



## Situational Homosexuality

by Tina Gianoulis

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Situational, or "emergency" homosexuality is commonly defined as sexual activity with partners of the same sex that occurs not as part of a gay life style, but because the participants happen to find themselves in a single-sex environment for a prolonged period.

Some single-sex environments that frequently become venues for situational homosexuality include prisons, military bases, ships at sea, convents and monasteries, athletic teams on tour, and boarding schools and colleges. Situational homosexual behavior is so common in these venues that in some cases nicknames have been created for those who indulge in it; for example "rigger-buggers" on rugby teams, "jailhouse turnouts" in prisons, and "lugs" for "lesbians until (college) graduation."

The idea of situational same-sex sexual activity is not a modern one. An essay by Josiah Flynt, published in 1899, told of situational sex among the male American hobos with whom he traveled. From the armies of Alexander the Great to the trenches of World War I to Desert Storm, male soldiers have taken comfort in each other's arms; and from harems to convents to boarding schools, women who were forcibly separated from men have been finding each other for centuries.

Situational homosexual experience can range from the frightening, such as prison rape and sexual domination, to the comfortable, such as the lesbian experimentation that occurs within the relative safety of a college campus.

### **Behavioral Bisexuality**

Sometimes called "behavioral bisexuality," the concept of situational homosexuality is a complex one. At its heart is the notion that the participants in same-sex sexual activity would not have done so were it not for their unusual situation and that they therefore are not really homosexual.

Since gay identity and life style are neither approved nor accepted by most societies, it is difficult to determine accurately the reason behind an individual's choice of heterosexual identification. While someone might insist that he or she chooses to be straight, it is impossible to know how much social pressure may be affecting that decision. Likewise, bisexuality is often disapproved by both gay and straight society, and bisexuals may be pressured to "choose" one sexual preference or another.

The question, thus, remains whether those who engage in situational homosexuality might be more generally bisexual if bisexuality were a more socially accepted choice.

Moreover, the concept of situational homosexuality raises other questions as to what extent sexual behavior expresses internal needs and desires and to what extent it is a response to external circumstances.

### **The Relationship of Situational Homosexuality to Homophobia**

In many cultures, situational homosexuality is tolerated, while homosexuality as a life style is not.

Some social analysts believe that the concept of situational homosexuality is used to reinforce homophobia and biphobia by allowing those who perform homosexual acts in same-sex environments to continue to define themselves as heterosexual.

Often participants in same-sex activity in single-sex environments are differentiated between "true homosexuals" and those who retain the assumption of heterosexuality. In such cases, it is usually the "true homosexuals" who are stigmatized, while their partners are not. In making such a distinction, homophobia is reinforced even as same-sex sexual activity may be tolerated.

Although situational homosexuality is often both tacitly expected and to some degree tolerated, it is also expected to remain clandestine. When such homosexual activity is made public, even in venues where virtually everyone knows it is happening, punishment is usually swift and severe, though often the brunt of punishment is borne by the participant who is considered the "true homosexual" rather than the presumably heterosexual partner who ostensibly participates in same-sex activity only because of his or her situation.

### **Bibliography**

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### **About the Author**

**Tina Gianoulis** is an essayist and free-lance writer who has contributed to a number of encyclopedias and anthologies, as well as to journals such as *Sinister Wisdom*.