

The Encyclopedia of Lesbian and Gay Histories and Cultures
Volume II

Gay Histories and Cultures: An Encyclopedia

George E. Haggerty
Editor

John Beynon
Douglas Eisner
Assistant Editors

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A of genital contact has been noted in numerous animal species independent of hormonal or neurological manipulation. Some of these interactions involve clear sexual elements, since erections and ejaculation are sometimes observed. Isolated anecdotes concerning male sexual behavior exist for numerous species in nature, but very few studies have focused on this behavior and attempted to place it within a larger constellation of social and sexual behaviors. To date, the most detailed studies of male homosexual behavior in animals have been on birds (razor-bills, pukekos, greylag geese), primates (bonobos, mountain gorillas), and domestic livestock (pigs, sheep, goats).

Some of the first systematic studies of male homosexual behavior were conducted toward the end of the Victorian era. During the 1890s, research on pigeons argued erroneously that an absence of opposite-sex partners and artificial confinement could “force” males to choose same-sex mates. The use of caged subjects meant that homosexual interactions were invariably characterized as abnormal products of captivity, unlikely to be found in “nature.” Moreover, male choice of same-sex mates was seen as Hobson’s choice: that is, a choice made for want of any female alternatives. These early investigations may have helped foster the paradigm of homosexual behavior as an abnormal phenomenon. This viewpoint is still widespread among zoologists today.

With the emergence of sociobiology in the 1970s, a paradigmatic shift occurred that resulted in some zoologist’s reconceptualizing homosexual behavior as an adaptation produced by natural selection. Within this theoretical framework, homosexual behavior was often depicted as socially beneficial, a perspective cheered by gay activists. Indeed, a number of researchers have demonstrated that homosexual activity among male animals sometimes serves various social roles including dominance demonstration, tension regulation, reconciliation, and alliance formation. More often than not, however, sociobiology was unsuccessful in establishing supporting evidence for the many adaptive hypotheses it generated to explain homosexual interactions. It may well be that sexual stimulation provides sufficient motivation in and of itself for animals to engage in homosexual behavior. Homosexual behavior in animals serves a social function and provides sexual stimulation at the same time.

Opponents of gay rights frequently claim that homosexual behavior is unnatural and use errone-

ous notions about animal behavior to support such opinions. While the logic that equates all that is “natural” with all that is socially desirable is faulty, its popular folk appeal is undeniable. Knowledge concerning male homosexual behavior among animals can be of value to those interested in negating such claims and placing human homosexuality within a larger, cross-species perspective. For instance, while homosexual behavior is widespread among male animals, aggression specifically directed to individuals who engage in such behavior appears to be a uniquely human invention lacking any counterpart in nature.

Paul L. Vasey

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See also Homosexuality; Sexual Orientation

Anthropology

Anthropology seeks to understand the different ways in which humans live their lives as social beings. It has traditionally been distinguished from psychology and sociology, the two social sciences that arose alongside it in the late nineteenth century, by an emphasis on culture and society (versus the individual psyche) on the one hand, and by an emphasis on comparative, qualitative data on the other. Anthropology is divided into four subfields: physical anthropology (the study of human biological adaptation and variation, particularly through the study of prehistoric human remains [paleontology] or present-day primates [primatology]), archaeology (the study of material remains and artifacts), linguistic anthropology (the study of language and its relationship to human social life), and social/cultural anthropology (the study of society and culture). Most work on homosexuality, bisexuality, and transgenderism within anthropology has taken place within the last of these four subfields, social/cultural anthropology.

Social/cultural anthropology developed from an earlier social science known as “ethnology,” which gained prominence in the mid-nineteenth century. Ethnology was concerned with the comparative search for human universals and/or evolution-

ary sequences of social and cultural phenomena. Understanding the lives of “primitives” was thought to shed light on the early history of “civilized” peoples: Primitives were seen as living fossils whose physique and lifeways provided a glimpse into the past. Of particular interest to ethnologists were “primitive” marriage and kinship, since many were concerned with the status of women in industrial society, and so in a sense the study of sexuality has always been integral to anthropology (see Morgan). Most ethnologists, however, did not travel for even short periods to “primitive” places, relying instead on the written accounts of travelers, missionaries, and colonial officials. The discipline of anthropology took its current form in the first decades of the twentieth century, particularly through the work of Bronislaw Malinowski and Franz Boas—who, in contrast to the ethnologists, emphasized firsthand experience with other cultures through extended periods of fieldwork.

Social/cultural anthropology is primarily concerned with “culture,” a highly contested term that many authors would provisionally define as those ways of thinking, patterns of social interaction, and sets of power relations within which human beings live their lives and understand their existence. Human beings enter the world with a highly underdeveloped cognitive system relative to other animals, and the vast majority of human behavior is learned rather than genetically transmitted. While there are human instincts and universal aspects to human cognition (which can be seen, for instance, in linguistic universals), these universal aspects of human existence only become manifest in the specific milieu in which a child grows up. Human beings are fundamentally social animals and their cognitive development depends upon particular cultural contexts.

Social/cultural anthropology (hereafter “anthropology”) is the study of these varied contexts. Its primary methodology is participant observation, the process of structured involvement in (and critique of) the life of a community or communities. Its primary product is ethnography, the written record of some aspect of a culture or cultures. In addition to participant observation, anthropologists sometimes use techniques such as interviews and focus groups, and they also rely extensively on the analysis of texts and historical data in cases where these exist. In addition to ethnographies, anthropologists sometimes produce reports, films, music, performance art, or fiction and are frequently involved in various forms of political activism. Since anthropol-

ogists seek to understand the ways of thinking of a particular group of people, an important aspect of the anthropologist’s work is to call into question his or her own cultural assumptions. This is the case even when the anthropologist is studying a culture that is in some respect his or her “own.” Anthropologists strive to make this self-critique as complete as possible, calling into question even such foundational concepts as “person,” “power,” “cognition,” “sexuality,” and, of course, “culture” itself. It must be noted, however, that self-critique can never be complete. (It is impossible to be completely aware of one’s own assumptions, and thus collaboration and peer critique are vital.) Additionally, the internal critique of anthropology is a relatively recent development, gaining a foothold only in the 1980s.

Early anthropology remained closely intertwined with colonialism and thus emphasized the study of exotic “others,” often with the explicit goal of enabling colonial powers to better understand and control their colonies. Sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular played a key role in this process. One of the best analyses of the relationship between same-sex practices and early anthropology is Rudi Bleys’s *The Geography of Perversion* (1995). Bleys shows how early ethnologists built on the ostensible distinction between “innate” and “acquired” homosexuality to portray homosexuality as merely incidental in the West, but endemic to the “Orient.” Homosexuality could thus serve as a crucial conceptual barrier distinguishing colonizer from colonized. In the “Terminal Essay” of his 1885 translation of the *Thousand and One Arabian Nights*, Sir Richard Burton provides a classic formulation of this paradigm in his notion of the “Sotadic Zone,” stretching from the Mediterranean through India, and China to the New World, wherein “the vice [of pederasty] is popular and endemic, held at the worst to be a mere peccadillo.”

Beginning in the 1920s, Malinowski and a new generation of anthropologists like Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict began using anthropology to challenge evolutionary models from ethnology as well as colonialism and Freudian psychoanalysis. Under the banner of the “culture and personality” movement, they used notions of *cultural relativity* to argue that a unilinear narrative of savagery to civilization was grounded in a racist framework that failed to appreciate the multiple ways in which it was possible to become a person and live in society. They also sought to critique established gender norms in the West by comparing them with radically

A different gender norms outside the West (Benedict Mead). One important way they did this was by showing that Freud's ostensibly universal narrative of childhood development, centered around the Oedipus complex, was in fact but one culturally specific variant of how people came to understand themselves as individuals (Malinowski). Sexuality was a frequent theme in this work and the existence of homosexuality in "other" cultures was catalogued with a rather tolerant attitude. However, homosexuality (or bisexuality, or transgenderism) was rarely the focus of study, and homosexuality in the West itself was left to sociologists studying "social deviance."

In the 1950s and 1960s, reeling from the horrors of World War II and thesis of essential human evil that arose in its aftermath, the *structural-functional* school gained ascendancy in many social sciences, including anthropology. Structural-functionalists built on the work of Emile Durkheim and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, among others, to develop a theory of society as an organism with constituent elements that contributed to the smooth functioning of the whole. Under this theoretical framework "normal" gender roles (like most dominant elements of culture) were valorized as structurally necessary, while "deviant" gender roles and sexualities were stigmatized as diseases of the body politic. From the mid-1960s, however, a growing body of work in feminist anthropology (and feminism more generally) challenged structural-functionalist explanations of gender inequality, exposing the conceptual incoherencies of this work as well as the role it played in legitimating the status quo oppression of women (Rosaldo and Lamphere, Reiter). While nonheterosexual sexualities were rarely addressed by these feminists, their work laid the foundations for the anthropological study of homosexuality, bisexuality, and transgenderism.

Anthropological studies of homosexuality itself began to blossom in the 1970s. Kath Weston's 1993 essay "Lesbian/Gay Studies in the House of Anthropology" provides a comprehensive review up to the early 1990s. The pioneering work in this field is usually seen to be Esther Newton's pathbreaking study of female impersonators, *Mother Camp* (first published in 1972), though other important research had begun ten years before Newton's. In the decade following Newton's work, the majority of anthropological studies of homosexuality fell into a pattern Weston dubs "ethnocartography," the search for "evidence of same-sex sexuality and gendered ambigui-

ty in 'other' societies" (Weston, *Families* 341). Weston notes that this approach was characterized by severe theoretical lacunae: "many an author opens with an obligatory nod to Foucault before presenting research findings, but more commonly, the researcher's theoretical perspectives remain embedded in apparently straightforward reports from the field. In effect, the absence of theory becomes the submersion of theory. Lurking between the lines are functionalist explanations, ethnocentric assumptions, and ad hoc syntheses of philosophically incompatible schools of thought" (Weston, *Families* 344). In this respect, what Weston terms "the 'salvage' anthropology of indigenous homosexualities" parallels the "gay history" movement of the 1980s which attempted to uncover an ostensibly "hidden" history of homosexuality. Where gay history looked for comrades across time, gay anthropology searched through space. While the gay history movement brought to light previously little-known data (as did "ethnocartography" in anthropology), by subsuming this data under a rubric of "gay history" it assumed the data represented the "same" phenomenon and thus took as given precisely the point that should have been the goal of inquiry. More recent work in "gay history" has largely moved beyond these limitations by using a more sophisticated analytical framework to ask how particular same-sex identities, communities, and practices were understood by the participants themselves (see, for instance, Kennedy and Davis, Chauncey).

In general, this "documentary rush" in both history and anthropology was occasioned by the political climate of the 1970s and 1980s, in which a newly emergent gay and lesbian movement faced the charge that it was a decadent "lifestyle" occasioned by a particular conjunction of decadent morality and soulless consumerism. Documenting the existence of homosexualities across time and space was seen as countering this claim by showing how same-sex desire could be found in social and economic circumstances radically different from the contemporary West. In some cases, this work was also used to argue for a transhistorical, universal homosexuality rooted in biology rather than the familial psychodrama of the dominant psychoanalytic paradigm.

Beginning in the mid-1980s, however, a growing chorus of academics and activists began to argue against this trend, building upon the theoretical framework of Michel Foucault to claim that homosexualities were "socially constructed" rather than reflecting genetic or hormonal essences. The "es-

sentialist/social constructionist" debates are beyond the scope of this article, except to note that anthropological data were used primarily (but not exclusively) to support the "social constructionist" side of the controversy. This makes sense in the context of social/cultural anthropology's own focus on culture and difference.

Despite these contributions, anthropology has had a somewhat marginal place in the emerging field of lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (hereafter LGBT) studies in the 1980s and 1990s. One reason for this has been LGBT studies' emphasis on theoretical advances over substantive research. While anthropology has had a strong theoretical component from its beginnings, it has lagged behind other fields of inquiry in this respect in the second half of the twentieth century. With a few exceptions, contemporary anthropologists draw their theoretical paradigms largely from other disciplines (e.g., history, literary theory, and philosophy). While this interdisciplinary standpoint has been highly fruitful, it has not aided the entry of anthropology into LGBT studies. In addition, anthropological fieldwork is an extremely time-consuming and difficult process, whether undertaken in one's "own" culture or "another" culture, in one's own country or abroad. Since there is little funding available for LGBT-themed anthropological research, and even fewer job positions for anthropologists working on these topics, there are to this day remarkably few in-depth ethnographies of LGBT communities (but see Parker, Weston [*Families*], Carrier, Shokeid, Prieur).

Nevertheless, we can identify three hopeful trends as LGBT anthropology enters the twenty-first century. First, there is a growing body of work which "anthropologizes" the West. Instead of documenting the existence of LGBT communities in exotic "other" places, these works turn the anthropological gaze onto the West itself, examining how LGBT identities vary in different contexts and how they are related to other aspects of Western cultures such as kinship, class, and race. Kath Weston's study of kinship in LGBT communities (*Families We Choose*) and Moshe Shokeid's study of Judaism and LGBT identity (*A Gay Synagogue in New York*) are excellent examples of this trend. Second, while most anthropological LGBT studies have focused on gay male identities and communities, a growing number of works are examining transgenderism, bisexuality, and lesbianism, though transgenderism has received more attention than either lesbianism or bisexuality to this point. Finally, a growing number of works es-

chew the traditional search for non-Western "indigenous" or "traditional" homosexualities to ask instead how growing numbers of individuals outside the West transform the ostensibly Western terms *gay*, *lesbian*, and *bisexual* so that they become seen as locally relevant. In Indonesia, for example, this process results in new identities and a complex sense of global community that can be reduced neither to a simplistic universal "queer planet" nor to a narrative of cultural loss and the eclipse of "native" authenticity by modernization (Boellstorff).

Anthropology, then, has an important role to play in the developing field of LGBT studies. On the level of data, anthropological techniques can help us understand how LGBT identity and community are lived "on the ground" by people around the world, including those who produce few or no magazines, films, and other sorts of documents. This allows us to link the theoretical advances of LGBT studies to the practices of everyday life. While beyond the scope of this entry, LGBT anthropology (often in conjunction with medical anthropology) also plays an important role in HIV/AIDS prevention by demonstrating the culturally specific ways in which risk, sex, and disease are conceptualized in different LGBT communities (Bolton and Singer, ten Brummelhuis and Herdt).

On the level of theory, anthropology helps us to understand the diversity of beliefs and practices behind terms like "lesbian" and "gay," and how this diversity is related to factors of economics, power, family, religion, gender, and nation. Anthropology can help us understand how the very category of "sexuality" contains crucial cultural assumptions about what it means to be a person, and how other groups of people may understand sex and personhood differently. Finally, anthropology can play a crucial role in "making strange" heterosexuality itself, showing its historical and cultural instability and the ways in which its coherence depends on the oppression of LGBT communities. Not only new LGBT identities but new heterosexualities can be charted through anthropological methods.

Thomas Maurer Boellstorff

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See also *Arabian Nights*; Bisexuality; Burton, Sir Richard Francis; Gay Families; Homosexuality

Antigay Initiatives and Propositions (U.S. Law)

Although gay men and lesbians have made numerous social and political gains in the United States since the struggles of early homophile organizations and the Stonewall riots of 1969, progress has not come without resistance from mainstream and conservative elements of the American public. More recently this resistance to the gay rights movement has become a well-organized and powerful effort by the right wing to scapegoat gays and lesbians for perceived "social ills," to ensure the continued criminalization of homosexuality, and to legalize discrimination against gays and lesbians.

Beginning in the 1970s gays and lesbians made major gains in the arena of gay rights by repealing the sodomy laws of various states and securing local ordinances protecting them from employment and housing discrimination. The first organized backlash or countermovement to gay rights advances began in 1977 with a fundamentalist Christian-based campaign in Dade County, Florida. Led by former beauty queen and Christian music entertainer Anita Bryant, the group successfully repealed a local ordinance protecting gay and lesbian employees from discrimination. This right-wing victory encouraged religious conservatives across the country to organize at a grassroots level in opposition to both gay and women's rights movements.

During the 1980s conservative Christian elements (led most notably by Jerry Falwell of the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition's Pat Robertson) joined forces with social conservatives of the Republican Party. This new coalition of right-