1. Nauseous Subjects and Loathsome Expressions — Some Words of Introduction

In this first session I want to attempt to define some of the terms we will be using throughout the course and to examine how the meaning of such words has changed over the years. In doing so I shall probably just be opening a can of worms, a Pandora’s Box of scientific hypothetical constructs, historical practices, religious beliefs, community prejudices, and other, often pie-eyed ways of viewing life on earth which will end up leaving you more confused than ever. However, it is from this primeval stew we will hopefully, eventually, extract something meaty to get our teeth into…..

Homosexuality
To start off with, it might surprise you when I state quite categorically that “Homosexuality” was invented by an Austrian-born Hungarian nobleman named Károly Mária Kertbeny on May 6, 1868.

Of course, that is not to say he was the first to experience the sexual urges, emotional attachments and spiritual yearnings many men have for other men or women for other women which are as old as the genus “Homo” itself. However, the credit does go to Kertbeny for coining the word “homosexuality”, which he did by combining the Greek homos (meaning “the same”) with the Latin sexualis. Ever since, pedants have been complaining that he should not have joined words from different languages, the convention being that new scientific or technical words are made up from either Latin or Greek, but not with bits from both.

Kertbeny was born in Vienna on February 28, 1824 into an aristocratic family with the Germanic name Benkert, but he later changed it to Kertbeny in order, so it was said, to emphasize his claims to the Hungarian nobility.

The first known use of the word was in a letter he wrote on May 6, 1868 to the German sexologist Karl Heinrich Ulrichs. Writing in German, Kertbeny

1 Wikipedia defines a hypothetical construct as “an explanatory variable which is not directly observable. For example, the concepts of intelligence and motivation are used to explain phenomena in psychology, but neither is directly observable.”
used the word *homosexualisten*. This form, *homosexualist* in English, is still preferred by some, the prominent American writer Gore Vidal among them, who claim that “homosexual” is an adjective, not a noun.

In the following year — 1869 — Kertbeny published two anonymous pamphlets in which he attacked the German criminal code which outlawed sex between men. In 1880 another of his texts appeared in a popular science book whose title translated into English was “The Discovery of the Soul” (*Die Entdeckung der Seele*), which was mostly about the role of body odours in sexual attraction.

It was in this book that *Heterosexualität*, meaning "heterosexuality", made its debut. Heterosexuality had a bit of a shady past. In 1901, *Dorland's Medical Dictionary*, published in Philadelphia, continued to define "Heterosexuality" as "Abnormal or perverted appetite toward the opposite sex." and in 1923 Webster's defined it as a medical term meaning "morbid sexual passion for one of the opposite sex."; then in 1934 "heterosexuality" appeared in Webster's Second Edition Unabridged defined as a "manifestation of sexual passion for one of the opposite sex; normal sexuality." As Jonathon Ned Katz² said: “Heterosexuality had finally attained the status of norm.”

Meanwhile, Kertbeny’s word, homosexuality, received its final imprimatur when Richard von Krafft-Ebing included it in the second edition of *Psychopathia Sexualis* in 1887. Then, at the turn of the century — 1900 — a chapter by Kertbeny was published in Magnus Hirschfeld's *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen* (Yearbook for Sexual Intermediates).

The point to Kertbeny’s invention was to find a word which could be used to refer to same-sex desire but without the usually derogatory or contemptuous overtones of those in common usage up to that time. The names — and popular circumlocutions — were many, the most romantic perhaps being the one devised by “Bosey” (Lord Alfred Douglas), Oscar Wilde’s one-time lover, when he referred to "The Love that dare not speak its name". Less attractive was the term commonly used in both law and history, often in Latin, "the sin not to be mentioned by Christians". Others, many with a long history, included "sodomite," "bugger," “pederast” (which survives in the colloquial French *pede*, roughly equivalent to “poof”), “molly”, “shirt-lifter”, "hermaphrodite," and "degenerate". This last word, “degenerate” was the strange pseudo-science love-child of Darwin’s theories of the

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survival of the fittest: it was argued that just as civilizations were thought to flourish and then decay, so too genes would gradually “degenerate” leading to a break-down in the moral and social character of the individuals and that they would then be less fit to survive. Both Hitler and Joh Bjelke-Petersen believed this notion.

There were also some strange, almost quaint, words floating around in the late Nineteenth Century which, like “homosexuality” tried to avoid the moral and criminal overtones of common usage. These included “urning” (this revived the old joke about Keat’s poem “Ode to a Grecian Urn”, “uranian” (this was before the discovery of the planet Uranus), “invert” (still in occasional use today) and “homophile”. Homophile, of course, has changed its meaning so that nowadays it refers to what we might call “pro-gay” groups and organizations rather than to persons, but it does have the advantage of being etymologically correct because both its components come from the Greek!

Kertbeny coined “homosexual” as a way of referring to a sex drive directed to a person or persons of the same sex and free of the many other overtones of sin, criminality or pathology. However, over the next century — as we will see later — many of these nuances crept back into the manifold uses of the word so that by 1969, a century after its invention, it was so overloaded with notions of crime, perversion and psychiatric illness that a new word had to be found by the new wave of “Gay Liberation” which swept the Western world after the Stonewall Revolt, the night of Judy Garland’s funeral, in New York.

**Gay**

The new word, of course, was “gay”. This new word, or more accurately, a revival of an old word, had to serve two purposes. As with “homosexual” it had to permit people, especially scientists and their ilk, to talk and write about same-sex attraction as objectively as possible.

But, equally importantly, it had to be a word homosexuals could use to describe themselves. In the past, the old words pre-judged them, casting them into a moral no-man’s land, relegating them to deviant status, and defining them, even to them selves, as people who are in some way sick, unacceptable and wrong. A new concept was born that night in Greenwich Village, the 28th June 1969, when drag queens refused to go quietly to jail and pay bribes to “New York’s Finest”. This new idea, so novel many found it unbelievable, was called “Gay Pride”, the homosexual version of Black Pride or the Sisterhood of the times.
The Origins of “Gay”
In his column “Word for Word” in the Courier Mail the Brisbane journalist Terry O’Connor attempted to answer a reader’s question,

"Can you tell me the origin of using the word gay for homosexuals?" writes Mary Best (mbest@erie.net), "and why is a Boston Cream Pie called a pie when it's obviously a cake?"

His answer was called: **Wave a gay goodbye**

_I couldn't help Mary with Boston Cream Pie, but the history of gay is another thing. It's only a few years since my newspaper, The Courier-Mail, buried an old friend - the word gay meaning lively, joyous, bright - and accepted gay meaning "homosexual". ........

.......Certainly gay is more kind than queer, poofter, fag, pansy or any of the other words that heterosexuals have used to describe homosexuals.

But has gay really been hijacked? Was it always innocent? The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary gives its derivation as Middle English, from the Old French gai, origin unknown........

........The word gay has changed meanings many times over the centuries, both as a standard English word and as a slang term, but it has nearly always had a shady side.

Two of the less offensive definitions in Eric Partridge's Dictionary of Historical Slang are as abbreviations of gay and hearty, rhyming slang for "party" and gay and frisky for "whisky". That's appropriate, because one 19th century meaning of gay was "slightly drunk".

The Oxford dictionary gives as one of the 17th century meanings of gay: "Addicted to social pleasures and

[^3]: Word for Word, the origins of unusual words and phrases, plus intelligent and spirited discussion on words and their meanings. The column is undated but the copyright date for the site is 2004: http://plateaupress.com.au/wfw/gay-gone.htm
By the 19th century gay had come to mean, as a verb, to copulate or as an adjective, leading an immoral or harlots's life. In this latter meaning, in 1908, that notorious newspaper, the Sydney Truth reported: "It was alleged that he had been taken down in a gay house for £44 worth."

O’Connor says that the first use of “gay” in Australia to mean “homosexual” was in the form “gay boy” back in 1951 — about the same time as someone coined gay deceivers for "falsies". He concluded his article by saying:

"It would be difficult today to use the 19th century nursery rhyme as it was used in the House of Lords in 1948 to congratulate Princess Elizabeth, as (the Queen) then was, on the birth of the Prince of Wales:

The child that is born on the Sabbath day,
Is fair and wise, and good and gay."

That’s a hard act to follow but I would like to add a couple of after-thoughts to Mr. O’Connor’s article. First, if you ignore the Hershey recipe for Boston Cream Pie (which makes it an all chocolate cake with chocolate cream and chocolate icing), most recipes on the Web are for what we might call vanilla sponge, cut into two layers, filled with chocolate cream and variously doused with a chocolate sauce which is allowed to dribble down the sides. It thus has a variegated — or piebald — appearance, a bits-and-pieces affect like magpies are dappled and so on. The early meaning of “pie” was more or less “bits and pieces”, so “a pie” was thought to be like a “stew in a pastry covering”. Ergo, Boston Cream Pie is pie and not cake because it is variegated.

The second is to add some more history to the Old French “gai” or “gaie”. Back in 1986 I added my little bit to the debate when in response to something a commentator had made on early-morning ABC-FM I wrote the following:4

“......... "gay" seems to have had sexual overtones for most of its recorded history. One of the earliest occurrences is in Old Provençal where "gai" meant "pretty" but also, generous with one's favours, and was used by Troubadours when singing of

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courtly love to describe not only their lady-loves but also their manly-loves. It entered Old French and from there, crept into English. About the time of the Restoration, it meant much the same as "sexually promiscuous" means today although without such overtones of moral disapproval. Other words, like "wanton" and "quean", then as now, were often found in its company. But later, as the Puritan blight bit deeper into European civilisation, "gay" came to be associated more with women than with men, and with prostitutes rather than the kind of people who gave sex gratis as its own reward.

Next, we hear of the "Gay Nineties" and "Gay Paree". At the time, they were called "gay" because in the City of Light, if not in Victorian Britain, sex was still fun. The Great War put an end to all that but "gay" continued to be thought "naughty but nice". Noel Coward and Ivor Novello and others of their kind, through the 'twenties and 'thirties, helped create the two-faced identity "gay", like homosexuals in Britain and America, was forced to wear for the next thirty years. Publicly, "gay" was innocent enough but it also served as a code word for "Dorothy and her friends", so they knew to turn the genders round in the torch songs of the day and so create the romance otherwise forbidden them........

And a couple of final thoughts: First, when the word “girl” was introduced into English in the Thirteenth century, it meant simply a “young person” so that to specify their sex in Middle English one had to say a “knave girl” for a boy and a “gay girl” for a young female.

And secondly, and a point I have raised on several occasions elsewhere in the past: — many of those writing in the early stages of the “Gay Liberation Movement” were academics who lived on the East Coast of the USA and would have been familiar with the so-called “Dutch” or Nonconformist religious sects which had come originally to the American colonies to escape persecution in Europe but who had since settled into remarkably rigid and isolated lifestyles. These people, including the Amish of ‘Witness’ fame, who shun public show of emotion, bright clothes, and motor cars, call their ways "Straight". In contradistinction, the behaviour of their fellow Americans who, from our point of view, lead more normal lives, they describe traditionally as "Gay".

You have probably gathered by now that I am fascinated by the history of words, but that is not the only reason for spending so long on an answer the
most-asked question, “where does the word gay come from?”. If you read between the lines you will notice in among all the twisting and turning of meaning, that there is a common thread: this is an association with hedonism, sexual hedonism in particular. Although the object of the word might change from time to time, sometimes referring to men, sometimes to women and often to no gender specifically, there is always the nuance of pleasure-seeking and a kind of “party-party-party” mentality. A subsidiary theme is one of superficiality and going along with that, of excessive display, of flaunting oneself…

And, incidentally, I quoted the matter of the Boston Cream Pie as a kind of parable and make an important point: Mary Best, who asked the question, was confused because she tried to understand this North American concoction from her point of view, not that of the Bostonians who invented it. Where she saw “cake” they saw a cake they distinguished from other cakes by its appearance. This will be our problem throughout this course: to understand beliefs and practices which all our lives we have considered immoral or down-right disgusting, not as they are in our culture but according to someone else’s traditions and values.

But before we leave “gay” and its place in history, it is important to note that when it was first used in the early days after Stonewall — that is, through the 1970s — and sometimes still today, “gay” was used in a fairly strict sense, meaning “a self-identifying homosexual”. In this sense, “gay” was a political term as well as the descriptor of a sexual identity. I suppose any sexual pronouncement in our society is ipso facto a political event, but in those days, it was much more so than it is now.

One of the characteristics one had to acknowledge in the process of “coming out” was that your sexual orientation was to others of the same sex. This is another of those terms we need to examine in more detail.

**Sexual Orientation**
Most so-called “practicing homosexuals” in the world are married and therefore are leading what is effectively bi-sexual lives. This has been true throughout history and until very recently, such a statement would have been accepted as self-evident. However, with the advent of “gay” as a socially-constructed identity familiar to most people in Western Civilization, such a statement is probably a bit shocking. We will talk about this bisexuality or ambisexuality much more later on, but for the moment it is necessary to point out that the norm in human life is not two separate and distinct groups of people, homosexuals and heterosexuals, but human beings whose sexual repertoire is far more varied than popular attitudes and religious beliefs.
If there can be said to be a norm, human sexuality is — to use Freud’s term — *polymorphous perverse*, and almost certainly more so among men than among women.

However, most people seem to recognize that they have sex more often with one sex than with the other and even that they enjoy it more with one or other of the two. About 4% of men actually realize quite clearly in life that they would not like to have sex with women. While it seems pretty clear that this is a matter of *preference*, we choose not to use this word because it so easily can imply a matter of *choice*. Of course, if sexual self-expression was simply a matter of choice then over the centuries, millions of people could have avoided horrible tortures and needless death simply by choosing to avoid homosexual encounters. And philosophically, if there is a choice in sex, then for many, all those religious considerations, such as free will and sin, also follow….

Sexual orientation is a difficult concept, a hypothetical construct devised to attempt to explain something we feel within ourselves but for which, as yet, there is no complete scientific validation. Yet we have to use the term, or something like it, if we are to acknowledge that although a man, for instance, might have pleasurable intercourse with a woman he has loved and lived with happily for years, yet he could go and have sex with a stranger, another man he has never met before, and find the experience a thousand times more satisfying. 5

There is another reason we need this term or something like it: when we talk of homosexuality we seem to focus on the genital events rather than the emotional context. That is perhaps OK for sexologists researching human sexuality — at least genital events can be fairly precisely defined and then counted, provided you can trust your informants to tell the truth — but it leaves out much of the emotional experience which in many ways is the more important component. Homosexuals do fall in love and express that through sexual intercourse. As far as we — I mean sexologists and the like — can tell, that love is no different, no less compelling, no less tender and certainly no less enduring than the heterosexual variety. In other words, the tender emotions as well as good old down-to-earth lust are directed in the same direction, to one gender or the other and are part and parcel of “orientation” as we call it.

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5 If you saw the movie, “Brokeback Mountain” the character Jack Twist, the Texan who at least could talk about his feelings, was probably a good example of a married man whose sexual orientation was primarily to other men.
Who does what?
I need now to tackle a rather delicate issue — what words to use when we need to talk about who is doing what to whom during sex between men, and particularly when talking about anal sex. As a society, we are rather squeamish about our bottoms and anal or more accurately, rectal sex is not a topic for polite conversation. However, it is a common sexual practice, even between men and women when it is not necessarily something kinky, but a time-honored method of contraception. In France during La Belle Époque, anal sex was practiced extensively as a method of contraception and was said to have been the second most preferred option, especially between men and their mistresses.

A further misconception I must clear up before we go any further, is that anal sex is not a matter of one man unselfishly submitting so the other can have all the fun: in males, massage of the prostate per anum is highly pleasurable and can result in an orgasm which is far more intense than that achieved by stimulation of the penis alone. This is normally not talked about, even in cultures in which — as we will see — such a method of intercourse is socially acceptable. In many such cultures, the youth or man whose prostate is being massaged is often required to pretend he finds no pleasure at all in the process because, to do so, is to suggest he experiences sexual pleasure like a woman, i.e., by being penetrated. So, although you don’t necessarily lie there and think of England, you pretend that the earth never moves for you…..

In saying all that, you saw the difficulty I had in finding suitable words if I wanted to avoid embarrassment. Unlike Daniel Defoe, the author of “Robinson Crusoe” who once wrote “It is hard to treat of a nauseous Subject, without some loathsom [sic] Expressions, but I shall take Care not to offend the Ears of the chastest Reader, and any one shall be able to read me without Blushes…” I am not sure I can avoid all your blushes because, sometimes to make myself clear, I will have to use the vernacular. Sometimes the Latinised expressions we consider “polite” are not very clear as indeed, they were invented to be deliberately so…..

The problem we encounter is to describe which man puts his penis into the other man’s rectum or, in the case of oral sex, the other man’s mouth. The

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old terminology was “sodomite” for the man who was the “doer” and “catamite” for the “done”. “Sodomite” comes of course from the City of the Plain which it was claimed — albeit inaccurately — God destroyed because the men of the town wanted to gang rape two angels He had sent under cover to assess the moral worth of the place. The problem with “sodomy” and “sodomite” is that they had come to be used quite commonly for both partners in sexual encounters, and not only encounters per anum. In some statutes, particularly in the southern states of the United States, “sodomy” means anything except intercourse between man and wife in the missionary position.

“Catamite” is a Latin corruption, catamitis, from the Etruscan catmis which was their version of the Greek “Ganumēdē” or Ganymede, the beautiful youth the God Zeus abducted and presumably buggared. Except in theological and very scholarly circles, it never really took off in common speech, not like “sodomite” which entered the vernacular to such an extent that the “affectionate diminutive” form “sod” (as in “you old sod”) became commonplace.

Another attempt at remaining polite while talking about the taboo is “active” and “passive”, the active partner being the Sodomite, the “passive” partner being the catamite. A similar use has been made of “dominant” and “submissive”. Neither of these attempts work: as any woman knows, the person on the receiving end is not necessarily “passive” and nor is she necessarily submissive. The same goes for men in homosexual intercourse and indeed, the belief is — in S&M parlance — that the “bottom” ultimately controls the “top”.

**Dominance-Submission**

These terms, “top” and “bottom”, also carry nuances of dominance and submission. This is all very well in an S&M “scene” where the participants are enjoying acting out the dominant or submissive roles, but dominance/submission is much more fundamental to human existence than a dungeon experience at a leather convention.

As we will see a bit later on in this course, many scientists consider the main evolutionary advantage of homosexuality is that it allows for the formation of alliances and cooperation, but this essential ability did not just come out of the blue: it must have come from somewhere. One suggestion favoured
by some scientists, including Dennis Werner, who is that it evolved from the processes of dominance-submission which are found in life forms ranging from bed bugs and various worms to bonobos and human beings. They contend that this is most probably genetically determined.

When we examine the evolution of male homosexuality and cooperative behaviour among primates, it seems to proceed through stages characterised by (1) marking territories; (2) marking submissive males using the same methods used to mark territory; and (3) marking alliances using gestures which signal and confirm that one party is dominant and the other is submissive.

Among humans, many of these gestures are expressed in language and reflect dominance/submission gestures acted out by lower primates. Expressions such as “kiss my arse” or “up yours!”, with or without appropriate hand signals, are of this kind. Similarly, we refer to some people as “brown noses” or “arse-lickers” signifying that they are characteristically submissive to certain dominant persons in the community.

How the genetics of dominance/submission express themselves in humans is not as well catalogued as it has been for bed-bugs and stickle-back fish. For example, predominantly homosexual men in Western society are not markedly more “feminine” than predominantly heterosexual men, although they are observably less aggressive. New York’s police confirm that although they are called out regularly to deal with fights in hundreds of heterosexual bars every night, they have to attend gay bars only once or twice a year! Similarly, McConaghy and Blaszcynski in their study found that the more predominantly heterosexual men expressed homosexual feelings the more they were likely to have disliked outdoor and contact sports when they were children. The Brazilian anthropologist Cardoso.

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Of course this is not to be confused with the dominance/submission associated with S&M, the Madame Lash type of sexual role playing. Although it must be said, the practitioners of this form of sex must be acting out roles of deep, perhaps primeval, significance to all players.


observed similar characteristics among the men in his fishing village. The exclusively homosexual men had avoided playing soccer when they were boys more often than other men who had fewer sexual contacts with men. However, none of them, homosexual or not, had played with dolls or enjoyed other cross-gender activities.

However, we live in a society which values competitiveness and so we tend to think of submission as a “bad” thing. Clearly, one of the first things to acknowledge is that it is not necessarily bad or indeed, un-pleasurable to submit to someone else — only the circumstances decide if it is good or bad. We also need to recognize that just about everything we do in life, as social beings, involves dominance and submission. As members of a gregarious species we are adepts at judging the dynamics of power in each and every social situation: how else would the Japanese know who should bow lower than the other or how would we know who should be the first to step aside when on a collision course with a stranger in the street?