

Gay vs. Homosexual

What's the Difference?

A more modern understanding of sexual identity

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Note: This is an educational tool based upon observational, theoretical, and clinical research unique to LMP's modern perspective of LGBTQ sexual identity.

Promoting Clarity is Our Mission (1)

At a young age today, it's sometimes difficult to understand one's "sexual identity" due to confusion brought on by social pressures, the media, religious indoctrination, scientific debate, popular political opinion, childhood abuse, and misinformed parenting. Understanding the origins of "gay" (2) and "homosexual" (3) can help us better conceptualize what it truly means to be LGBTQ – an *"inborn loving human identity."* Let's explore these two terms while addressing their drastic differences in our modern understanding of "sexual orientation" (a.k.a. 'sexual identity'). Even today, the terms "gay" and "homosexual" are still inappropriately used interchangeably in various facets of society especially within scientific research, the media, religious teachings, political arenas, and educational institutions. Let's clarify these two terms, why they should never be used interchangeably (especially in social settings), and the negative social implications if used improperly.

Defining the Facts

Today, in social terms, it's clearly understood the word "homosexual" is merely a century's old observational interpretation of same-gender "sexual desires and behaviors." (3) Modern social science now understands "homosexuality" is NOT a "sexual orientation" or even a "sexual identity" but simply same-gender "sexual desires and behaviors" [e.g., '*men who have sex with men*' (MSM); '*women who have sex with women*' (WSW)]. We also understand "homosexuality" is more accurately described in modern terms as a *"physical sexual fluidity,"* as discussed below. This understanding allows us to better conceptualize "gay" as a loving "inborn trait" rather than a mere "sexual behavior or desire."

Presently, we use the term "gay" as a modern colloquial (or social) expression to more appropriately address a "gay" person's "inborn identity" based upon *"love, intimacy, sexual passion, and commitment."* (4) Historically, up until the late 1960's, most psychiatrists only interpreted "homosexuality" as "sexual deviance" (a 'behavioral' or 'mental' disorder) and never fully addressed "homosexuality" as a person's "inborn identity" or a "healthy desire" to connect romantically with the same gender. That's a major reason why modern western "social perspectives" conceive the term "homosexual" as largely outdated, inaccurate, and demoralizing. To remedy this issue, the word "homosexual" would need to be expanded upon or redefined for the LGBTQ population to relate to it "internally." *Unfortunately, even today, the scientific term "homosexual"(3) still does not address loving "romantic ideations" (4) or even a simple loving emotional connection.*

There is a strong consensus among social scientists, (1) in the U.S. today, that a person's "sexual behaviors" play zero role in determining one's "sexual identity." Our "consensual sexual behaviors" (specifically 'sexual experimentation') may only help us better understand and reinforce our inborn "sexual identity." As a well-accepted scientific concept, a person's "sexual identity" is likely first formed before birth much before one's ability to comprehend sex. The term "gay" can therefore be better defined as a "personality trait" related to a "*desire to love*" (4) and to be "*loved romantically*" (4) by someone of the same gender instead of being diminished to a mere "sexual behavior or desire." In other words, "gay" is defined as an "inborn-desire" to connect with someone of the same gender on varying degrees of loving "*intimate, passionate, and commitment*" (4) levels.

Let's define "gay" and "homosexual" in modern social terms

Gay = rooted in a person's loving "inborn identity" (2)

(e.g., same-gender intimacy, loving sexual-passion, commitment) (4)

Homosexual = rooted in a person's "sexual behaviors and desires" (3)

(e.g., same-gender objectified sex, sexual-passion, lust), (or 'physical sexual fluidity,' *see below*)

[i.e., Many 'gay' individuals (particularly 'gay' males) have a strong affinity for 'homosexual' sex (e.g., 'objectified' sexual behaviors) while not all people practicing 'homosexuality' are even 'gay' (many consider themselves 'straight').]

Three examples to add clarity

1.) Anyone of any gender, ethnicity, race, sexual identity, or religion can "choose" to engage in "homosexual behavior" (in essence, 'choose' a 'homosexual lifestyle') while foregoing the loving, intimate, and committed (4) aspect. However, no one can "choose" to be "gay" or "choose" to live a "gay lifestyle" because it's an "inborn identity."

2.) Within the ancient Roman, Greek, and Hindu cultures, "homosexual" practices were very common but few of them who practiced "homosexuality" could actually be considered "gay" by our understanding today. Homosexuality was highly "culturally-based" and "culturally-driven." It was common practice to objectify others of the same gender for purely sexual purposes.

3.) It's becoming increasingly socially acceptable in "westernized culture" for males and females to engage in "homosexual" activities while maintaining their "straight" sexual identity because these are merely considered "sexual acts" based primarily upon "objectified" sexual desire, lust, and passion. They do not equate themselves to being "gay" or even "bi" because of the genuine lack of loving, intimate, passionate, and commitment ideations (4) for the same sex.

Term 'Homosexual' as Dehumanizing

Historically, LGBTQ people were defined in "scientific terms" as "research subjects" by studying their "homosexual behaviors" (3) rather than their loving "*romantic ideations*" (4) in an attempt to label (or demoralize) their so-called "deviant" sexual behavior as a "disorder." Even today, it appears the largely "straight" heteronormative scientific community continues, still, to perpetuate the idea that being "gay" is equivalent to being "homosexual" which directly promotes this demoralizing scientific, political, and religious historical perspective of the distant past. For example, the scientific term "homosexual" (3) still does not include loving "*romantic ideations*." What's worse, the label indirectly promotes cultural, scientific, religious, and political discrimination and abuse. Even currently, many "straight" people are unaware of the severe trauma

the use of the word "homosexual" promotes today and encouraged throughout history. In social circles, it's important to use the proper term "gay" (which accurately represents a 'loving identity') to avoid promoting this highly dehumanizing and demoralizing social, scientific, political, and religious history.

Term 'Gay' as Liberating

When the term "gay" (as a sexual identity) started gaining popularity in the 1950's, it was the beginning of liberation from the chains of past "scientific and religious abuse." The very meaning of the word "gay" (merry, joyous, carefree) perfectly exemplified the desired emotions of the LGBTQ people and how they wanted to escape this traumatic psychological abuse. They just wanted to finally break free of the chains from their past. And the term "homosexual" perfectly exemplified these horrific chains. Even much of the U.S. governmental scientific community strove to continually label LGBTQs as deviant "homosexual" predators. So, remember, when you use the term "gay," it has a very significant meaning of "empowerment, liberation, and love" to the LGBTQ population.

Emotional Sexual Fluidity (common female trait) (6)

Note: The current scientific community cannot come to a general consensus on whether "sexual fluidity" is inborn, socially derived, or both. The following is our interpretation of how "inborn" sexual fluidity can exist for both females and males.

Emotional Sexual Fluidity (ESF) is a term developed by us indicating a person's tendency for "sexual behaviors" within sexes motivated primarily by "emotional desires." Generally speaking, ESF is, by far, more common between females ('lesbian and straight' identities; 'straight and straight' identity) because of a female's "heightened innate ability" to connect "emotionally" with each other via an "intimate, passionate, and committed" (4) level. ESF can be described as a person's "inborn-trait" where "emotional sexual desires" supersede "physical sexual desires." This can result in a person's ability to base their "sexual desires" primarily upon "internal human-traits" and secondarily upon "external human-traits." This could be conceived as an "emotionally-driven bisexuality" (presence of strong 'gay' emotional ideations) due to a significant emotionally "loving, intimate, passionate, and commitment" (4) desires within sexes. However, this person generally would not be considered "bisexual" because of the lack of "significant 'physical' sexual-attraction" to both sexes.

Physical Sexual Fluidity (common male trait) (6)

Physical Sexual Fluidity (PSF) is a term developed by us indicating a person's tendency for "sexual behaviors" within sexes motivated primarily by "physical desires." Generally speaking, PSF is, by far, more common between males ('gay and straight' identities; 'straight and straight' identity) because of a male's "heightened innate ability" to connect "physically" with each other via a purely "sexually objectified" level. PSF can be described as an "inborn trait" where their "physical sexual desires" typically supersede their "emotional sexual desires." These individuals tend to have a more difficult time connecting on more emotionally "intimate, passionate, and commitment" (4) levels (resulting in higher 'sexual objectification') which can then result in increased rates of PSF. This could often be conceived as "objectified bisexuality" (presence of strong 'homosexual' (3) ideations) due to significant "objectified sexual-passion and lustful desires" within sexes. However, this person generally would not be considered "bisexual" because of the lack of "strong 'emotional' sexual-attraction" to both sexes.

History of the Word 'Homosexual'

In 1880, the word "homosexual" originated first by *Gustav Jäger* a German naturalist and hygienist in his writings. Just over a decade later, in 1892, the term gained scientific acceptance through the psychiatrist *Richard von Krafft-Ebing's* book "Psychopathia Sexualis" on sexual deviation. This book became the foundation for the understanding of human sexuality 20 years before *Sigmund Freud's* "Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex."

Through 100 years of scientific psychiatric research, "homosexuality" was still understood as a psychosomatic disease (body-mind disease) or purely a psychological disorder (a disease of the mind). Later, in 1946, the word was adopted into the English translation of the bible because no contextually appropriate English word existed similar to the Hebrew word ('to know') neither the Greek word ('arsenokoitai'). However, many biblical scholars today understand that "to know" can have many different connotations in Hebrew. Similarly, many biblical scholars believe "arsenokoitai" in Greek was misinterpreted and should be defined as "to 'objectify' another of the same gender sexually." However, in the 1940's, the word "homosexuality" was well accepted as a "disease" and seemed to easily fit the intertwined ideologies of the scientific and religious beliefs of that time.

In 1952, when the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders I (DSM-I) was first published by the *American Psychological Association* (APA), "homosexuality" was considered a "sociopathic personality disturbance" (SPD) diagnosis. By 1968, the DSM-II version re-classified the SPD diagnosis as a "sexual deviation" (SD) diagnosis. Then later in 1973, the famously revised DSM-II-R version now considered the SD diagnosis a "sexual orientation disturbance" (SOD) diagnosis by a vote of the APA's board of trustees. The SOD diagnosis indicated a mental illness only if the person experienced distress due to their same-sex attractions and wanted to change. This new diagnosis represented a compromise between psychiatrists divided on this issue within the APA. Another compromise occurred in 1980, within the new DSM-III version, which replaced the SOD diagnosis with an "ego-dystonic homosexuality" (EDH) diagnosis indicating the lack of desire for heteronormative sexual behaviors. Then, in 1987, this diagnosis was FINALLY removed completely from the revised DSM-III-R version.

Today, the term "homosexuality" is still defined in the same way as a century ago perceived as an objectifiable "sexual behavior" rather than a "human identity" based upon "love." This is largely because, historically, the "homosexual" diagnosis was primarily described as a "disorder" (disease) largely driven by "choice" (nurture) and never perceived as an "inborn loving identity" (nature).

History of the Word 'Gay'

The origin of the term "gay" is highly disputed but it's often believed to have begun in the 14th century from the Old French *gai* "joyful, happy; pleasant, agreeably charming; forward, pert." By the 1890's, the term developed a more sexual meaning referring to a brothel as a "gay house." As far back as 1893, "homosexual" became attached to the label "gay cats" who were wanderers living on their own doing odd jobs because they were outcasts (hobos). Many of them were reported to be "homosexual" in the early 1900's. Later in the 1940's, "gay" was first adopted in psychological literature to be referred to as "homosexual."

"After discharge A.Z. lived for some time at home. He was not happy at the farm and went to a Western city where he associated with a homosexual crowd, being 'gay,' and wearing female

clothes and makeup. He always wished others would make advances to him." [Rorschach Research Exchange and Journal of Projective Techniques,' 1947, p.240]

Necessary Changes to Research

It's common within our "modern" scientific research to inappropriately apply the concept of "sexual identity" interchangeably for both "homosexual" and "gay" terminologies. This is likely due to a significant divide in our social and scientific conceptualizations of "sexual orientation." The over 100 years of misleading scientific "homosexual" research has laid the groundwork for an inaccurate equivalency between same-sex "sexual desires" and same-sex "intimate, loving, and committed ideations." This fallacy has caused a major rift in our social understanding of same-sex "human sexual identity" while often inadvertently encouraging the idea that "sexual orientation" ('gay') is a "choice." While related, the two terms are far from identical. There must be a paradigm shift within all human sexuality research to clearly distinguish "gay" from "homosexual" or the false social narrative promoting "gay" as a "choice" will continue to intensify over the years to come.

Need Scientific Agreement of Terms

As social scientists, we understand "physical sexual attraction" is solely ONE determining factor to accurately describe a person's "gay," "straight," or "bi" identities. We concede there must exist more precise **unifying** scientific terminologies (language) to identify how "gay," "straight," or "bi" persons "feel" toward another on all 3 "*intimate, sexually passionate, and commitment*" (4) levels. For example, the *American Psychological Association* (APA) only includes "romantic ideations" for "heterosexual" and "bisexual" terms but not for "homosexual." (5)

*"...sexual orientation is usually discussed in terms of three categories: **heterosexual** (having emotional, romantic or sexual attractions to members of the other sex), **gay/lesbian** (having emotional, romantic or sexual attractions to members of one's own sex) and **bisexual** (having emotional, romantic or sexual attractions to both men and women)." (5)*

*"People can be celibate and still know their sexual orientation--be it **lesbian, gay, bisexual or heterosexual**." (5)*

What did you notice here? According to the APA, "emotional" and "romantic" ideations (as well as 'sexual orientation') are all confined to the "heterosexual" and "bisexual" scientific terms. (5) The "**gay/lesbian**" colloquial (or social) terms replace the "homosexual" scientific term (5) likely because socially "homosexuality" is perceived solely as a "sexual attraction" different from "sexual orientation" (which also includes 'romantic ideations'). (4) As a result, this produces a very imbalanced, non-uniform, and confusing relationship between "heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual" terminologies. Consequently, the equivalency between "homosexual" and "gay" is often falsely promoted in society today. In turn, this imbalance produces a massive divide in our modern social and scientific perceptions of "gay" and "homosexual" identities.

Conclusion

In more modern social perspectives, we understand "gay" refers to males and females attracted lovingly, romantically, sexually, and intimately to their own gender. The term "gay" better reflects a person's "sexual orientation" rather than "homosexual" because "gay" has less of a clinical (emotionally detached) meaning and more of a socially accurate (love oriented) (4) significance. This differentiation came about due to our social understanding that the term "homosexual"

originated from a scientifically and religiously "derogatory connotation" based primarily in "scientific inaccuracy and abuse." These are the major reasons why we separate the two words today. Another reason is because the term "gay" is a more modern and socially respectable version; the lesbian and gay populations tend to feel it more accurately represents their "inborn sexual identity" due to its inclusion of "*romantic, intimate, and commitment ideations.*" (4)

So, when societies start to finally understand these major (and greatly misconceived) flaws in our perception of "gay" and "homosexual," we might just begin to resolve much of the religious, political, and social prejudice related to "human sexual identity." And the "LGBTQ" population might then finally enjoy the benefits of full inclusion in ALL societies around the globe.

Sources and Footnotes

1. **This article reflects an essentialist viewpoint related to sexual orientation in social science.** Essentialism suggests human 'sexual orientation' originates as an 'innate or inborn identity.' This is a counterargument to the constructionism viewpoint which teaches our 'sexual identity' is 'learned' or 'partially learned.' Humans are prone to sexual experimentation and through years of human experience and interactions, a person's 'sexual identity' may not become fully recognized until later in adulthood--a very common phenomenon among straight and LGBT 'Q' (or questioning) youth.
2. **There is no scientific equivalent to the term 'gay' or 'lesbian' currently.** Socially 'gay' and 'lesbian' are 'sexual identities' based upon a person's sexual (passionate), intimate, and committed ideations. However, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, 'gay' and 'lesbian' are synonymous with 'homosexual' which is highly inaccurate because the term 'homosexual' excludes intimacy, romance, and commitment paramount to sexual identity ('gay' and 'lesbian'). Our current scientific community has not yet fully addressed this significant incongruity. It is essential there be a scientific debate to accurately translate 'gay' and 'lesbian' into scientific 'names' today.
3. **The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines 'homosexuality' as:** "*sexual attraction or a tendency to direct sexual desire toward the same sex; sexual activity with another of the same sex.*" This defines 'homosexuality' as purely 'sexually-motivated' while foregoing important factors including a desire for a 'loving, romantic, intimate, or committed' connection vital to a person's 'sexual identity.' This is paramount to fully understand the difference between 'gay' as a 'sexual identity' (same-sex loving intimacy, passion, and commitment) and 'homosexuality' as a 'sexual desire' (same-sex objectified passion, sex, and lust).
4. **The Triangular Theory of Love.** In 1986, Dr. Robert Sternberg created this theory of love which helps identify which of the "7 type of love" two people feel for one another. Within this theory, Dr. Sternberg suggests these "types of love" are based upon 3 criteria: "intimacy, passion, and commitment." This helps us better conceptualize what love is and the deep complexities behind how our human desires, attractions, and emotions represent who we are inside.
5. **American Psychological Association.** (2017). *Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality.* <http://www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/orientation.aspx>
6. **Two Forms of Sexual Fluidity.** Our division of 'sexual fluidity' into two categories is highly generalized across genders. It is based upon the broad understanding that females manifest more sexually emotional traits while males manifest more sexually objectifiable traits. Nonetheless, as the scientific evidence evolves, these explanations may evolve as well.

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