

Pascale Smorag

From Closet Talk to PC Terminology : Gay Speech and the Politics of Visibility

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Référence électronique

Pascale Smorag, « From Closet Talk to PC Terminology : Gay Speech and the Politics of Visibility », *Transatlantica* [En ligne], 1 | 2008, mis en ligne le 14 mai 2008, Consulté le 17 mai 2012. URL : <http://transatlantica.revues.org/3503>

Éditeur : Association française d'études américaines (AFEA)

<http://transatlantica.revues.org>

<http://www.revues.org>

Document accessible en ligne sur :

<http://transatlantica.revues.org/3503>

Document généré automatiquement le 17 mai 2012. La pagination ne correspond pas à la pagination de l'édition papier.

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Pascale Smorag

From Closet Talk to PC Terminology : Gay Speech and the Politics of Visibility

- 1 « Bi, Gay, Open Minded, Lesbian, Drag, Fetish, Shemale, Glitz and Glamor... Total You. Total Mix. Total Fun. Darlink, you're most welcome. Your hostess »¹.
- 2 Funny and provocative as it may seem, this message posted on *Kinks & Queens*, a gay Swedish website, not only reveals a visibility and culture that the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender community was long compelled to hush, but it also confirms the existence of a lexicon not quite like standard English. From the darker ages when homosexuality was at its best a sin and/or a perversion until the present environment of rainbow flags and gay prides, gayspeak has been used to transgress social norms, articulate particular needs and emotions, as well as reconstruct, or re-interpret, reality. Giving voice to new perceptions of gender identity while reclaiming offensive terms and a lifestyle of their own, gayspeakers are deliberately asserting cultural and, to some extent, militant ambitions. When it comes to elaborate politically correct definitions of the « queer » universe, pink talk displays an extraordinary complexity of sexual orientations and subcultures, a possible means to compensate for linguistic deficiency and to claim a gay space on the social spectrum.

Born as A Coded Talk

- 3 In the Victorian era, « confess'd sodomytes » were punished with « forfeiture of all rights, including procreation »—in other words, castration, as related by Byrne R. Fone in *Homophobia, A History* (2001)². Most male homosexuals therefore kept their sexual orientations very much in the closet unless amidst their kin when they called each other female names—« Miss Kitten », « China Mary », « Primrose Mary », and « Dip-Candle Mary »³—, a practice still familiar among contemporary gay men. Until World War Two, research on what was then labeled the « language of homosexuality » focused on gender inversion, with homosexuality being regarded as a pathology characterized as sexual deviance or perversion : whereas heterosexual language equated with the appropriate gender, homosexual language displayed frequent inadequacies between the physical gender and the linguistic gender of the speaker. In the repressive and security-concerned Cold War environment⁴, to talk about themselves, most gays and lesbians relied upon euphemisms such as « friends of Dorothy('s) », (after *The Wizard of Oz*, 1939, a classic musical popular with gay audiences), « whoopsies », « (s)he's is a little... you know, or 'that way' », « one of them », or again « (s)he plays for the other team ». Until the advent of gay rights in the 1950s-60s, homosexuality meant being subjected to a life of secret codes, special rules, and specific passwords to access private clubs. *Passing women* (19th century cross-dressing women who « passed » as men) were often recognized as such only at their deaths or during illness⁵. In his essay *A Critique of Social Constructionism and Post Modern Queer Theory*, Rictor Norton explained that « all of the camp⁶ talk of the eighteenth-century mollies⁷, for example, was overheard by police constables who had infiltrated the molly houses ; such talk was virtually unknown outside the confines of a molly house »⁸. The term « Boston marriage » was one of those appellations which, as Rebecca James puts it, avoided the « derogatory medical diagnosis »⁹. Used in late 19th century New England, it was then a fashionable and « polite » phrase to qualify long-term relationships between two (high social status) women¹⁰. Yet, quoting Emma Donoghue's *Passions Between Women : British Lesbian Culture 1668-1801* (1993), Norton sustains that these « romantic friendships » have often been « invoked to neutralize and de-sexualize evidence »¹¹.
- 4 In the 1950s and early 60s, British (especially London) gay men spoke Polari¹², a coded lexicon which allowed them to express their homosexuality publicly. Whereas few gays were acquainted with the glossary's 500 words, all knew that *bona* meant « good », *camp*

« effeminate, outrageous », and *cod* « awful »¹³. In his analysis of Polari, which he classifies « as a language variety, a sociolect, or an anti-language »¹⁴, Paul Baker, professor in the Department of Linguistics and Modern English Language at Lancaster University, UK, explains that men used Polari « as a form of protection and secrecy. It excluded outsiders who wouldn't be able to tell what you were talking about, and allowed gay people to conceal their sexuality. It could be used to talk about other people while they were present, and was particularly useful when cruising with friends »¹⁵. Despite the achievements of gay rights, the stigma attached to a « love that dare not [always] speak its name », to quote Oscar Wilde, occasionally lingers in the way some gays use « them » to refer to their partners and « carefully word speech to hide explicit gender references »¹⁶. For many Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender—or LGBT¹⁷—people today, pink talk works as a cohesive force against discrimination, although they also admit that gay expressions have actually shifted from the *physical* confinement of the 18th century molly houses to a *linguistic* confinement. Whereas gayspeak displays limited cross-community use, it is not « a strategy for coping with or undermining straight culture » but rather « having cultural values *for its own sake*. The vast bulk of queer slang is created by queers to communicate with one another »¹⁸.

5 Since 1993 [,] the American University in Washington DC has been home to annual conferences on Lavender Language and Linguistics, with Lavender¹⁹ Language being defined as the way « lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgendered persons and queers use language in everyday life »²⁰. According to Bill Leap, the co-coordinator of the 2003 conference, homosexuals communicate with each other in ways that are « different from the linguistic practices of non-lesbian/gay-identified persons »²¹. Macmillan English dictionary explains that « Lavender language functions as a kind of homosexual code, characterized by acronyms, plays on words and double meanings only intended to be understood by the gay community »²². Leap gives the example of « top », the active partner in active/receptive relationships, which gays post in personal ads. « To talk about a person as a 'top' immediately would label the speaker as lesbian or gay for anyone who knows lesbian or gay culture ». Leap mentioned two other « beautiful examples » : whereas in gay speech « pitcher » identifies the sexually active individual and « catcher » the receptive person, « If we say pitcher or we say catcher, in an ordinary conversation, I think it's unlikely that [straight people] would read anything else into it. [...] You see it says 'pitcher' on somebody's T-shirt, and I bet you straight folks in Omaha will think this [homosexual] guy is on a baseball team ».²³ As these examples tend to prove, not only is there a lingo called lavender, but like any other idiom, it is also coded. Language-wise, LGTB speakers do not differ from non-LGTB speakers, thus gayspeak is not *per se* a system which works on a grammar, syntax, and sounds different from English. It is, however, a lexicon, a collection of words and phrases expressing specific identities « in covert ways recognized by the like-minded »²⁴.

Visibility and Pride

6 Conceived to express the needs of a socially repressed group, Polari was also, as Professor Baker explains, « a form of humour and camp²⁵ performance, ... a way of initiating people into the gay or theatre subculture »²⁶. Norton confirms the view that,

Polari was never designed to escape notice, but was often confrontative : 'Even when travelling in the singular, we weren't averse to shrieking a quick *get you, girl* at some menacing naff'... We flaunted our homosexuality. We were pleased to be different²⁸.

7 Apart from a specific lexicon, gayspeak reveals itself every time qualifiers like « adorable », « fab(ulous) », « glam(orous) », and « so cute », are employed by both gay men and women. Whereas some lesbians tend to speak at a lower pitch than straight women—and their range of pitches is lesser than that of straight women²⁹—the typical high pitched discourse and adorned talks of some gay men, not necessarily of the effeminate type, is another frequent give-away. As *Flamespeak*, an on-line dictionary describing « lingo used by LBGT people » explains, *drama queens* are well-known as they « dramatically proclaim that [their] life is full of drama

and acts as though they are in a soap opera full of heartbreak, affairs, and treachery ; [they] can usually make a routine trip to the car wash sound more traumatic than the Argentine revolution »³⁰.

8 The LGBT community indeed revels in describing its members, depending on their respective attitudes, as *divas*, « club boys wearing expensive clothing, jewelry, and glitter »³¹, *drag kings*, women who impersonate men onstage or wear men's clothing³², and *drag queens/drags*, their male counterparts³³. *Femme fatales*, « queeny queens », *granola lesbians*, « wholesome, health-conscious lesbians ; sometimes referred to as *crunchy dykes* », *soft butches*, « butch lesbians with a soft side and gentle demeanor », and *sugar daddies*, « older men who financially support younger partners »³⁴, are names and definitions which evidence a certain sense of belonging. They also testify to the community's variety of lifestyles. Food metaphors are not uncommon, such as *seafood* (gay sailors) and related *sailor queens* (men whose primary interest is sailors), *tuna* (*young gay sailors*), *jam* (younger men), *angel food* (gay men in the air force), *rice queens* (men attracted to Asians), *government inspected meat* (a gay man in the armed forces) to be found in *meat racks* (gay male cruising areas). Animal images include *studs* (mostly, although not necessarily, African-Americans butches), (*kissing*) *fish* (young gay women), *bears* (hairy and overweight men), and *chicken hawks* (older men looking for younger men). Adepts of the *Scene* (the gay club circuit) attend *white parties*, where *Amy-Johns* (after *Amazons*), *lipstick lesbians*³⁵ (stylishly dressed in a traditionally feminine way), and *chapstick lesbians* (who do not wear make-up and are very much into sports)³⁶ meet with *leather dykes*, *tomboys*, and *lemons* (lesbians). As for *gym bunnies/queens* (gay men who work out in a gym), and *muscle Mariés* (more effeminate gym queens) who are a hit among *muscle queens* (men who prefer muscular men), they will join *flamers* (effeminate gay men), *baby Crocketts* (pseudo-cowboys), and *label queens* (designers' fashion victims)³⁷.

9 Probably more self-consciousness than provocation, today's gay lexicon not only defines an identity different from the norm but also proves the aspiration of homosexuals to be visible within a larger straight society. Gayspeak thus intends to promote community cohesion while exhorting « to accept who you are ». Often playing with taboo phrases, for fun, social, and political communication, it enhances identification among members who are conscious of sharing experiences and values, what some call the « LGBT culture ». As Julia Stanley contended in 1970 in her article « Homosexual Slang »³⁸, it was a way to celebrate group bonding through a common—and dynamic—way of speaking, even though few members of the community spoke it. The yearly gay prides which take place in most American cities, in the midst of ribbons, colorful parades, and musical shows, are a clear signal, as the name indicate, that there is pride in being members of the « family », a term the gay community sometimes applies to itself³⁹. As Sean McLennan wrote in « Gay on the Vocabulary Vanguard » in February 2001, « Be proud of the fact that every word you say helps enact social change. And whether or not the straight world wants to admit it, we're cultural innovators—fashion and language speak louder than actions sometimes ! And imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, after all »⁴⁰.

10 In New York City on June 28, 1969, gay people fought back against police repression⁴¹ in what was going to be known as the Stonewall riots. This episode sent the signal that time was ripe for promoting gay rights in the United States. Many pejorative labels that had been used against LGBT people then began to be openly questioned by the community, leaving room for a renewed and re-interpreted gay speech. In the 1970's, research on language and homosexuality likewise became more focused on how and by whom this specialized lexicon was used, a differentiation the pre-Stonewall era had hardly promoted. In this ebullience, Bruce Rodger's landmark *The Queen's Vernacular* was released (1972), followed, to mention just a few, by Joseph Hayes's « Gayspeak » (1976) and « Language and Language Behavior of Lesbian and Gay Men » (1978-1979), Leonard R. N Ashley's « Kinks and Queens : Linguistic and Cultural Aspects of the Terminology for Gays » (1979) and « Dyke Diction : The Language of Lesbians » (1982), as well as Wayne R. Dynes's *Homolexis : A Historical and Cultural Lexicon of Homosexuality* (1985) and *Encyclopaedia of Homosexuality* (1990), a

compilation and analysis of numerous gay expressions. Paul Baker himself, who has conducted interviews among the British LGTB population, researched gay archives and decoded gay and lesbian chats on the internet, released *Fantabulosa : A Dictionary of Polari and Gay Slang* in 2002⁴², with 1,700 entries derived from interviews, archives, and gay and lesbian web chats⁴³. The internet has its share, upon which the present study has been partially based, such as the online *Dictionary of Gay Slang and Historical Terms, Flamespeak, Queer Slang in the Gay 90*, Rebecca Scott's *A Brief Dictionary of Queer Slang and Culture* (1997), Matt & Andrej Koymasky's *GLTB Slang Dictionary* (last updated in 2005), and Robert Owen Scott's comprehensive *Wizard Gay Slang Dictionary* (last updated in 2003)⁴⁴.

- 11 Yet, despite a growing interest for queer studies, the progress of gay speech has not been steadily supported. Whereas in the 1960s gay and lesbian scholars took a stake in the political advancement of homosexuals, indirectly encouraging the older generation to use the Lavender language, gay youths decided to avoid what they considered a relic of the past (in England, some claimed Polari to be « silly, feminising and outdated »⁴⁵). What is more, the (partial) decriminalization of homosexuality challenged the necessity of a secret language. In the mid-1970s and 1980s, however, the divisions between homosexuals deflated, strengthening the cohesion of the community as well as a new approach of homosexuality which was defined in terms of oppressed minority identity : after the manner of African-Americans who promoted Black English vernacular, LGBT people found it logical to adopt a specific language, although as we noted before, gayspeak has always been more a lexicon than a language with its proper grammatical and phonological rules. Simultaneously, this new cohesive attitude encouraged the development of the modern queer theory movement, part of which attempted to analyze the secreted content of the gay and lesbian language. Since the late 1980s, the identity-based model of homosexuality has been in its turn challenged, for being excessively focused on respectability, thus excluding some marginal lifestyles—sodomasochists, working-class femme lesbians, African-American drag queens, and bisexuals—within the gay community itself. « Queerspeak », as it is also called, was going to « valorize general nonconformity beyond identification with homosexuality »⁴⁶, an attempt at keeping politics in gay talk. Not just straight but gay mentalities, too, had matured and time had come to define and reclaim what it meant to be « queer ».

A Queer World

- 12 « We're here. We're queer. We're fabulous »⁴⁷. Such was the slogan of Queer Nation founded in New York City, in March 1990, by activists from ACT-UP, the organization created in the mid-1980s to fight the spread of AIDS⁴⁸. In an effort to reawaken the spirit of activism from the post-Stonewall era, Queer Nation adopted a somewhat confrontational approach and purposely used the word *queer* for its shock value while rejecting the term *gay*, which for some had become too mainstream⁴⁹. Until Queer Nation reclaimed the term *queer*, it had been used offensively for an openly homosexual (the semantic shift from « unusual » to « unusual sexual orientation » occurred in the 1920s). « Yeah, QUEER can be a rough word but it is also a sly and ironic weapon we can steal from the homophobe's hands and use against him »⁵⁰. As Sean McLennan wrote, « Through usage and the activist process of « reclaiming » the words that define us, [...] we alter their meanings and dissolve their power to denigrate us. Although such subtle shifts don't usually have an obvious effect on individuals, collectively and given time, that's how language changes⁵¹. Once popularized by the activist Queer Nation, the word was reclaimed by gays and scholars in « queer theory ». The author of *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1994), Judith Butler⁵² also declared that

'Queer' derives its force precisely through the repeated invocation by which it has become linked to accusation, pathologization, insult. [...] The interpellation echoes past interpellations, and binds the speakers, as if they spoke in unison across time. In this sense, it is always an imaginary chorus that taunts 'queer'⁵³.

- 13 The term *queer* has since entered Academia, which is host to *queer activists*, *Queer Theory*, *Queer (and/or) Gender Studies*, *queer movements*, *Queer Alliances*, *queer and queer-friendly*

spaces, queer events, queer resource centers, queer faculty, Queers of color, etc. As Eric, a student at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, said to *PlanetOut*, a gay website which investigated on the « Queer Fifty » American universities in 2001,

The surrounding town isn't that big, so it doesn't have any bars, but there is always *tons* going on on campus, and there are queer parties during the queer holidays like National Coming Out Day, and Pride Week, and stuff like that. Plus, there is an annual Queer Prom that I was lucky enough to be on campus for as a prefrish. Already I've seen gay couples dancing at « straight » parties. There are gay houses on campus that have parties a lot, too. There is definitely no lack of social activities for queer people or any student on campus⁵⁴.

14 While a metamorphosed *queer* has become a hit in the academic world, a broader *non-queer* yet *queer-positive* society has made room to queer culture, adopting phrases like « coming out (of the closet) » which also applies in other contexts such as talking about a *closet smoker*, to qualify someone who smokes on the sly, or *coming out as a NYPD fan*, for somebody whose addiction to the series has just been « exposed ». As Showtime's series makes it clear, it is all « Queer as Folk »⁵⁵. In a February 9, 2004 interview in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Tom Lynch, director of the San Francisco LGBT Community Center, said that visitors to the center complained about a sign proudly claiming San Francisco « the queerest place on Earth ». He nonetheless added, « In the Bay Area, in the age of 'Queer Eye for the Straight Guy,'⁵⁶ that sort of sensitivity is beginning to seem almost quaint. Even some straight people have adopted the word because they have gay parents or an affinity for gay culture »⁵⁷.

15 Although—following the example of *queer*—other terms such as *fairy* have been reclaimed, their success did not equate with that of *queer*. First used to describe the participants in New York drag balls in the 1890s, *fa(i)ry* became a common deprecating term in the 20th century used to qualify effeminate gays (in the mid-1900's *fairy ladies* was applied to femme lesbians)⁵⁸. Today, the word has taken on a positive label, especially among *radical fairies/faeries* who assert their pride in challenging traditional male roles⁵⁹. The term *Fag* or *faggot* has been retrieved by gay men in a defiant or self-mocking way⁶⁰. It was possibly derived from the French *fagot*, a bundle of sticks and twigs bound together, used for burning heretics and witches at the stake, or from an abusive term for women, or in reference to younger boys who performed duties for seniors in British public schools, where homosexuality was viewed as endemic. A term like *camp*, which characterized an effeminate man, was also recaptured in 1964 by the American writer Susan Sontag who coined two new phrases, high camp (sophisticated, tongue-in-cheek wit, and self-aware) and low camp (showing a lack of sophistication and self-awareness)⁶¹. As this reclaimed terminology evidences, there is a continuous need to define the complex identities and sexual categories of the LGBT community. « The label 'homosexual' », Norton explains, « instead of being generated by society to control people, was self-generated by gay (or gay-friendly) men to empower individuals and set them on the road to freedom rather than enslavement »⁶². Since then, as an adjective, it has yielded to *same-sex(-oriented)* because of the stigma related to it ; *sexual orientation* is likewise replacing *sexual preference/inclination*, because of the implication that same-sex orientation is a choice—which is not the current theory. While searching to free themselves, representatives of all sexualities have actually been liberating themselves from a language of oppression. It is this desire to « re-open the nature of identity politics »⁶³ that challenges the heterosexual/homosexual division.

Women-Loving-Women : Labels that Matter

16 In 1869 the word *Homosexualität* was coined by the German-Hungarian Károly Kertbeny, a closeted gay man who—unsuccessfully—contested the reproof of sexual relations between men⁶⁴. Yet, although Kertbeny coined *Homosexualisten* for gay men, and *Homosexualistinnen* for gay women, homosexuality was primarily understood as a male, rather than female phenomenon. Even today, people tend to use the word *homosexuality* when thinking about male same-sex relationships. The existence of the term *lesbian* probably accounts for such perception, as does the deep-rooted belief that homosexuality was mostly a male phenomenon

(studies and repressive legislations have been mostly about gay *men*). Homosexuality is therefore identified as a female phenomenon when qualified as such, i.e. when specifically labeled as *female* homosexuality.

- 17 The current *LGBT* linguistic item itself—*Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender*—supports the idea that the term *gay* excludes lesbians. Yet, even though *lesbian* is the oldest and clearest term to designate female homosexuals, today a majority of them define themselves as *gay* as much as *lesbians*. Whereas in the nineteenth century *gay* designated male and female prostitutes⁶⁵, it is now advantageously displaying LGBT flamboyance, with less technicality than the term *homosexual* and with an assuredly less explicit link between sexual activity and gay identity regardless of the gender⁶⁶. Gay and bisexual women who chat on the Internet or post personal ads do it on sites with names such as *Gay-Women.com*. *The Gay History of Planet Earth* online itself has clearly specified that « the word ‘gay’ is used throughout [their] site in reference to women and men who form erotic same-sex relationships »⁶⁷. In 1997, when Ellen DeGeneres became the first openly gay main character in a US television series, she made the cover of *Time Magazine* with the famous tag line « Yep, I’m Gay ». She also insisted in her interview with *Time* that she « never wanted to be ‘the lesbian actress’ »⁶⁸, as she had never liked the term. ABC, which produced the sitcom in which the character Ellen Morgan, alias real life Ellen DeGeneres, was to make a « startling self-discovery », « apparently managed to make its intentions known without using that ever-so-sexual ‘L’ word. As *PlanetOut*, the online gay site, explained a few days before the public outing of DeGeneres,

Over the millennia, gays and lesbians have come up with many ways to announce their sexual identities, from code words to pinkie rings, but darned few have issued press releases. But then, « Ellen’s » Ellen Morgan isn’t a person but a sitcom character, and there’s no precedent for a prime time network TV series’ lead character openly identifying as lesbian or gay. [...] The official ABC press release read like ‘Ellen is coming out as a, well, you know’⁶⁹.

- 18 *Women-only* events, *lesbian* clubs, *dyke* bars, *Girlz* nites, *gay women* nights, *women-to-women* chat rooms, *golden girls* websites : terminology counts quite a few items to describe the lesbian world, not to mention those displaying the variety of lesbian identities. Whereas today they are regularly called « girls’ girls » or « women-loving-women » (WLW), the way gay men are called « men-who-have-sex-with-men » (MSM)⁷⁰, « in mid-eighteenth-century discussions of lesbians », Norton noted, people used « abstract phrases such as ‘feminine congression’ » or euphemisms such as « vicious Irregularities », « unaccountable intimacies », « uncommon and preternatural Lust », « unnatural Appetites in both Sexes », and « abominable and unnatural pollutions »⁷¹.
- 19 Such pseudo-scientific, normative, and disparaging definitions would eventually encourage the « unnaturally polluted » women to promote a less hostile and more appropriate glossary for themselves. *Lesbian* was one of them, derived from the Greek isle of Lesbos, where Sappho (620 BC-565 BC) celebrated love between women⁷². Although its first modern use was in William King’s satirical poetry collection, « The Toast » (1732)⁷³, the expression did not make its first official entry in a medical dictionary before 1890 as « the practice of tribadism »⁷⁴, another phrase to describe sex practice between two women⁷⁵. In the early twenty-first century, to be a lesbian « typically means to embrace an identity and to participate in a lesbian culture »⁷⁶. As a likely result of a generation divide, a younger group of women responded by reclaiming the phrase *dyke* for themselves, the way the LGBT community has retrieved the once-defamatory *queer*. This move was also partly triggered in reaction to the mainstreaming of this lesbian « culture » and its use by market forces, like the « lesbian chic » in the entertainment industry. As Carolyn Laub, the director of the Gay-Straight Alliance Network in San Francisco, which links gay and lesbian student clubs in California said,

« Homosexual » sounded pathological and clinical, so activists went about creating their own words, starting with « gay » and « lesbian ». That was well and good, but terms like « dyke » and « queer » had an appealing spikiness and served double-duty by stripping the sting from words that had heretofore been considered unspeakably nasty⁷⁷.

20 Possibly derived from *bull-diker* (a 1920s black American slang that applied to lesbian lovers⁷⁸), the word *dyke* (also spelled *dike*) came, rather derogatorily, to describe masculine-looking lesbians⁷⁹. It was only in the not too distant past that it began to be used by lesbians as a token of pride to mean a strong, independent lesbian. Among heterosexuals, however, it has remained a pejorative qualifier⁸⁰. In 1984 Judy Grahn gave a definition of the word in reference to the 1950s :

For all our boyish clothes and mannerisms... we women did not pass as men or boys. ... our point was not to be men... A dike (sic) learns much of her social function from other *dykes*. ... Whether she ever has the chance to enter a Gay bar or not, she imitates *dykes*, not men. She may identify with traditionally *dyke* figures : Diana the Huntress, Beebo Brinker, Gertrude Stein, Bessie Smith, Natalie Barney, Queen Christina, Joan of Arc, Amy Lowell, Oya, St Barbara, modern athletes, and other leaders. ... the social message she bears and is delivering is not 'I am a man' but rather 'Here is another way to be a woman'⁸¹.

21 Modern « dyke figures », presently called *dykons* (from *dyke* + *icons*), would more likely count personalities like KD Lang, Melissa Etheridge, or Ellen DeGeneres⁸². As for the more « ordinary » dykes, they come in such assortments as *bull dykes* or *diesel dykes*, « *lesbians who dress and behave in a masculine fashion* »⁸³, *PC dykes* (*politically correct dykes*), « Rush Limbaugh's wet-dream feminazi ; come in several varieties, from mild to hard-headed »⁸⁴, *andro dykes*, identified as neither masculine nor feminine⁸⁵, *root dykes*, whose dress reflect ethnic roots⁸⁶, *sex-positive dykes*, « feminist dykes who also read lesbian porn, dress for effect and don't think enjoying penetration is a sign of being a male-identified dupe. Probably grew up with Queer Nation, ACT-UP and Riot grrrls⁸⁷ for role models »⁸⁸. Masculine lesbians proudly identify themselves as *butches*, a label that dates back to the 1950s. Yet, after the low-profile both the term and lifestyle adopted in the late 1960s and 1970s—a consequence of lesbian-feminists who viewed butches and their soul *fem(me)* mates as a retrograde legacy of patriarchy and heterosexual roles—, butches have recovered their place within a larger lesbian culture⁸⁹. The revival of butch/femme couples gives room to a renewed interpretation of role-playing, such as « butch in the streets, femme in the sheets », or with couples as « butch-on-but and femme-on-femme »⁹⁰, relationships sometimes referred to as *homogender* (butch-but).⁹¹ *Bianca's Lesbian Lexicon* gives an interesting historical definition,

Butch/Femme : A necessary self-definition in the '50s, if you wanted to get laid. It was out of style and vilified through the '70s as being male-identified (butch too male, femme a response to straight male desire). Revived in the '90s by the younger set as another fun way for sexual and verbal role-playing. Results in such personals-ad phrases as, « I'm a soft butch bottom⁹², looking for a bitchy⁹³ total femme top⁹⁴ for some fishing⁹⁵ fun. Vegans⁹⁶ only »⁹⁷.

22 The fluctuating roles within the gay female community somehow outdates the strict separatist politics of the 1970s, when feminists started using words like *wimmin* and *womyn in lieu* of a patriarchal *wo-men*⁹⁸ (as for the summer Michigan *Womyn's Music Festival*⁹⁹), or when they founded the New York Lesbian *Herstory* Archives.¹⁰⁰ Whatever the controversy such decisions have generated within the lesbian community, the diversity of appellations gay women use and invent for themselves are sound evidence that they can also be enfranchised from imposed categorizations. Yesterday's « Lovers of their own Sex » and Sapphists have come a long way and can now send their soul mates e-cards via the *grrl.com* site. A long way, indeed, with Showtime's¹⁰¹ successful broadcasting¹⁰² of the glossy, groundbreaking, prime time *The L Word*, the first lesbian soap opera devoted to the lives and loves of « a cast full of gorgeous dykes, the L standing for ladies, love, Los Angeles, and most importantly, you know what »¹⁰³.

Gender Issues

23 « Gender theory begins with the premise that what society commonly recognizes as the static, oppositional binary of gender—male or female—does not derive from a series of natural, inevitable, or essential components of an individual's biological sex »¹⁰⁴. Adopted by the majority of gay community centers in most English-speaking countries in 2004, the

term *LGBT* actually includes more subtle subcultures than just « lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender/trans(s)exual »¹⁰⁵. Probably less controversial than *queer* or *lesbigay*, the acronym *LGBT*—or *GLBT* (permutations are frequent)—can develop into *LGBTQ* or *LGBTQQ*, with one *Q* for *queer* and another for *questioning*. *LGBTI* counts *intersexuals*¹⁰⁶, individuals born with « ambiguous genitalia » or features of both sexes (an older term, now considered pejorative and inaccurate, being *hermaphrodite*). While *LGBTIA* indicates straight—or *str8*—*Allies* among their ranks, an extremely rare *LGBTTTIQQQA* represents the community in its fullest, with the final *A* being interpreted as *Androgynous*. Canada's 2007 Pride Toronto clearly expressed its commitment to « celebrate the history, courage, diversity and future of Toronto's *LGBTTIQQ2S** »¹⁰⁷ community. *LGBTTIQQ2S** stands for « Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Questioning, 2-Spirited ». Used by late twentieth century LGBT Native Americans to define themselves, as they possess a female and a male spirit, *two-spirit* indicates « a spiritual and communal orientation, not just sexual and affectional ones »¹⁰⁸. Some, however, argue that the scientific, almost technical character of these acronyms make them resemble life-devoid linguistic automatons whose austerity is so unlike the gay spirit. Yet, for all their flaws, these designations promote a visibility and a better understanding of the GLBT population, correcting past hurtful medical and psychological definitions of homosexuality.

- 24 As Carolyn Laub said, « We [...] are developing new understandings of sexual orientation and gender identities and what that means to us. We don't really have enough language to describe that ; therefore, we have to create new words »¹⁰⁹. In an interview published in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (Feb. 8, 2004), Andy Duran, then 19, explained, « People are feeling like, what's the point of labeling ? If I must label, let me create my own »¹¹⁰. Why stick to the commonplace *transgender/transsexual* when more accurate descriptions can be suggested by *she-male* or *transwoman*, i.e. a transgender born as a man who identifies as a woman, *post-op*, a transgendered person who has had either an operation or hormone treatments, *pre-op*, who has not had any, *F2M* or *FTM*, « a female-to-male transsexual », or *transman*, or again a *M2F* or *MTF*, « a male-to-female transsexual, or *transwoman*, the last two acronyms not to be confounded with *M2M* (« male-to-male » relationships) and *F2F* (its female equivalent) ? While *crossdressers* or *X-dressers/XDers* (a term preferred to *transvestite* generally applying to straight people) dress in the clothes of the opposite sex, *genderqueer* view gender other than the binary male-female option. Whereas a *trannydyke* is a F2M or M2F attracted to people with a more feminine gender, and a *tryke* [trans + dyke] is a M2F who identifies as a lesbian, *pomosexuals* (derived from *postmodern-sexuals*) do not identify with any label, *pansexuals* are attracted to people of multiple genders, and *omnisexuals* and *multisexuals* to almost anybody. In the *San Francisco Chronicle* interview, Justin, then 19, called himself a *boi*—with an 'i'—because he felt like a boy (with a 'y'), but did not have « the boy parts, as much as [he] wish[ed] [he] did »¹¹¹. Lynn Breedlove had exclusively identified him/herself as a *butch dyke* for years, until (s)he also called her/himself a *trannyboy*, a word referring to her/his desire to be transgender although not a *transman* (too hairy). Today, Lynn, depending on her/his mood, goes back and forth between the old label and the new one, « Because I'm like Peter Pan—eternally youthful but I'm always played by a girl »¹¹². Asked what his favorite terms in his *Dictionary of Polari and Gay Slang* were, Paul Baker answered that he

liked the term *homovestite*—someone who wears the clothing of their own sex. It's interesting because it sounds like something that's very sexually exotic—like a combination of homosexual and transvestite. However, it refers to « ordinary » people. [...] It's a good word to use because it gives « normal » people an obscure scientific label that makes them sound weird too !¹¹³

- 25 Since one's physiological sex does not necessarily determine one's gender role, a distinction needs to be made between « men » and « women » who were respectively assigned a *female* and *male* gender at birth (not *per se* anatomical men and women), and *bio-men* or *bio-women*, « biological » men or women who were assigned a male or female gender at birth. Likewise, the radical, queer, and feminist *FTF*, « Female-to-Femme », challenges assumptions about gender, femininity, and identity¹¹⁴ and uses the language of gender to talk about femme identity. In

the same way, a *MTM* is an intersexual who considers himself transitioning from « Male-to-Male » : he has always been male, yet not in the way it is traditionally defined. *FTX*, *MTX* and *F/MTU*, « Female/Male to ‘Unknown’ », and *F/MTT*, « Female/Male to Trans », similarly question notions of gender normativity.

26 In addition to these technical, somewhat pragmatic acronyms and labels that confirm a desire to define every conceivable position on the queer spectrum, there is a wide range of creatively picturesque and bubblier expressions the LGBT community refers to for itself. Whereas most LGBT people are *clear* (100% gay) or *as pink ink* (very obviously gay, a mid-90s coinage), some are *eyeballing the back of the closet door* (not quite out of the closet)¹¹⁵, *straight acting/appearing* (or *s/a*, *s/a/a*), and even *yestergays* (identifying as gay in the past, but no longer so). Bisexuals, indeed, range from *bi-possible* (who could be persuaded to be bisexual), *bicurious* (heterosexuals who wish to « experiment » with their sexuality), *LUG*, *GUG* or *BUG* (« Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Until Graduation », i.e. experimenting while in college), *hasbyterians* (« has been lesbian »), and *heteroflexible* (bisexuals with a straight dominance), to *Gillette blades* (*bisexual women*), *bi-serious* (bisexuals who are very committed to it), and *poly(gamous/amorous)* (preferring to have two or more partners/lovers at once).

27 The sometimes derogatory slang epithets applying to bisexuals, such as *AC-DC* (for « alternating/direct current ») by heterosexuals, or *fence-sitters* or *double-gaited* by gays and lesbians, connotes a « betrayal » of one’s hetero- or homosexual identity, as well as a reluctance to commit oneself to a sexual orientation¹¹⁶. With the 1990s came the advent of bisexual political power. Giving way to an enhanced visibility, such perceptions and labelling might, eventually, be history¹¹⁷. Unless the person *drops a hairpin* (gives a clue they are gay), *he or she might just be a breeder* (a heterosexual), which the unfortunate gay will call *scenery*, since the only thing they can do is « Sit back and enjoy the scenery ». Heterosexuals, then, come in such variety as *metrosexuals* (fashionable urban heterosexual men), who share a gay aesthetic for their hip appearance with *guppies* and *luppies* (gay/lesbian urban professionals), or, conversely, *beige* (insipid, anti-fab) and *naff* (« Normal As Fuck », i.e. dreary and dull) *dudes* (bland straight people). Heterosexual women socializing extensively with gay men are called *WLMLM* (« Women who Love Men who Love Men »), *fag hags*, *fruit flies*, or *ribbon clerks*¹¹⁸, and if attracted to them, *fag magnets*. Gay or straight men who hang around lesbians (*Dutch girls*) are nicknamed *Dutch boys* or *Sappho Daddy-Os*¹¹⁹.

28 On the Internet, gays use acronyms such as *MOTSS*, « Members Of The Same Sex », or *SGL*, « Same Gender Loving ». Undecided individuals can still go for *MOTAS*, « Members Of The Appropriate Sex », whom bisexuals might also identify as *MOTOS*, « Members Of The Opposite Sex ». Looking for a *SO*, « Significant Other », or *LJBF*, « Let’s Just Be Friends », the decisive choice is *DAYP*, « Do As You Please »¹²⁰. Cyber Pink talk, like other Internet languages, is highly coded. In other words, the lexicon used by gays who chat or post personal ads on the Internet does not escape a drift towards abstraction. This dehumanization therefore relegates the older bathhouses, Y’s, or other *French embassies* (places where gay sex is available) far behind chat rooms and cyber sex. Yet, it is not uncommon for logged-on chatters to *meet* actually with *members of the Union* (gay men or women).

29 The complexity of gender and sexual identities as well as new understandings of sexual orientation prove that there is much more than *gays*, *lesbians*, and *queers*. The way queers define themselves might be puzzling for many heterosexuals and even older homosexuals. Apart from Lynn Breedlove who is not what can be called a young individual, most respondents of the *San Francisco Chronicle* interview are youths who are both experimenting with their sexual identities and questioning their elders’ social norms. In the United States the presence of increasingly conspicuous LGBT communities has also encouraged the younger generations to reflect on communal as well as personal identities¹²¹. As Caitlin Ryan, a researcher at San Francisco State University who has studied lesbian, gay and bisexual youth, said, « Before, the tribe was so much more important. [...] What we’re getting in the LGBT community is the power of youth. It’s their expression and exuberance and energy and also their contribution to the culture »¹²².

30 As gender identities have increased in complexity (as the gay lexicon reflects), the challenge now exists for more « ordinary » straight people to grasp the realities of queer culture. Heterosexuals might be « lost in translation », caught in the midst of genuine, enthusiastic, occasionally exotic expressions and more political, provocative, norm-challenging phrases coined by a community whose existence and lifestyle are getting, if not accepted, at least recognized. Yet, the question remains as to whether gayspeak is meant to be shared by society at large. If the answer is yes, it will be a slow process of linguistic acquisition through books, TV shows, and the web. As Leap, the organizer of the 2003 Conference on Lavender Language, said, « Just being a speaker of English does not prepare you to be a speaker of this gay language. You've got to learn a lot of it yourself »¹²³. With NBC's *Will & Grace*, HBO's *Six Feet Under*, and Showtime's *Queer as Folk* and *The L Word* now accessible to mainstream audiences, heterosexuals might learn the basics of communicating with, or understanding homosexual « speakers ». If gay speech is *not* to be shared with the dominant population, it then remains a coded idiom only accessible to initiates, leaving homophobic reactions to prosper (human nature hates not to understand)¹²⁴. Given its marginality, the LGBT community has developed an imaginative lexicon that perches itself on the fringe of heterosexual values and cultures. It is no wonder, then, that—as with any other culture—this language is used as « a tool of communication, as a tool of inclusion, and as tool of exclusion »¹²⁵.

31 Approximately two-thirds of the linguistic items found in gay lexicons have a heavy sexual content. Probably because this specific part of the community life had been—and to some extent still is—condemned by society, gays have consistently relied upon specific vocabulary to express the « unspeakable ». From the repressive times when homosexuality was considered a felony to the present variety of gender identities and queer subcultures, hundreds of expressions—puns, euphemisms, metaphors, word-coinage, and semantic shifts—have been used and are now listed in specific dictionaries, evidence of how LGBT people assert their distinctiveness and communicate in creative ways. For some members of the community, this pink talk (or queer lexicon, queer/queenspeak, lavender language, or gayspeak—whatever the name) works as a coded communication centered mostly on sex-related issues as well as sexual categorization. It is something like a glossary or a slang which does not display any self-conscious political resistance. In its broader version, however, it is a language inspired both by the sufferings of a long ostracized group and the desire to overcome past and present misunderstandings of different, non-normative, alternative (sub)cultures—an innovative disobedience combining gender identity, protection, self mockery, defiance, and subcultural bonds. Whether this lingo enables the LGBT community to reach beyond its own borders, obviously, remains a challenge. The social relations that minorities have maintained with mainstream societies have always implied some sort of survival and risk-taking. Gayspeak somehow confirms the rule.

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Notes

1 Kinks & Queens.

2 Publisher's Review of *Homophobia, A History*.

3 Norton, « Queer Language ».

4 Systematic crackdowns on homosexuals were common

5 Baker & Tropiano, 86.

6 Haggerty, under the entry « camp ». Recorded in print for the first time in *A Dictionary of Victorian Slang* in 1909, camp referred to « actions and gestures of exaggerated emphasis ». In mostly pre-Stonewall culture, « given the stereotypical merging of theatricality, male homosexuality, and the aesthetic sense », it came to signify « gay ». It has been applied both to gay men and women and their cultures.

7 Clubs in 18th-century London, where homosexual men, « in addition to sex, came together for gossip, merriment, and drinks ». Haggerty, under « mollies ».

8 Norton, « Queer Language ».

9 See Murphy for full definition, under « Boston Marriages ».

10 Such « marriages » were formed by Alice B. Toklas and Gertrude Stein, or Jeannette Marks and Mary Woolley.

11 Norton, « Political Definitions of the Lesbian ».

12 Haggerty, under « gay language ». « Polari, an aggregate of gay varieties found in Great Britain, with sailors and maritime personnel speaking the code quite differently from the persons associated with the theater or some other more upscale profession ».

13 Gill.

14 Baker, « Polari ».

15 Baker, « Polari ».

16 McLennan.

17 This acronym will be used throughout this study, although the « Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender » world comprehends a wider multiplicity of communities and lifestyles, as will be detailed later, than what those four words seem to indicate.

18 Norton, « Queer Language ».

- 19 « Since the nineteenth century, lavender has been linked to homosexuality, sometimes seen as a blend of pink and blue—female and male—, symbolizing the integration of gender ». Herbst, under the entry « lavender ».
- 20 See their website homepage at <http://www.american.edu/cas/anthro/lavenderlanguages/>
- 21 Betsch.
- 22 Macmillan Dictionary, « Lavender Language ».
- 23 Betsch.
- 24 Stein, under the entry « language ».
- 25 See note 6.
- 26 Baker, « Polari ».
- 27 A « dreary and dull » heterosexual.
- 28 Norton, « Queer language ».
- 29 Stein, under « language ».
- 30 Flamespeak.
- 31 Flamespeak.
- 32 Zimmerman, under « crossdressing » and « drag kings ». An older term would be male impersonator, a genre that has existed for more than two centuries. They are both « different from the drag butch, a masculine lesbian who wears male attire as part of a daily gender expression ».
- 33 Stein, under « drag queens and kings ». « Not all men who dress as women are drag queens. Other categories include transvestites or cross-dressers, generally straight men who wear women’s clothing for erotic reasons ; preoperative male-to-female transsexuals ; and transgender people who display and embrace a gender identity at odds with their biological sex, but who do not intend to undergo surgery to change their sex. Drag queens, in contrast, are gay men who dress and perform as—but do not usually want to be—women or have women’s bodies ».
- 34 « Queer Slang in the Gay 90’s ».
- 35 Herbst, under « lipstick lesbian ». They first emerged on the West Coast in the 1990s, breaking the stereotype of the overall-clad feminist.
- 36 <http://www.answers.com>. « Chapstick Lesbian ». « The phrase gained some currency following an episode of the television show « Ellen », circa 1997. In the show, Ellen DeGeneres’s character, asked by her parents whether a certain woman is a ‘dipstick lesbian’, explains that the term is ‘lipstick lesbian’, and comments that ‘I would be a chapstick lesbian’ ».
- 37 The references in this paragraph are to be found in the different online gay dictionaries and glossaries, as well as more general online wordsearch portals, all of them featuring in the « Online Dictionaries » section of the bibliography.
- 38 Stanley, 45-59.
- 39 « Unofficial Gay Dictionary ».
- 40 McLennan.
- 41 They had assembled on the night of Judy Garland’s funeral at Stonewall Inn, NY.
- 42 Full references are listed in the bibliography.
- 43 A few major dictionaries are listed in the bibliography
- 44 Full references can be found in the bibliography.
- 45 Baker, « Polari ».
- 46 Stein, under « language ».
- 47 Haggerty, under « Queer Nation ».
- 48 Although it did not officially break up, Queer Nation no longer exists.
- 49 Haggerty, under « gay ».
- 50 « reeuQ yhW, Queer! » Queer Nation Manifestos.
- 51 McLennan.
- 52 One of Butler’s most significant contributions is her interpretation of gender roles, « in which the categories ‘male’ and ‘female’ are understood as a repetition of acts instead of natural or inevitable absolutes ».
- 53 Butler, 226.
- 54 Cook.
- 55 First broadcast on British television in 1999, « Queer as Folk » was later adapted by American TV network Showtime. It was a night-time soap that followed the lives of a group of

- gay and lesbian characters in contemporary Pittsburgh. *Running* for five seasons (2000-2005), it has been a tremendous success among American gay audiences.
- 56 A weekly show where five gay men transform « a style-deficient and culture-deprived straight man from drab to fab ». (Bravo Networks, USA)
- 57 Marech.
- 58 « Queer Slang in the Gay 90s ».
- 59 Koymasky.
- 60 Haggerty, under the entry « faggot ».
- 61 « Camp ». Take Our Words for It.
- 62 Norton, « The Term Homosexual ».
- 63 Haggerty, under « gay ».
- 64 Haggerty, under « homosexuality ». It was not until eleven years later that the phrase heterosexual was invented, normalsexual being its first opposite.
- 65 Herbst, under « gay ».
- 66 In the 1930s a gaycat was a younger man homosexual traveling with his « Daddy ». It was simultaneously used in prison slang for a man that would provide sexual « services » to other inmates. The word was eventually adopted by the larger homosexual community, Gertrude Stein using it extensively in her story « Miss Furr and Miss Skeene » (1911).
- 67 See their website homepage at <http://pages.zoom.co.uk/lgs/gw.html>
- 68 Lo.
- 69 « ABC : 'Ellen' Coming Out As a? ».
- 70 Interestingly enough, gay women are presented as lovers, whereas relations between gay men seem to be first and foremost based on sex.
- 71 Norton, « Labelling Theory ».
- 72 Zimmerman, under « lesbian ».
- 73 Baker & Tropiano, 127
- 74 From Greek tribein, i.e. « to rub » in Baker & Tropiano, 137.
- 75 James.
- 76 Zimmerman, under « lesbian ».
- 77 Marech.
- 78 Herbst, under « bulldyke ».
- 79 « Queer Slang in the Gay 90s ».
- 80 Zimmerman, under « dyke ». In nineteenth-century slang dike (sic) referred to male clothing.
- 81 Norton, « Political Definitions of the Lesbian ».
- 82 Scott, Rebecca.
- 83 Albert. Also known as « truck drivers ».
- 84 Bianca's Lesbian Dictionary.
- 85 Scott, Rebecca.
- 86 Herbst, under « dyke ».
- 87 The rather recent grrl describes a soft butch who is too old (yet still young) to be a baby dyke. (« Queer Slang in the Gay 90s »). An interesting gender role is defined on the homepage of the Riot Grrls' site at <http://www.techsploitation.com/socrates/riot.grrls.html>, « You've come to the right place. A shrine to all girls who wish their gender started with a grrrrrow! [...] And remember, you don't have to be FEMALE to be a riot grrl! Let's hear it for tough, genderfucked, radical males, too!!! ».
- 88 Bianca's Lesbian Dictionary.
- 89 Zimmerman, under « Butch/Femme ».
- 90 Scott, Rebecca.
- 91 Stein, under « language ».
- 92 Passive, a role not expected from a butch.
- 93 Sexually provocative.
- 94 Active, not an expected femme role.
- 95 In gay talk, a lesbian is Fish, as in *Go Fish*, a Rose Troche's (romantic) comedy on multicultural Chicago lesbians (US, Samuel Goldwyn Company, 1994).
- 96 This final reference to vegetarians obviously challenges role inversion among « fish » women.
- 97 Bianca's Lesbian Dictionary.

- 98 Cooper.
- 99 See their website site at <http://www.michfest.com>
- 100 The Lesbian Herstory Archives online at <http://www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org>
- 101 A major American TV network.
- 102 The soap has been broadcast since January 2004.
- 103 Baker & Tropiano, 214. See Showtime Online at <http://www.sho.com/site/lword/home.do> or a fan's site The Lworld on line at <http://www.thelwordonline.com/main.shtml>
- 104 Murphy, at the entry « gender theory ».
- 105 *The Free Dictionary*, « Transgender/Transsexual ». « Whereas transgender (coined in the early 1970s in the USA) is generally used for individuals who fully or partially reverse gender roles, but do not go through surgery, trans(s)exual applies to people who, feeling 'trapped in the wrong body', have been through surgery and medical treatment, permanently shifting from their 'birth' sex to the opposite gender. Yet, since the 1990s, transgender is the most common term used today, for both categories ».
- 106 Stein, under the entry 'intersexuals »
- 107 PrideToronto.
- 108 Zimmerman, under 'two-spirit ».
- 109 Marech. See note 60 for Laub.
- 110 Marech.
- 111 Marech.
- 112 Marech.
- 113 Baker, « Fantabulosa ».
- 114 « FtF : Female-To-Femme ». « As the title of our film, FtF, is meant to suggest, people can be born female and enter into a journey to live as another gender expression entirely : femme. We consider this project to be one in alliance with other people crossing genders. It is also a feminist project that acknowledges that people seen as women are attacked as often for occupying a space of femininity as for « violating » that space. In other words, people are attacked for being seen to be moving in and out of the category of « women », but people are also attacked for being « women ». It has long been a goal of ours to foster coalition based on opposition to the hatred of femininity (which makes femininity a triple trap : you are not supposed to leave it, enter it or exist within it). Our film denaturalizes femininity and pushes for an understanding of femininity as multiple rather than singular, constructed rather than natural, and as being as potentially radical on someone « born female » as masculinity ».
- 115 Flamespeak.
- 116 Herbst, under « bisexual ».
- 117 Haggerty, under « bisexuality ». As a distinct identity category, bisexuals did not begin to be recognized until the turn of the twentieth century. It is only of late, with the 1987 March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, that a national bisexual movement began to emerge. The most significant progress was made in the 1990s, when bisexuals created supportive communities throughout the United States, expressing a clear challenge to heteronormativity.
- 118 In reference to the red ribbon worn to increase visibility for HIV and AIDS.
- 119 See note 88.
- 120 Raymond.
- 121 « Recent studies have shown that, on average, lesbian and gay youth first become aware of their same-gender attractions at an average of 9-10 years old and first identify as lesbian or gay at an average of 14-16 years old ». « About GLBT Youth ». Safe School Coalition.
- 122 Ryan & Futterman.
- 123 Betsch.
- 124 « I'm shocked and appalled that they're using university time to sponsor what amounts to promotion of homosexuality in the guise of studying language », says Bob Knight, an alumnus of American University which is host to the Annual Conferences on Lavender Languages and Linguistics. « The event », Knight says, « is—pure and simple—a promotion of sinful behavior ». Brown & Brown.
- 125 Zimmerman, under « slang ».

Pour citer cet article

Référence électronique

Pascale Smorag, « From Closet Talk to PC Terminology : Gay Speech and the Politics of Visibility », *Transatlantica* [En ligne], 1 | 2008, mis en ligne le 14 mai 2008, Consulté le 17 mai 2012. URL : <http://transatlantica.revues.org/3503>

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Résumé / Abstract

Depuis l'époque où l'homosexualité était synonyme de perversion, voire de délit, jusqu'aux actuelles *gay prides*, la communauté gay, lesbienne, bisexuelle et transgenre n'a cessé de développer un langage distinctif, le *gayspeak*. Transgressant les normes sociales, ce parler, davantage glossaire qu'idiome, permet aujourd'hui à la communauté LGBT de reconstruire sa propre réalité tout en ouvrant vers de nouvelles perceptions identitaires. Militant tout autant que ludique, ce langage se veut également le défenseur d'un certain style de vie, cherchant à exprimer, de manière la plus visible, politiquement correcte et efficace qui soit, la richesse des comportements et des cultures du monde gay.

Mots clés : militantisme, homosexualité, lesbiennes, bisexuels, transgenres, homophobie, terminologie gaie et lesbienne, argot gay, identité sexuelle, identité de genre.

This paper examines the extraordinary complexity of sexual orientations and subcultures as expressed by "gay speech," an idiom the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community has developed for itself. Since the times when homosexuality was a perversion to today's vibrant Prides, *gayspeak* has been used to express the needs of a group which, feeling socially repressed, reinvented and subverted language. Whereas some activists are using it as a means to keep politics in the language, notably by reclaiming all discriminatory terminology, others rely upon this rich lexicon to assert the diversity of their specific lifestyles and subcultures.

Keywords : homosexuality, LGBT, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgenders, homophobia, militancy, gay and lesbian language, gay slang, sexual identity, gender.