

# GLOSSARY FOR PSYCHOLOGY OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION

## by Janis Bohan, Ph.D.

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*Note: The acronym "LGB" is shorthand for lesbian/gay/bisexual. It is used throughout this list for the sake of brevity. The term "LESBIGAY" serves the same function.*

### **Affectional Orientation**

A recent term used to refer to variations in object of emotional and sexual attraction. The term is preferred by some over "sexual orientation" because it indicates that the feelings and commitments involved are not solely (or even primarily, for some people) sexual. The term stresses the affective, emotional component of attractions and relationships, including heterosexual as well as lgb orientation.

### **AIDS**

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. AIDS affects the immune system and makes one susceptible to a wide range of opportunistic infections. The disease is caused by HIV, the human immunodeficiency virus.

### **Amazon**

A term that connotes either a strong, self-sufficient woman or a woman perceived as dominant, masculine, and warlike. Thus, the terms can be either laudatory or derogatory, depending on context. Often used among lesbians in the first sense to affirm lesbians' independence and power. According to early Greek and Spanish belief, Amazons were an ancient tribe of female warriors.

### **Biological Sex**

The dichotomous distinction between female and male based on physiological characteristics, especially chromosomes and external genitalia.

### **Bisexual**

A person whose affectional and sexual orientation is to members of both sexes (either serially or simultaneously). Sometimes referred to as "ambisexual".

### **Butch and Femme**

Terms referring to gender stereotyped roles of "masculine" and "feminine." The primary use of the term is in describing roles assumed by some lesbian couples. "Butch" describes a woman who assumes stereotypically "masculine" behavior, mannerisms and dress. "Femme" describes a woman who behaves in a stereotypically "feminine" way. More broadly, the terms (especially butch) are sometimes used to refer to gay men.

Sharply defined butch and femme roles were common among lesbians in the 1950's, particularly among working class women whose social life was centered in gay bars. These roles declined in prominence with the emergence of the women's movement in the 1960's and 1970's. Some observers believe the roles are enjoying a resurgence, through for different reasons than might initially have motivated them.

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### **Camp**

Camp is exaggeration, burlesque, poking fun. In LGB circles, people (especially gay men) may be described as "camp" or "campy" if they behave in a manner that exaggerates gay mannerisms or stereotypes. Such exaggeration is often powerful in its ability to reveal the absurdity of gender expectations..

### **Closet, In the Closet, Clostod**

The term used to describe a lesbian, gay male, or bisexual who hides her/his sexual orientation for fear of the consequences if her/his true identity were known.

### **Coming Out (of the Closet)**

The sequence of events through which individuals come to recognize their sexual orientation and disclose it to others. Technically, both heterosexual and LGB people would come to this realization and reveal it to others. However, because heterosexuality is taken for granted, and there is generally no conscious process of discovery or disclosure for straight people, the term is only applied to lesbians, gay males, and bisexuals.

### **Community/LGB Community**

The usually informal social, emotional, and political network within which LGB individuals create and maintain contacts with others. The community is an amorphous collection of individuals, couples, and groups that creates opportunities for the sort of interaction and mutual support that are provided for straight people by mainstream institutions. The community, too, has its institutions, traditions and rituals: churches, community centers, bars, bookstores, LGB choruses and symbols. Close friendships, public and private social gatherings, educational opportunities, cultural events, political activities, and assorted formal and informal gatherings provide a sense of belonging to a community that many LGB people refer to as "family".

### **Drag**

Being "in drag" involves overt violation of gender role prescriptions. Most obviously, it means dressing in clothing usually prescribed for the other sex; beyond this, one also mimics the make-up, hairstyles, and mannerisms of the other sex. Drag Queens are men who appear in public in drag, often performing at gay or LGB events. Women are less often described as being in drag, since women are allowed to dress and act in "masculine" ways without the same approbation as men receive for such gender bending.

### **Dyke**

Slang term for a lesbian, usually having the connotation of traditionally "masculine" appearance, dress, speech, and manner. In this meaning, it is a stronger form of "butch" and is often intended to convey contempt. The most powerful form is "bull dyke" or sometimes "bull dagger".

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### **Essentialism**

In reference to sexual orientation, this approach argues that one's sexual orientation is a core part of her/his being and identity (whether its origins were biological, social, or both). Thus, an individual who experiences same-sex (or other-sex) emotional and sexual attraction will develop an identity centered on that sexual orientation. Further, the approach argues that homosexuality (and heterosexuality and bisexuality) thus defined has always existed, across history and across cultures. This view is contrasted with social constructionism.

### **Faggot/Fag**

Slang term for a gay man. The term faggot means a bundle of sticks, and its use to refer to gay men apparently derives from the time when men accused of homosexual acts were burned along with the witches. This origin is reinforced by the term "flaming faggot", a reference to extreme or exaggerated "femininity". Like dyke, the term has historically had a negative connotation, but is now often used among gay men themselves as an affirmation of gay pride.

### **Fairy**

Another term for a gay man, perhaps deriving from the "feminine" qualities stereotypically attributed to gay men.

### **Femme**

See Buth/Femme.

### **Gay**

The term applied to a person (especially a man) who is emotionally and sexually attracted to members of the same sex. In some cases, the term is applied to people who have same-sex sexual relations even if they do not identify themselves as gay ("He's gay, he just can't admit it"). On the other hand, people may be said to be gay whether or not they have sexual relations with a member of the same sex ("I was always gay, I just never did anything about it"). The most specific definition reserves this term for those who identify themselves as gay and as members of the gay community.

Traditionally, "gay" has been the generic term to refer to both women and men. However, it has also been used to refer to men only (as the word "man" has been used to refer to us all). Because this generic use makes women invisible, the current preference in much of the LGB community is for the term "gay" to refer to gay men (often "gay men" or "gay males" is used to further clarify the meaning of the term), and "lesbians" to refer to women. This position is shared by the American Psychological Association.

### **Gender/Gender Role**

"Masculine" and "feminine". The attitudes and behaviors one is expected (and socialized) to exhibit based on one's biological sex. Gender is the socialized

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consequence of our belief that men and women are and should be different in a wide range of behaviors and experiences. The complex of those expectations constitutes the gender role: the "feminine" role details how women should be, and the "masculine" role defines appropriate behavior for men.

### **Gender Bending**

Sometimes called "Gender Blending". Any form of behavior that challenges traditional, stereotypical expectations for "gender appropriate" behavior. LGB individuals engage in gender bending/blending by virtue of their involvement with members of the same sex, because this violates "appropriate" (i.e. heterosexual) pairings. Other forms of gender bending (e.g. cross-dressing, "flaming fairy" or "bull dyke" behavior, exaggerated cross-sex mannerisms, and so forth) may be particularly offensive to some people, but are often seen by the LGB community as intentional affirmations of the freedom to bend gender rules.

Some argue that LGB identities pose a threat precisely because they challenge the necessity for traditional roles. In this view, the real fear is that traditional roles may be lost if LGB people are allowed to exercise this freedom.

### **Heterophilia**

From the Greek hetero (other) and philia (love). This term is an alternative to heterosexual, preferred by some because it stresses the love between two women and men people rather than sexual nature of the relationship.

### **Heterosexual**

From the Greek hetero, meaning other. The term refers to an affectional and sexual orientation toward members of the other sex.

Generally, people identify as and are deemed by other to be heterosexual even if they have had some homosexual contact. In most research, people are simply asked their sexual orientation and those with a predominantly heterosexual pattern self-identify as straight (hence, many studies include "straight" people who might be better be classified as bisexual). However, in research studies where more explicit information is sought, "a little bit of lavender" (or incidental homosexual contact) is often enough to earn the label homosexual or bisexual. Apparently, the assumption is that if one ever had homosexual relations, that must be her/his "true" identity.

### **Heterosexism**

The belief that heterosexual identity and behavior are normal and legitimate, whereas any other sexual orientation is deviant, perverse, abnormal, dangerous. Institutionalized heterosexism occurs where social institutions assume the legitimacy of heterosexuality and support it with public policies, rituals, and resources while ignoring, demeaning, or even punishing other sexual orientations.

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### **Homophilia**

Taken from the Greek homo (same) and philia (love), this term is an alternative to homosexual. Some prefer this term because it stresses the love between people rather than the sexual nature of same-sex relationships.

### **Homophobia**

Technically, irrational fear of homosexuality (from the Greek, homos, same + phobias, fear). The term has come to refer to an aversion to and prejudice and discrimination against lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, their sexual practices, lifestyles, and beliefs.

### **Homosexual**

From the Greek homo, meaning same. This is a clinical term for a person whose affectional and sexual orientation is toward members of the same sex. Although technically it includes both lesbians and gay males, the term is most often interpreted as referring to males along (as in "homosexuals are effeminate", or "homosexuals are effeminate" or "homosexuals are at high risk from contracting HIV").

In general, homosexual is used as if it referred to a group of people who are (and always have been) exclusively homosexual in their sexual orientation. In reality, a very large percentage of people who identify as lesbian or gay have also had emotional and sexual relations with members of the other sex, as well.

The term is not preferred among many LGB people and many of those who work with LGB issues for two reasons: 1) It is a clinical term, long used to pathologize LGB identity; and 2) It emphasizes the sexual aspect of LGB experience, disregarding the multi-faceted nature of LGB identity.

### **Internalized Homophobia**

The psychological consequence of living in a homophobic (or heterosexist) society, this term refers to a hatred of homosexuality internalized by LGB people themselves. It is reinforced by fears of verbal and physical aggression, potential loss of friends, family, status, job, housing, and child-custody, and other negative consequences that attach to being identified as LGB. Internalized homophobia may manifest as self-denigration, as verbal or physical aggression toward other LGB people, as hatred of qualities stereotypically attributed to LGB, and so forth.

### **LGB**

(or LBG or GLB). A shorthand term for lesbian/gay/bisexual. Lesbigay is often used in a similar manner. Occasionally LGBT or GLBT is used to include transgendered people. Queer is a rough synonym, acceptable among many in the LGBT community.

### **Lesbian**

A woman who is emotionally and sexually attracted to other women. The term comes from the isle of Lesbos, where the poet, Sappho, established a

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community of women in the 7th century BC. Much of Sappho's poetry spoke of love for women.

Currently, the term lesbian is popular in many segments of the LGB community, and is the term deemed appropriate by the APA to designate homosexual women. It is preferred as a term that makes women clearly visible in LGB issues, acknowledging that lesbian issues are not entirely the same as gay men's issues. However, some members of the LGB community do not prefer this term. Some believe it is too political and may be divisive (why separate ourselves from gay men?). Others feel that it sounds too clinical or pathological.

### **Lesbigay**

Shorthand for lesbian/bisexual/gay.

### **Life Partner/Partner**

The person with whom one shares a committed relationship. Comparable in some ways to "spouse" or "lover" in heterosexual relationships, such partnerships between LGB people may include shared housing and financial resources, a daily life and social activities that are closely intertwined, emotional and sexual intimacy, a commitment to nurture the relationship, and intention to remain together, agreements regarding sexual activities outside the relationship, and presentation (at least within the LGB community) as a couple. There may be a formal ceremony of commitment. Variation among such partnerships is vast, and a given relationship may include any number of these (and/or other) elements. Many of the differences between these and heterosexual pairings arise from social and cultural institutions that treat LGB relationships differently from heterosexual ones. Others derive from the absence of prescribed gender roles within LGB partnerships.

### **Lover**

Traditionally the term has been used among LGB people to refer to a primary partner, with or without commitment to a long-term partnership. The term is rejected by many LGB people because it implies that the relationship is purely sexual, thus neglecting the many other facets of the relationship and reinforcing stereotypes about LGB relationships.

### **Out, Out of the Closet**

The state of being aware of and open about one's sexual orientation. The term is almost exclusively applied to LGB people, because straight people automatically "out" as a result of heterosexist assumptions (i.e. you are assumed to be heterosexual; only LGB identity needs to be discovered or revealed). People can be "out" in varying degrees; some are out only to themselves, some are out to their family, some are out in their work, one may be out to some friends and not to others, and so forth.

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### **Outing, To "Out" someone**

Revealing the sexual orientation of someone else without their consent. Some activists have argued that it is important for powerful and important LGB people to be visible, and that when such people choose to remain closeted, we all suffer. Using this rationale, they publically expose the sexual orientation of people who themselves had chosen to remain closeted. Less blatant forms of outing also occur, as when a person mentions the name of someone she/he knows to the LGB, thus inadvertently revealing that person's sexual orientation to people who might otherwise not be aware of it, and who the individual might not have chosen to tell.

Most people in the LGB community do not advocate outing in the intentional, politically motivated sense mentioned first. However, the other form of outing occurs frequently, as people share stories about their lives, seek to come to know their community, try to make new contacts, and so forth. Straight people, of course, are outed regularly; the sharing of information about sexual orientation is only a risk for LGB, for whom even inadvertent and apparently innocent outing can be damaging.

### **Queen**

A gay man, especially one who is particularly "feminine" in manner and dress. The term is usually used by others derogatorily, but may be used by gays themselves as an affirmation of their comfort with violating norms for "masculine" behavior.

### **Queer**

A slang term traditionally used to refer to lesbians and gay men; increasingly it refers to all alternative sexual orientations and identities (lesbian, gay, and bisexual; often it also includes transgendered). Historically a derogatory term, this term has been assumed by LGB (and transgendered) people as a term of pride used among themselves, reflecting their shared freedom to engage in gender bending.

### **Sexual Orientation**

One's sexual orientation is defined by who are the objects of one's emotional and sexual attraction. While the term emphasizes the sexual component of interpersonal relationship, in reality any sexual orientation involves a wide range of feelings, behaviors, experiences, and commitments.

### **Social Constructionism**

In reference to sexual orientation, this approach argues that "homosexuality" (as well as "heterosexuality" and "bisexuality") as we understand them are products of particular historical and cultural forces rather than being universal and immutable categories of human experience. Although sexual activity among people of the same sex may always have occurred, this approach argues, such behavior has not always been viewed as we view it, nor has one's identity always

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been based on one's sexual activities. The meaning of the behavior, then, varies across time and across cultures

Further, one's identity as homosexual (or heterosexual or bisexual) is seen as a product of similar forces. If the culture did not define identity by sexual orientation, neither would we define ourselves in that manner. Thus, sexual orientation is no inherently a core, immutable part of identity, but comes to be experienced in that way because the culture defines it thus. This view is contrasted with essentialism.

### **Sodomy**

From the Biblical town, Sodom, which was destroyed as punishment from God for its sinful ways. Some interpretations believe the sin was homosexuality; other interpretations argue that it was inhospitality or rape. In its broadest sense, the term sodomy refers to any "unnatural" sex act, that is, any sex act that was not directed toward reproduction. Thus oral sex by anyone, masturbation, and anal sex would all be considered sodomy, regardless of who performed these acts. The term has taken on a narrower meaning, usually referring to anal sex only. In many situations, sodomy is synonymous with homosexual sex (where "homosexual" means gay male sex). Thus, laws against sodomy are prosecuted as laws against homosexuality (mostly male).

### **Straight**

A slang term historically referring to someone who is generally conforming to cultural norms, conventional in their behavior. Its most frequent current use is in the context of sexual orientation, where it refers to heterosexual identity.

### **Transvestite**

A person who dresses in clothing deemed appropriate for the other sex, deriving sexual gratification from this practice. Some sources refer to any cross-dressing as transvestitism, but most reserve the term for people who are conventional in other areas of their lives and who engage in cross-dressing in well-defined and circumscribed circumstances. Most commonly, transvestites in this latter sense are heterosexual, often married with children.

### **Transsexual/Transgendered**

In most sources, these terms are nearly interchangeable, with both terms referring to individuals who have chosen to live fully the life of the sex other than their own biological/birth sex. They express a feeling of being "in the wrong body" and choose to change their sex/gender identity completely, undergoing hormone treatments and surgery to give them the correct body, as well as changing their behaviour, hair style, dress, mannerisms, and so forth.

The distinction between transsexual and transgendered rests in the meaning given these feelings and the changes they induce. The term transsexual focuses on the physical and sexual aspects of one's identity. Transgendered, on the other hand, focuses on the broader psychological and social meaning of being a man or a woman. The latter perhaps more accurately describes the feeling that these

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individual express of wanting to live as the other gender, not merely to become the other sex physically. Some transgendered people do not undergo physical changes, choosing instead to live as the other sex while retaining the physical body of their birth sex.

Transsexual/transgendered people represent a dimension entirely different from sexual orientation. For example, a male-to-female transgendered person may, subsequent to the undergoing a sex change, form relationships with men. Such relationships are heterosexual according to the social roles (gender) and the external genitalia of the partners, although both are genetically male. If the same person formed relationships with women, those would be lesbian relationships according to the external genitalia and social roles of the people involved, even though they are genetically of different sexes. Other such possibilities illustrate the complexity of defining sex/gender and sexual orientation.

In some sources, the transsexual and transgender are specifically distinguished from each other. In this interpretation, transsexual is reserved for those who undergo a complete sex change, whereas transgendered refers to anyone who blurs traditional gender lines: transsexuals, transvestites, cross-dressers, drag queens, butch lesbians, etc.

### **Woman-Identified-Woman**

This term is used to refer to women whose primary emotional commitment is to other women. In many cases, this also implies romantic and sexual commitments; in other cases, the term is used to include women who are committed to women and women's issues without same-sex sexual involvement.