

## **METAPHORS OF IDENTITY**

### **THE CASE OF SPANISH BEARS**

Bears constitute a strong, well developed and well organized group within the wider gay community. The prototypical bear is stout, hairy and straight acting. On the one hand, bears are a challenge to the gay stereotype. On the other hand, they tap heterosexual ideals of masculinity in order to create an alternative, larger-than-life version of it (cf. Wright 1997, 2001 on bear culture; Sáez 2005 for some specificities of the bear movement in Spain).

Conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Lakoff 1987) acts here as a powerful identity building device. It enables the group to determine their self-representation and can achieve an empowering effect. Most importantly, metaphor provides the group with a name. Names stand metonymically for categories (cf. Kövecses & Radden 1998: 42 f.). They bring a category into being and are crucial for identity, visibility and recognition. The naming act becomes, simultaneously, a foundational act.

The primary bear metaphor unfolds into a remarkably consistent network (Trim 2007) giving rise to a symbolic space where bears coexist and interact with wolves, otters, chasers and other creatures.

The bear movement originates in America and is exported to Spain and other countries together with the structuring metaphor network. This gives rise to a unidirectional cultural, conceptual and formal linguistic hybridization. This is part of a more general phenomenon. The Western world is converging in the area of sexuality within the frame of an American-led globalization. Spain participates of this trend, especially for less conventional sexuality forms, which used to be inexpressible or, rather, nefand in the country's tradition (cf. Llamas, Vidarte & Andreu 1999).

## References

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