



## Sorting the Alphabet Soup of Sexual Orientation and Identity: a Guide to LGBT Sources ~ Sheryl Stahl ~

**Description:** When a person in our community "comes out," it causes a ripple effect. People who have never thought about homosexuality or sexual or gender identity issues, or who did so only reluctantly, suddenly must deal with a new issue in their lives and have to try to figure out how it fits into a Jewish context. As librarians, we may have contact with gays and lesbians, their families, their rabbis, their social workers, and friends. There are many resources that address sexual orientation and gender/sexual identity in a Jewish context that we can point them to. In this presentation, I will go over Library of Congress subject headings, discuss print (book and journal) resources, and highlight some online resources.

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As librarians, we meet many different kinds of patrons with a wide variety of information needs. While some questions seem to have appeared from nowhere, others seem to have come directly from the headlines. Here are a few examples of some patrons we may encounter.

An orthodox Rabbi comes in. A young man in his shul just told him that he was gay. The Rabbi would like to respond in a compassionate manner that is halakhicly sound.

A young woman comes in. She is just coming to terms with the fact that she is a lesbian. She is feeling very isolated and would like to know if there is anyone else like her.

A middle-aged couple comes in. Their son has just told them that he has been born into the wrong body and is in fact a woman. They are at a total loss as to how to respond.

A lesbian couple comes in. One of them is about to give birth, and they would like to find a naming ceremony that will celebrate their family.

A reporter comes in. With so many gay issues in the news, he would like to know what Judaism has to say about homosexuality.

While sexual orientation and sexual identify issues are not new, they have certainly become more apparent in the mainstream discourse.

These issues are sometimes hard to talk about for both patrons and librarians. Everyone sees the world through their own experiences, preferences and beliefs. As we try to meet our patrons' needs, we need to sort through our own biases. We have to find a way to speak about and show people references to issues that we don't understand, can't relate to, or even actively disapprove of.

Further complicating this issue is the difficulty in figuring out what words and terms to use. The abundance of initial combinations doesn't help much either: LG, LGB, LGBT, GLBT, GLBTQ, etc. And none of them are even pronounceable!

So to try and sort out this alphabet soup, I'll start with some definitions.

"L" is for lesbian. This is a woman whose primary emotional and physical attractions are for other women. Other terms you might hear are: dyke (which is ok for lesbians to say, but considered pejorative for anyone else), gay woman, or homosexual woman.

"G" is for gay. This is a man whose primary emotional and physical attractions are for other men. As in Hebrew, the male term can be the generic' and include both men and women. Other terms you might find are homosexual (which is also a generic term which can include women - this term is not often used by homosexuals) and fag or faggot (as with 'dyke' this term has been 'reclaimed' and is used by some gay men, but is considered pejorative from anyone else.)

"B" is for bisexual. This refers to a man or woman with strong emotional and physical attractions to both men and women. This is often called just 'bi.'

"T" is the hardest to define. The open discussion of these issues is so new that the terminology hasn't really settled down.

The Social Work and Psychology fields treat *transgender* and *transsexual* as two separate issues. *Transgender* describes people who are not comfortable with the gender expression which their culture has assigned to them. In other words, they are comfortable with their bodies, but they are not comfortable or can't relate to the roles, clothes, or behaviors that are expected of someone of their sex. *Transsexual* describes someone who is not comfortable in their body and feels that they were born into a body of the wrong sex.

On the other hand, many popular works use *transgender* as a continuum that goes from "mild" (cross-dressing) to "extreme" (changing the body by surgery or hormones)

The Library of Congress does not distinguish between *transsexual* and *transgender* and uses *transsexual* to cover both. I'll spend more time on the Library of Congress in a minute. Other terms you might see are trans, ftm (that is female to male), mtf (male to female), transvestite, cross-dresser, drag queen, or drag king.

While L., G., B., & T. are the most common initials seen, there are more. "I" is for inter-sexed. These are people who have both male and female physical characteristics. The older term for this is hermaphrodite.

"Q" is for queer, which is a sort of umbrella term for any of the above. And "Q" is also for questioning. And of course, "H" is for the heterosexuals amongst us. Also known as straight, hets, breeders.

I'm sure there are many terms that I left out and new terms are still appearing. I recently saw the term 'lesbigay' in a scholarly journal (American Sociological Review) and 'homofolk' in a book.

While all these issues tend to get lumped together, they actually belong to two separate topics: those referring to sexual orientation and those referring to sexual identity. *Sexual orientation* deals with how a person relates to other people; a person's physical and emotional attractions. *Sexual identity* refers to a person's relationship with their own body - the 'match' between their body and their feelings about what it should be.

**Library of Congress Cataloging and Classification.**

The Library of Congress is in various stages of dealing with these issues. I've highlighted some of the most commonly used terms in this chart. I've tried to find the most specific terms and phrases related to Judaism and religion. There are many others relating to various aspects of LGBT life in the LC books.

	<b>Issue</b>	<b>People</b>
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	Sexual orientation Homosexuality - Religious aspects - Judaism Lesbianism - Religious aspects - Judaism Homosexuality, male - Religious aspects - Judaism Bisexuality - Religious aspects Heterosexuality Homosexuality in the Bible	Gays Gay men Lesbians Jewish gays Jewish lesbians Jewish gay men Lesbian rabbis. Bisexuals Bisexual men Bisexual women
<b>Sexual Identity</b>	Gender identity Transsexualism Hermaphroditism -- Religious aspects	Transsexuals Female-to-male transsexuals Transvestites

On the shelves, items tend to be clustered in a few spaces. In the LC classification scheme, we'll find most books in one of 3 places: BM 729 H6.5 for special topics in Judaism, BS 680 H6.7 for special topics in the Bible, and HQ 74 -77

Judaism. Special topics. Homosexuality/Gays/Lesbians: BM 729 H6.5

Bible. Topics. Homosexuality: BS 680 H6.7

Bisexuality: HQ 74 - 74.2.

Homosexuality. Lesbianism: HQ 75 - 76.95

Transvestism: HQ 76.97 - 77.2

Transsexualism: HQ 77.7 - 77.95

Same-sex marriage: HQ 1033 - 1034

### Print Resources

In the early 1980's the first books appeared which addressed issues of being both gay or lesbian *and* Jewish. The number of books on the topic has steadily increased since then. Interestingly, the books have been and remain focused on gay and lesbian issues. Very few have addressed bisexuality or trans issues. I picked out just a few of the many books available. I've included some recent works as well as some 'classics.'

There are many books which talk about the personal experiences of Jewish gays and lesbians. *Nice Jewish Girls: a lesbian anthology*, edited by Evelyn Torton Beck was a groundbreaking collection. It addressed homophobia in the Jewish community, anti-Semitism in the lesbian community, and issues of coming-out and other family relationships. The collection was published in 1982, and revised and updated in 1989.

Also published in 1989, was *Twice blessed: on being lesbian or gay and Jewish*, edited by Christie Balka and Andy Rose. The editors brought together essays to illustrate the diversity of voices and experiences among gay and lesbian Jews. They addressed topics of gay and lesbian role models, relationships, and community.

*Found tribe: Jewish coming out stories*, edited by Larence Schimel was published more recently, in 2002. The collection focuses on men's coming out in different situations.

And lastly, *Queer Jews*, edited by David Shneer and Caryn Aviv was also published in 2002. It has a much broader focus. In addition to gay/lesbian issues, this book addresses transgender issues, as well as different aspects of popular culture.

I've only picked out a few collections, but there are many more as well as a wealth of individual biographies and memoirs.

There are not as many books which deal with homosexuality in general as it relates to

Judaism. I highlighted a few which represent different viewpoints.

In *Like bread on a the seder plate: Jewish lesbians and the transformation of tradition* by Rebecca Alpert, the author examines Jewish texts (mainly Torah) from a Reconstructionist point of view. She also addresses issues of relationships, coming out, and contemporary literature.

Steven Greenberg offers a orthodox point of view in his book, *Wrestling with God and men:: homosexuality in the Jewish tradition*. He examines texts dealing with intimacy, sexuality, and homosexuality in the Tanach, Rabbinic literature, piyyutim and other Jewish texts.

And from the Reform movement, comes *Kulanu (All of Us) : a program for congregations implementing gay and lesbian inclusion : a handbook for UAHC congregations* prepared by the UAHC Task Force on Lesbian and Gay Inclusion. Chapters include: history and texts, steps to inclusion, life-cycles, leadership training and education, (re)defining family and temple membership, and employment practices.

As I mentioned, I did not find any books that dealt specifically with Judaism and bisexuality or trans issues, so I'll mention a couple more general works.

*Bi any other name: bisexual people speak out* is a collection essays, personal stories, and poetry edited by Loraine Hutchins and Lani Kaahumanu which covers many aspects of bisexuals' experiences.

*Our Trans children* is an excellent publication by the Transgender Network of PFLAG. You can buy a paper copy or download it from their website. The booklet is set up in a question and answer format and covers family, social, health, and legal issues.

*Trans-gendered ; theology, ministry and communities of faith* by Justin Tanis, *Omnigender: a trans-religious approach* by Virginia Ramey Mollenkott and *Transgender warriors* by Leslie Feinberg are three books that discuss trans issues from personal, community, medical and religious perspectives.

### **Internet Resources**

Not surprisingly, there is a wealth of information on the Internet. Although again, I found much more on Jewish gay/lesbian issues than on trans or bisexual issues. Most of the descriptions are taken from the sites' homepages.

A new site sponsored by the Sexual Orientation Issues in the Jewish Community (an initiative of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion) is the **Jeff Herman Virtual Resource Center** or **VRC**. Its goal is to help Jewish professionals become more knowledgeable about the religious, cultural, health and communal needs of gay and lesbian Jews and their families. It includes annotated links to sites with information, responsa, personal perspectives, and discussion forums on Jewish law and customs from various branches of Judaism related to sexual orientation, and gay and lesbian focused synagogues, outreach programs and other supportive organizations. It also has a section (called sampleography) which is divided by topic and includes web sites, book reviews, articles, video reviews, etc.

### **World Congress of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Jews, Keshet Ga'ava**

This organization consists of more than 65 member organizations in Argentina, Australia, Austria, Canada, France, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Mexico, The Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The World Congress holds conferences and workshops representing the interests of lesbian, gay, bisexual, & transgender Jews around the world. The focus of these sessions varies from regional, national, continental, to global.

### ***Orthodykes***

The purpose of this site is to provide a home on the Internet for Orthodox Jewish lesbians. At the moment, there are OrthoDykes groups in New York, in Israel and on the Internet.

### ***GayJews.org***

GayJews.Org is committed to providing up to date, accurate information for Orthodox Jews who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered. We have links to all other from GLBT content here on the web as well as a number of features of our own. Includes Questions and Answers L'Halacha on Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender Issues.

### ***CLAF*** (Kehilah Lesbit feministit = Community of feminist lesbians)

The objectives of CLAF are: raising public awareness of the special issues pertaining to lesbians ; legislative and lobbying activities aimed at achieving legal equality for lesbians and their families ; raising awareness among lesbians of their rights as equal citizens under Israeli law ; and creating a safe, secure and supportive environment for lesbians.

For more general web sites, I would recommend **PFLAG's** main site and their **Transgender Network** site. PFLAG (Parents, families, friends of lesbians and gays) promotes the health and well-being of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons, their families and friends through: support, to cope with an adverse society; education, to enlighten an ill-informed public; and advocacy, to end discrimination and to secure equal civil rights. PFLAG provides opportunity for dialogue about sexual orientation and gender identity, and acts to create a society that is healthy and respectful of human diversity. Includes printable booklets on several topics.

### **Same-Sex Marriage: a selective bibliography of the legal literature**

Compiled by Paul Axel-Lute, this site includes: court rulings, articles for and against same-sex marriage, and list by state of legal actions/issues.

### **People with a History : An Online Guide to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans\* History**

People with a History presents the history of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgendered people [=LGBT]. It includes hundreds of original texts, discussions, and [soon] images, and addresses LGBT history in all periods, and in all regions of the world. In the medieval section, there is an article on Jews.

### **Periodical Indexes.**

Lastly, I would like to mention periodical indexes and databases. As Judaica librarians, most of us are familiar with *RAMBI* (Index of Articles on Jewish Studies put out the Jewish

National and University Library) and the *Index to Jewish Periodicals*. Both include some LGBT articles. Both are somewhat limited in their assigned subject headings and use either homosexuality alone or homosexuality and lesbian. For trans or intersex articles, you might have more luck doing keyword searches under: transsexual, transgender, or hermaphrodites

For those of us in academic settings, you might have access to the *GLBT Life database*. This is a subscription database of scholarly and popular journals, newspapers, etc.

So, now lets return to our patrons.

For the Orthodox rabbi, I would direct him to the book *Wrestling with God and men* and to the **VRC** which has some formal and informal responsa from the different Jewish branches.

For the young woman who is just coming out, I would recommend *Nice Jewish girls*, *Queer Jews* and the **Orthodykes** website. If she was concerned about coming out to her family, I would point her to the **PFLAG** site for hints on how to do that and to find support groups.

For the couple with a trans son, I would steer them towards **PFLAG's Transgender network** for information and support.

For the about-to-be moms, I would suggest browsing through the general baby naming collection. There are many contemporary and traditional ceremonies available and I'm sure that some could be used 'as is' or easily adapted to suit their family.

For the reporter, I would suggest the **VRC** to get a widest range of views.

So whether the questions come from the headlines for from the heart, I hope that we will be able to steer our patrons towards the information and support they need in the areas of sexual orientation and identity.

Slides from this presentation are available online at:  
<http://www.huc.edu/libraries/Exhibits/LGBT/>