The Adaptation of Homosexuality
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Homosexuality has existed in human society for centuries. It can be found in societies as early as the ancient Greeks, and continuing still into modern times. With the Nineteenth Century, homosexuality became, although rarely mentioned, an identified form. It was something that was never spoken of or whispered about, and those that participated in it kept that secret to themselves. The Twentieth Century, however, saw a change in that as well. Homosexuality was no longer kept so strictly to the dark, although it continued to be a delicate subject. With the coming of the Twentieth Century, the people who practiced homosexuality kept it a secret only by choice. The ancient Greeks, on the other hand, did not have so much concern for secrecy in respect to homosexuality. It was well known in Greek society that dominate men would have sexual relations with young boys. In fact, homosexuality, (for male or female) was often the theme of many Greek myths and artistic outlets (Halperin, 1990). Since homosexuality has existed for so long, it must have had a purpose.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to discover the purpose of the adaptation of homosexuality. I will begin by defining homosexuality and discussing its history among the ancient Greeks. For a brief comparison, I will then discuss homosexuality as it was viewed during the Renaissance. In an attempt to find a more biological and physical answer to the question of homosexuality, I will call upon studies done by Sigmund Freud and discussed in depth by Lionel Ovesey. Following this discussion, I will discuss how modern Christian cultures view homosexuality. My conclusion shall bring each of these discussions together in an attempt to explain the adaptation of homosexuality through time.
**Greek Homosexuality**

The basis for Greek sexuality is perhaps best explained in Aristophanes myth in Plato’s *Symposium*. To summarize the myth, Aristophanes explains that human beings were once oddly shaped creatures that looked drastically different than they do now. In a lecture I once heard, a professor said that Aristophanes’ first humans reminded him of roly-polys. He made this claim because the first humans were round creatures with two sets of arms, legs, and genitals, as well as two faces. There were three types of these proto-humans, the first was all male, with both sets of genitalia being like that of male genitalia; the second was all female, with both sets of genitalia like that of female genitalia; and the third was androgynous, with one set of genitalia like that of the female and the other set like that of the male. The myth goes that the Greek gods and goddesses feared these proto-humans because of their queer look. Zeus, the king of the Greek gods, could not have his fellow immortals fearing mortal creatures, so he ordered Apollo to cut the creatures in two, stretching the skin around each half to cover the then missing half. Apollo also rotated their heads (Halperin, 1990). The proto-humans, however, missed the connection they had with their other half so that

“once reunited, [they] clung to one another so desperately and concerned themselves so little with their survival as separate entities that they began to perish for lack of sustenance; those that outlived their mates sought out persons belonging to the same sex as their lost complements and repeated their embraces in a foredoomed attempt to recover their original unity” (Halperin, 1990).

As such, these new forms humans found themselves dying off. Zeus pitied the humans then, and had Apollo move their genitals around to their front sides so that they could at least procreate. David Halperin points out that “Aristophanes extracts from this story a genetic explanation of observable differences among human being with respect to sexual
object-choice and preferred style of life” (1990: 19). Halperin explains that “preferred life style” references a person’s (especially a man’s) choice in whether or not he or she wished to marry. From this myth, Greek thoughts on sexual behavior can be easily understood. The “ideal” Greek relationship, however, was a relationship between an adult male and a young boy. Aristophanes accounts for this as well, stating that, unlike the other two categories of humans, descendants of the male-male category were attracted not just to men, but to pubescent or pre-adult boys (Halperin, 1990).

This myth, then, helped explain to the ancient Greeks their thoughts on sexual attraction, making it a perfectly natural thing instead of some mishap by nature. The ancient Greeks seemed so secure in their sexual choices that they expressed them not only in the myth of Aristophanes, but in many of their other myths, paintings, sculptures, etc. This, perhaps, does not fully explain the sexual attraction to someone of the same gender, but it does give insight into the general acceptance of homosexuality in a culture, as well as, proof of homosexuality as existing before it was officially named in the early twentieth century (Halperin, 1990).

**Homosexuality in Renaissance England**

By the time of the Renaissance, homosexuality had become an act of the devil. Aristophanes’ myth was no longer an explanation as to why some people were sexually attracted to others of the same gender. Homosexuality was a sin collectively brought together with other sexual sins of the time and called “sodomy” or “buggery.” The furthest explanation that most authors gave to homosexuality (in combination with the other sexual sins) was “a sin committed ‘by mankind or with brute beast or by
womankind and brute beast” (Bray, 1982). The belief during the Renaissance was that one sexual sin, such as homosexuality, led to all of the other sexual sins, and that is perhaps why they were referred to collectively. In the pamphlet, The Life and Death of John Atherton, the writer “recounts in sensational detail the alleged sexual vices – the same trio of adultery, incest, and rape…culminated in homosexuality and [John Atherton’s] subsequent execution.” These same vices were then mentioned in other pamphlets by writers such as John Donne, John Wilmot, and John Marston. The name Ganymede became used to reference the homosexual activity among “sinners,” with Ganymede more than likely coming from the ancient Greek myth of Ganymede, the cup bearer of the Olympian gods and homosexual-boy-child lover of Zeus. It is no surprise, then, that when John Atherton was discovered to have a “Ganymede,” he and his lover, John Childe, were sentenced to death and hanged as other mortal sins were punished (Bray, 1982).

As disliked and distrusted as homosexuality was during the Renaissance, many of the thinkers of the time still attempted to explain its cause. Edward Coke claimed the origin of homosexuality as “‘pride, excess of diet, idleness, and contempt for the poor,’” while Bray (1982) goes on to note that George Turberville’s explanation was common drunkenness. Other thinkers of the time, however, based its origins in the “natural corruption and viciousness” of man (Bray, 1982).

Freudian Explanations

During his studies, Sigmund Freud proposed a reason for homosexuality. Lionel Ovesey (1969) summarizes Freud’s idea as “instinctual forces that are inherent, have a
fixed ontogenetic course of development, and recapitulate phylogeny.” According to
Freud, everyone goes through a “homosexual stage” during their sexual development,
with this stage occurring between autoerotism and heterosexual object-choice. Ovesey
summarizes Freud’s idea into four points in regard to the libido theory, which is “the
theory of instincts and its energetic equivalent.” The first point is that the person
excessively fixates on himself during the autoerotic stage. When the stage shifts from
autoerotic to object-love, “he remains at a point of fixation between the two,” resulting in
an attraction to someone with the same genitals. Ovesey points out that “in fantasy he
then loves himself through his partner.” The second point is related to “castration
anxiety.” The person is at first fixated with the mother with an Oedipus complex. As he
fails at striving for his mother, he begins to identify with her, so that he is assimilating
her into him. He then seeks out homosexual love-objects so that he can give them the
love he wanted from his mother. The third point entails an anal fixation so that as the
person assimilates the mother into himself he takes also the desire to enjoy sex the same
way that the mother does. The fourth point concerns rivalry, as among brothers, in which
the “competitive hatred was held in check by transformation into homosexual love”
(Ovesey, 1969).

In terms of adaptation, Ovesey (1969) points out that homosexuality was often
used to disguise nonsexual behaviors such as dependency, aggression, competition,
domination, and submission, making homosexuality strictly psychological. This
psychological behavior can be then divided into “the needs of the individual and the
societal demands.” Ovesey then suggests that the social demands are molded in the child
by parental discipline, such that excessive discipline in relation to infantile sexual activity
results in fear of physical harm or the withdrawal of love. He then claims that “homosexuality…is a deviant form of sexual adaptation into which the patient is forced by the injection of fear into the normal sexual function.”

Female Homosexuality

For perhaps the majority of this paper, most of the accumulated information has been in reference to male homosexuality rather than female homosexuality, although the ancient Greeks did leave room for explaining female homosexuality, as well (Halperin, 1990). Bray (1982) also noted that:

“Female homosexuality was rarely linked in popular thought with male homosexuality, if indeed it was recognized at all. Its history is, I believe, best to be understood as part of the developing recognition of a specifically female sexuality.”

The lack of mention of female homosexuality may be in part to the segregation of society by gender. The ancient Greeks kept themselves divided into two classes when it came to gender, male and female. While males had more freedom, females had very little and were often restricted to their homes, venturing into public only when heavily veiled (Davidson, 1997). This segregation of society kept members of each sex closer to others of the same sex, with whom they would pass their time. During the Renaissance, the custom of segregating the sexes was still quite common, although perhaps not as strict as it was in ancient Greek society. Women socialized with other women while men socialized almost strictly with other men. Although there was mingling between the two groups, it was not as common as it would be in more modern times. This segregation, and the lack of true knowledge as to how each group spent their time, in addition to the fact that most prominent writers and thinkers of the time were more strictly male, made it so
that little information was written about females, and most especially female 
homosexuality, since it would have been perhaps easier to hide.

Elizabeth Moberly (1983) writes that female homosexuality is like that of male 
homosexuality in that the homosexual persons sees herself as being detached from others 
of her sex. This detachment, she claims, is the basis for homosexuality. With this 
detachment comes the desire for a mother-daughter relationship because, Moberly claims, 
they seek female love, which is a “maternal love.” Moberly also points out that several 
lesbian relationships can be described as being similar to a mother-daughter relationship. 
For male homosexuals, Moberly claims this as the same, although with a father-son 
relationship instead. Homosexuality, then, is a “defect in the capacity for relating to the 
same sex” (Moberly 1983).

Religion and Homosexuality

In ancient Greek society, religion and homosexuality often went hand in hand, 
with several myths describing homosexual relations among gods and mortals (Halperin 
1990). Whereas by the time of the Renaissance, homosexuality was condemned by the 
church as a sin punishable by death (Bray 1982). In more modern times, Christians are 
torn between acceptance, tolerance, and exclusion. There are those churches and 
Christians that believe in exclusion of homosexuality only, and there are those that 
believe in acceptance or tolerance. Despite this there seems to be an overwhelming belief 
that homosexuality is immoral and “incommensurate with the Christian paradigm.” This 
belief of homosexuality is the most common religious stance in modern times (Rudy 
1997).
According to Kathy Rudy (1997), many homosexuals choose to have more than one partner, going back to the myth of Aristophanes in which it was believed that only the heterosexual proto-humans chose to marry while the homosexual proto-humans would take more than one partner over time. This sexual choice then is but one of the lifestyle choices that Christians use to ban homosexuals from their religion, although there are those that seek to allow homosexual marriages in order to make homosexuals monogamous. Rudy (1997) says this is because Christian heterosexuals have “forgotten how to think about social and sexual life outside the family.”

Although there are no longer any real punishments for being homosexual, as there have been in the past, many homosexuals are met with a great deal of hostility, resentment, and ridicule from the church. Because of this, many homosexuals, especially male homosexuals, find it easier to remain “in the closet” than to announce their sexual preferences to the world (Rudy 1997).

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, homosexuality has adapted over time in response to the varying levels of acceptance it receives from various cultures. Homosexuality has gone from being culturally accepted to being culturally ridiculed and punishable by horrendous acts. Although homosexuality began as a generally accepted act, a few dominating cultures seem to have forced it into hiding with thoughts of immorality and threats of violence, with it only recently beginning to come back into general knowledge.

However, perhaps Aristophanes had his myth right, as metaphorical as it may be, when referring to the desires of homosexuals and heterosexuals. It would seem that
researchers into the psychological aspect of the homosexual have kept Aristophanes’ ideas close at hand as they have performed their research. Rudy in her research sticks close to Aristophanes’ ideas that only heterosexuals find it necessary to marry, while homosexuals do not mind promiscuity. She even goes so far as to encourage homosexuals to not consider marriage as a lifestyle because it is not necessary as a part of their lifestyle since promiscuity is. Ovesey also keeps his ideas close to those of Aristophanes, although he draws on great thinkers such as Freud to help him argue his points. Is homosexuality then a product of psychological complexes such as the Oedipus complex? Perhaps it is a mixture of the ideas presented here, and perhaps it is a biological occurrence to help contain the population, as Aristophanes suggests.
References Cited


