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### Heterosexuality

In the 1901 Dorland's Medical Dictionary, heterosexuality is defined as an "abnormal or perverted appetite toward the opposite sex." More than two decades later, in 1923, Merriam Webster's dictionary correspondingly defined it as "morbid sexual passion for one of the opposite sex." It wasn't until 1934 that heterosexuality was brought out with the meaning we're familiar with today: "manifestation of sexual passion for one of the opposite sex; normal sexuality."<sup>[1]</sup>

In essence, heterosexuals are individuals that are romantically or sexually attracted to the opposite gender. Along with bisexuality and homosexuality, it is one of the three main categories of sexual orientation within the heterosexual-homosexual continuum. Across different cultures, most people are heterosexual, and heterosexual activity is by far the most common type of sexual activity. The term heterosexual or heterosexuality is usually applied to humans, but this particular sexual behavior is observed in all other mammals and in other animals, as it is necessary for sexual reproduction.

It is interesting to note, that there is no simple and singular determinant for sexual orientation which has been conclusively demonstrated. But scientists believe that a combination of genetic, hormonal, and environmental factors determine sexual orientation. They favor biological theories for explaining the causes of sexual orientation, as there is considerably more evidence supporting nonsocial, biological causes than social ones, especially for males. Factors related to the development of a heterosexual orientation include genes, prenatal hormones, brain structure, and their interaction with the environment.

Compared with the accumulation of research on the speech and language of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) people, the talk of heterosexuals qua heterosexuals has been much less studied. As Cameron and Kulick pointed out, "One of the privileges enjoyed by dominant groups in general is that their identities and modes of behavior are rarely scrutinized in the same way as the identities and behaviors of subordinated groups".<sup>[2]</sup>

Historically speaking, there was no need to coin a term such as heterosexual until there was something else to contrast and compare it with. Jonathan Ned Katz dates the definition of heterosexuality, as it is used today, to the late 19th century. According to Katz, in the Victorian era, sex was seen as a means to achieve reproduction, and relations between the sexes were not believed to be overtly sexual. The body was thought of as a tool for procreation, "human

energy, though as a closed and severely limited system, was to be used in producing children and in work, not wasted in libidinous pleasures." The role played by religions in shaping the social mindset is also crucial to note in this context.<sup>[3]</sup>

## References

- [1] <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20170315-the-invention-of-heterosexuality>
- [2] Celia Kitzinger (2005) "Speaking as a Heterosexual": (How) Does Sexuality Matter for Talk-in-Interaction? , *Research on Language & Social Interaction*, 38:3, 221-265, DOI: 10.1207/s15327973rlsi3803\_2
- [3] Wikipedia contributors. (2020, August 16). Heterosexuality. In Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Retrieved 08:31, August 27, 2020, from <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Heterosexuality&oldid=973257684>