? This word sis is so gendered and now it’s being challenged.”

On September 15, 2018, Twitter user Brandon Pledger tweeted, “If guys is gender neutral then so is sis. Thanks for coming to my Ted Talk.”

For More Stories Like This, Sign Up for Our Newsletter

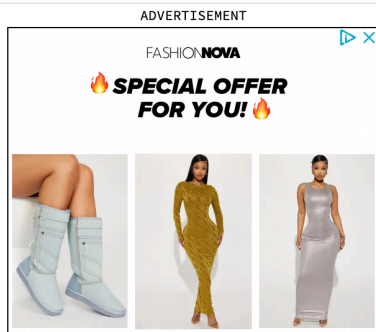
Pledger’s tweet was shared over 106,000 times, favorited over 370,000 times and there were over 1,000 responses with some protests and others agreeing. The push for sis to become gender neutral or even universal isn’t

Pledger’s tweet was shared over 106,000 times, favorited over 370,000 times and there were over 1,000 responses with some protests and others agreeing. The push for sis to become gender neutral or even universal isn’t simple, especially when it comes to people who might not appreciate the pronoun being applied to them (i.e. cishet men) or who are peripheral to Black culture. Semantics matter but when the gatekeepers of a term continue to evolve, the lines between who can and cannot use it can get blurry—especially with a word as multifaceted as sis.

According to Johnson, the best way to find out if you should or shouldn’t be using sis—and who it can be directed towards—is a matter of doing your research. “I think you should just always talk about what you know. I think the reason why you see it [spreading] is because Black internet culture is really the internet culture, just like Black culture is American culture,” he says.

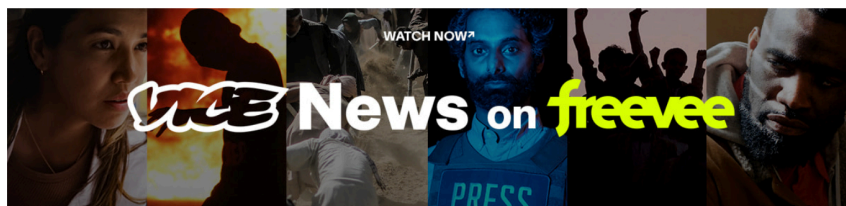
ADVERTISEMENT

According to Johnson, the best way to find out if you should or shouldn't be using sis—and who it can be directed towards—is a matter of doing your research. “I think you should just always talk about what you know. I think the reason why you see it [spreading] is because Black internet culture is really the internet culture, just like Black culture is American culture,” he says.



“You see that word a lot because we're going to run everything culturally. It's not going to transform differently; that's just going to communicate negligently. So if you see something you think is cool, then it's OK to mind your business. I'm not really into the exchange and appreciate, I'm just like, 'mind your business.'”

TAGGED: [CULTURE](#), [MEMES](#), [LINGUISTICS](#), [SIS](#), [BEYONCÉ](#), [LGBTQ](#), [TERMS](#), [LANGUAGE](#), [BROADLY CULTURE](#), [FEMINISME](#)

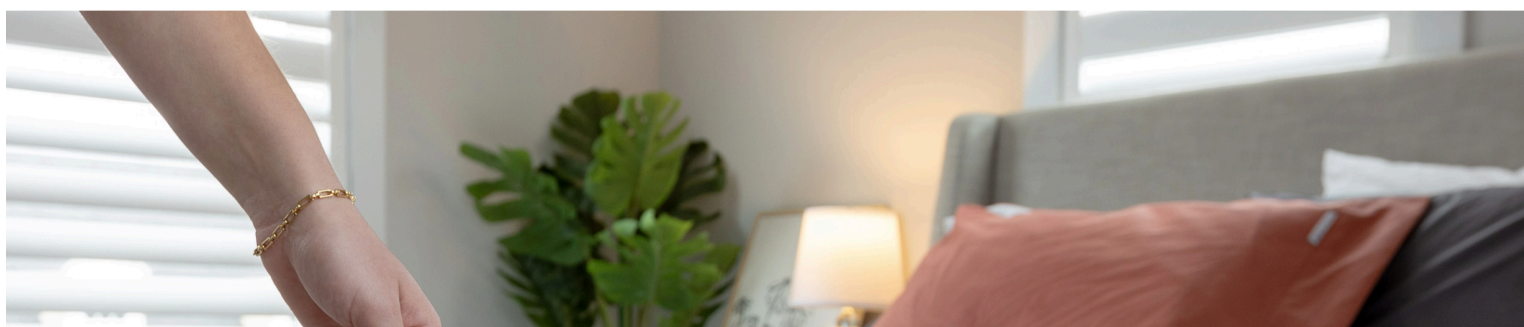


ORIGINAL REPORTING ON EVERYTHING THAT MATTERS IN YOUR INBOX.

Subscribe

By signing up, you agree to the [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#) & to receive electronic communications from Vice Media Group, which may include marketing promotions, advertisements and sponsored content.

PARTNER CONTENT





This Duvet Cover Solves the Most Annoying Thing About Making a Bed

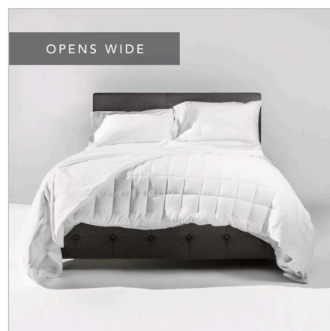
PRESENTED BY



QuickZip's mission is to reboot "the most reviled home essentials" and make them easy, breezy, and of course, comfy.

So you want to do your laundry. Valiant! And yet, as you embark on the arduous duvet cover shuffle, a ritual that makes wrestling with a greased pig seem like a walk in the park, your sanity takes a vacation. Trying to swap out a duvet cover is like attempting to fold a fitted sheet—an exercise in futility that would make even the most Sisyphean tasks seem like a breeze. Armed with nothing but determination and a pint of sweat, you quickly realize that duvet covers have a mind of their own, and attempts to put a fresh one on leave you tangled in a labyrinth of fabric. It's like trying to put socks on an octopus.

So why, in the name of all things cozy, hasn't someone solved this conundrum? We can put a man on the moon, but can we conquer the duvet cover? It's a first-world problem, sure, but in the grand scheme of annoyances, it ranks somewhere between a persistent mosquito and a slow internet connection. Still: Someone, somewhere, needed to unleash their genius and create the duvet cover revolution we never knew we needed—and that someone was QuickZip.




QUICKZIP

New-Way Duvet Cover (Queen)

\$140 at QuickZip

[Buy Now →](#)

QuickZip was born of problem-solving ingenuity, an “innovative approach to bedding,” if you will, according to the company. QuickZip calls fitted sheets and duvet covers “two of the most reviled home essentials,” and we don’t disagree; of course we want our bed decked out in super-soft sheets and an ultra-cozy duvet cover, and the typically twisted bedding industry knows we won’t go without regardless of the struggle in folding and applying these elusive beasts. But QuickZip reinvented the fitted sheet with a unique two-piece design comprised of a “Zip Sheet” and a “Base,” making changing your sheets a speedy and efficient process whilst simultaneously ensuring that your fitted sheets stay put on your mattress, thanks to vertical elastic and the zippable design.



QUICKZIP
Fitted Sheets (Queen)

\$145 at QuickZip

[Buy Now →](#)

Ditto the duvet cover, which utilizes an extra-long zipper, clips, and hidden vents to make changing your comforter cover, adjusting it, and keeping it in place wildly easy. This is especially handy if your bed is in a tight space that makes moving around your mattress tricky, whether that’s your tiny Brooklyn studio apartment or your #vanlife VW camper. “We believe this is an opportunity ... to transform the way you approach one of life’s daily annoyances—your bed sheets—in a pursuit of a more comfortable and hassle-free existence,” the brand explains.

So, what are you waiting for? It’s your choice between years of wrestling with your duvet cover, or a better way.

Head over to [QuickZip](#) to peruse its problem-solving bedding.

The Rec Room staff independently selected all of the stuff featured in this story. Want more reviews, recommendations, and red-hot deals? [Sign up for our newsletter.](#)

PRESENTED BY I-D

PARTNER CONTENT

YOU MAY LIKE

