

## Language and sexuality

### July 11: Historical background

#### Gershorn Legman (1941) “The language of homosexuality: An American glossary”

Some examples of terms “used exclusively by homosexuals” (in 1941) from Legman’s glossary:

**auntie** – a derogatory term for a middle-aged or elderly homosexual

**basket** – the scrotum, or, rather, the size of the testicles and scrotum as seen or felt through the trousers.

**blind** – an uncircumcised penis

**(playing) checkers** – moving from seat to seat in a motion-picture theatre to find a willing youth...

**church mouse** – a homosexual who frequents churches and cathedrals in order to *grope* or *cruise* the young men there.

**come out** – to become progressively more and more exclusively homosexual with experience.

**daddy** – a lesbian of the masculine type, especially one who lives or consorts with a lesbian of the feminine type

**double-life man** – an actively bisexual man, who can, and does, have pleasurable sexual relations with both sexes.

**drag queen** – a professional female impersonator

**flaming** – obviously homosexual, using cosmetics, wearing flamboyant clothes and suede or high-heeled shoes and generally affecting exaggeratedly feminine mannerism in order to announce and attract attention to one’s homosexuality (...*flaming queen* – homosexual who attempts thus to attract attention and drum up trade.

**ga-ga** – 1. the first of the ‘seven recognized stages of homosexuality, from *ga-ga* to the “deeper tones” of lavender. (There do not seem to be terms for each stage, and it is possible that seven distinct stages are not actually thought to exist, the phrase being merely a way of indicating the progressive nature of homosexuality.) 2. An immature or inexperienced homosexual. 3. The preliminaries of arousal between two homosexuals who enjoy sexual intimacy with each other and are therefore looked down upon by many experienced homosexuals (compared *ki-ki*)

**gay**- An adjective used almost exclusively by homosexuals to denote homosexuality, sexual attractiveness, promiscuity...or lack of restraint, in a person, place or party.

**incest** – A sexual liaison between two homosexuals, such an association being held in comparative contempt by most homosexuals. Compare *ki-ki*

**ki-ki** (IPA = [kaj kaj]) – A homosexual male who is sexually attracted only to other homosexuals, or who engages in an affair with another homosexual for want of the money or personal attractiveness necessary for contact with heterosexuals.

**RFD queen** – A homosexual who lives in the country or in a small town, and who has homosexual impulses and desires, but who does not understand the argot and ways, or know the habits and places of congregation of the homosexual fraternity in cities and metropolitan centers. From *Rural Free Delivery*

**seafood** – Generic for sailors; a term used by male homosexuals.

**slay** – to injure a homosexual by dishing the dirt about him or informing on him.

**straight** – not a clip-artist or a phoney, also employed as meaning not homosexual. **to go straight** is to cease homosexual practices and to indulge -- usually to re-indulge -- in homosexuality

**(knowing the) words and music** – to use or recognize typically homosexual locutions (such as *gay* and *camp*), suggesting that one is homosexual or understands the other person to be so.

### David Sonenschein (1969) “The homosexual’s language”

“sex terms” – terms related to sexual activity or sexual organs

“role terms” – aspects, forms, and patterns of behavior and orientation (e.g. *nelly*, *queen*)

redirection – Here the form remains but the meaning changes from a heterosexual referent to a homosexual one. An example of a redirected role term is ‘bitch,’ meaning a male homosexual with certain unpopular characteristics and style though not necessarily effeminate.

	Legman (1941)	Sonenschein (1969)	Cory (1963)	Strait (1964)	Gould (1965)
sex terms	39%	36%	40%	23%	35%
role terms	61%	64%	60%	77%	65%
N =	(316)	(74)	(89)	(127)	(467)

Comparison of general vocabularies with subject community (Sonenschein 1969)

	same	redirected	unique
sex terms	23%	8%	5%
role terms	7%	12%	45%

Relation of homosexual terms to heterosexual usage in subject community (Sonenschein 1969) [subject community = city in Southwestern US]

	same	redirected	unique
sex terms	71%	41%	11%
role terms	29%	37%	89%

Internal shifts of homosexual terms in relation to heterosexual usage (Sonenschein 1969)

## Gayspeak (1981)

Joseph Hayes: “Gayspeak” involves three subtypes:

secret setting (conveying sexuality covertly)

social setting (expressing gayness in gay contexts)

radical-activist setting (language specific to gay male and lesbian activists)

James Darsey: “Gayspeak: A response”

Darsey’s theorem (Kulick 1999): “The fact that gays do X doesn’t make X gay”

## Polari:

1. Oh, varda well the omee-palone ajax who just trolled in – her with the cod lally-drags and goolie ogle fakes. Varda her naff riah, nanti pots in the cupboard, dear. She’s with the trade your mother charvaed yesterday. Nanti that! Some omees have nanti taste! (adapted from *Fantabulosa!: A dictionary of Polari and gay slang* by Paul Baker. London: Continuum 2002)

2. Cant the parlary in the Bungereies, cant the parlary in the charvering carseys and the drags. Una lexicon peroney, and the bona lavs of dolly parlary can be detected by the hearing cheats of all those incognitos and margeries in Eine. Tell your bencoves and beanpeas, when acting the bougereau quality or doing the rights, our lavs of parlary will bespangle us like natty fakements, and do the rights to all those mace gloaks who cant the naff and still expect the parkering ninty of the high camps existence. (from: Ian Lucas, “The color of his eyes: Polari and the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence” *Queerly Phrased* ed. by Livia and Hall. Oxford 1997.)

Polari numbers:

½	medza
1	una, oney
2	doeey
3	tray
4	quarter
5	chinker
6	say
7	say oney, setter
8	say doeey, otter
9	say tray, nobber
10	daiture
11	long dedger, lepta
12	kenza