

Sexual terms for persons, clarification for those who need and a proposal for even better terms

When I read something like SEP's article on [homosexuality](#), I cannot avoid feeling that these thinkers mentioned are *horrible* thinkers. They did not even consult the ordinary dictionary. In this case, doing so dictionary would clear up for the confusion for them. There is no need to talk about power or “Power” and try to redefine (that is, stipulate new meanings and pretend that everybody else means the same) for ordinary words. Since these people are evidently too stupid to look up words in a dictionary, I will do it for them.

The words I am interested in here are: “homosexual” (adj.+noun), “heterosexual” (adj.+noun), and “bisexual” (adj.+noun). There are many more but these are the six I am interested in in this essay.¹ One could probably do with only looking up either all the nouns or all the adjectives, but since it gives better reason to trust one's conclusion and it is not particularly much more work, I will examine the definitions of all of them.

After exploring and discussing the entries in the dictionary, I will discuss a more clear approach resulting in some even better terms.

What does the dictionaries 'say'?

I will use two dictionaries, the first I like because it is pretty good, is freely available on the internet, and is open source; *Wiktionary*. The second I like because it is simply the best dictionary for the english language; The *OED*.

“homosexual”

[Wiktionary](#)

Adjective

“homosexual (*comparative more homosexual, superlative most homosexual*)

1. (of a person or animal) Sexually attracted solely or primarily to other members of the same sex.

¹ Examples of others are “freak”, “sodomasochist”, “exhibitionist”.

2. Pertaining to homosexuality, *as* a relationship, an attraction, a desire, etc.
3. Intended for or used by homosexuals, *as* a nightclub, a bar, etc. “

We are here interested only in the word used for describing persons, (2) and (3) are about the word used about non-persons, thus, we are not interested in those. Thus, we are left with (1).

I think (1) is a good definition that nicely catches the meaning of the term. The part “or primarily” is very important, as people still use the word “homosexual” to describe people that strongly prefers members of their own sex but occasionally may be attracted to members of the other sex.

Noun

“homosexual (*plural homosexuals*)

1. A person who is attracted solely or primarily to others of the same sex. “

This has the same quality as (1) above has.

OED

Adjective

“A. adj. Involving, related to, or characterized by a sexual propensity for one's own sex; of or involving sexual activity with a member of one's own sex, or between individuals of the same sex.”

The OED is a bit pretentious. I was not clear what they meant with “propensity” so I looked it up (also in the OED)

“1.a The quality or character of being ‘propense’ or inclined to something; inclination, disposition, tendency, bent. Const. to, towards (rarely for, of) with n., or to with inf. a.1.a Disposition or inclination to some action, course of action, habit, etc.; bent of mind or nature.

1.b Disposition to favour, benefit, or associate oneself with some person, party, etc.; favourable inclination, good will.

1.c Tendency or liability to some physical condition or action.”

There were two more definitions but they were marked as rare and dated so I ignored them.

So, the OED definition of adj. “homosexual” is broadly equivalent if meaning to the Wiktionary one. That's good.

Noun

“B. n. A person who has a sexual propensity for his or her own sex; esp. one whose sexual desires are directed wholly or largely towards people of the same sex.

In non-technical contexts it is often taken to mean a male homosexual, a female one being termed a lesbian.”

Again, this definition has the same strength as does the Wiktionary one, because it rightly notes that ”or largely”.

“heterosexual”

Wiktionary

Adjective

“**heterosexual** (*comparative more heterosexual, superlative most heterosexual*)

1. Sexually attracted to members of the opposite sex “

This definition is incomplete, as it would make bisexuals a subgroup of heterosexuals which is a not what is typically meant. An easy mend would be simply to add the word “primarily”, so one would get “Sexually attracted primarily to members of the opposite sex“.

Noun

“**heterosexual** (*plural heterosexuals*)

1. A heterosexual organism, especially a human. “

This definition is not very helpful even tho it is a correct description. It seems to me that the editors have simply put more effort into the definitions of “homosexual”.

OED

Adjective

“1.a Characterized by a sexual interest in members of the opposite sex.

1.b Pertaining to sexual relations between people of opposite sex.

2. Pertaining to, characteristic of both sexes. “

The relevant one being (1a).

This one suffers the same problem as does Wiktionary's definitions.

Noun

“B. n. A heterosexual person (see sense 1 above).”

This one is defined in terms of the one above, and thus, it does not do better than that one.

Again, it seems that the editors spent more time on the definitions of “homosexual”.

“bisexual”

Wiktionary

Adjective

“bisexual (*comparative more bisexual, superlative most bisexual*)

1. (botany) Having both male and female organs. See perfect.
2. (sexuality, of humans or other animals) Sexually attracted to persons of either sex.
3. (rare) Hermaphroditic. “

The relevant ones being (2) and (3) but (3) is clearly a complete different meaning of the word, and it is marked as rare. The usage that I am interested in of “bisexual” is not rare.

I think the (2) is okay as it catches the general idea, but following the definitions of “homosexual”, some homosexuals are merely primarily attracted to members of their own sex, and thus are also a bit attracted to members of the other sex, and thus, according to the above definition, they are also bisexual. But this is clearly not how we use the word. I suggest making a simple amendment by adding “roughly equally” so as to get “Roughly equally sexually attracted to persons of either sex.“, even tho it is a bit long it very nicely captures the usage.

Noun

“bisexual (*plural bisexuals*)

1. A person who is bisexual. Someone attracted to persons of either gender“

The first part refers to the definition of the adjective above. The second has the same problem as does the above one, but is fixable in the same manner.

OED

Adjective

“1.A. Of two sexes; spec. having both sexes in the same individual.

2.A. Sexually attracted to individuals of both sexes. Cf. ambisexual a. “

(1) is again the dated (looks like this from the OED's examples) meaning of the term. The (2) is pretty much equivalent to Wiktionary's definition.

Noun

“B. n. a. a hermaphrodite. rare. b A person who is sexually attracted to members of both sexes. “

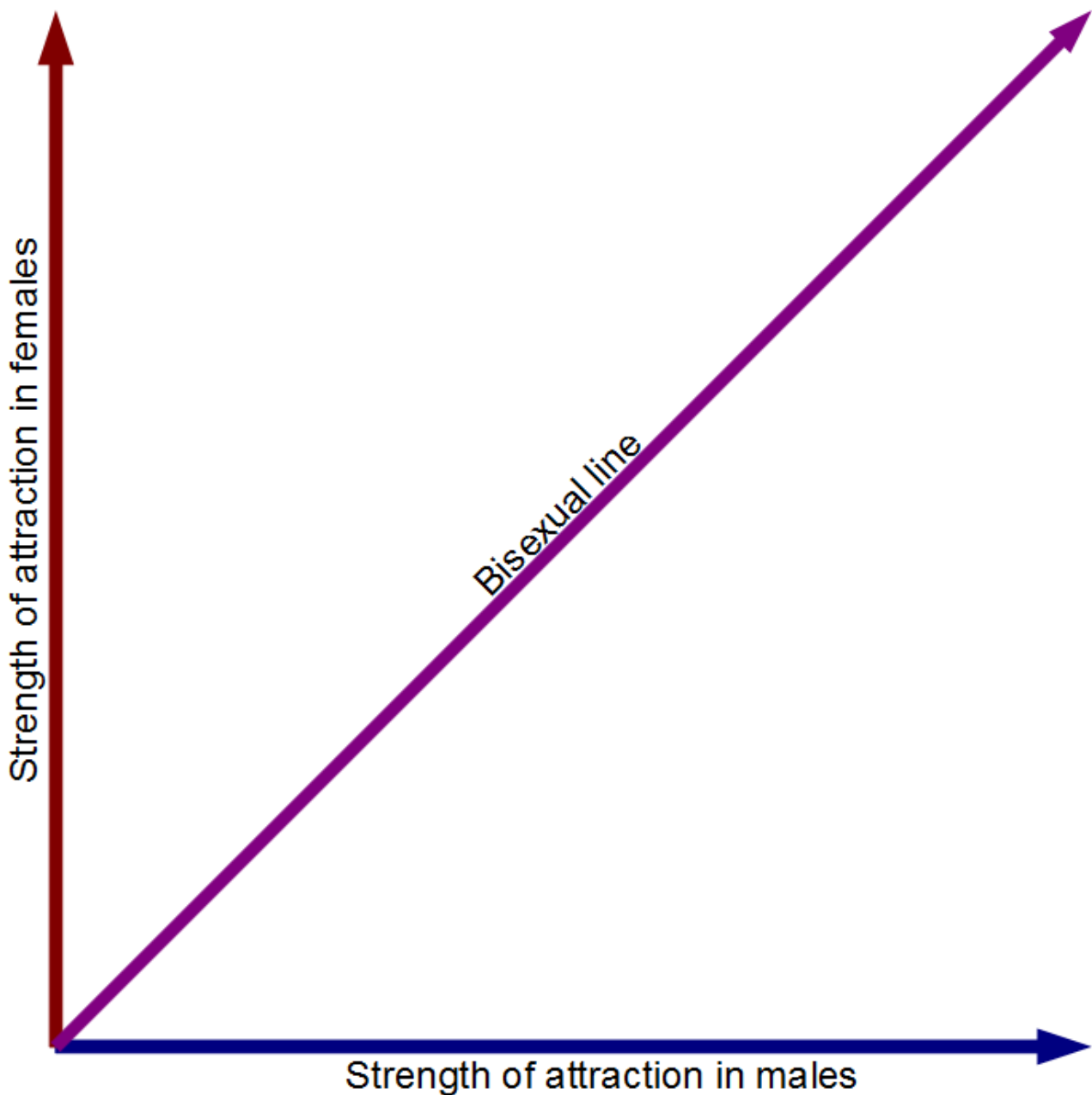
The first definition again being relevant to the dated and rare (I never heard of it before looking up the dictionary today) meaning, and the second definition is pretty much equivalent to Wiktionary's.

So the dictionaries are in agreement again but have the same shortcoming.

Some more clear ways to think of sexual preferences for members of sexes

The first way is just to improve the dictionary definitions as I suggested as this would better capture what is meant and would result in useful terms.

The second way is to think about it a bit more analytically. Again, we have a case of concepts that are a matter of degree; one can be more or less attracted to members of a particular sex. One can even make a graphical representation of this. Here is how I did it.



People 'on' the red line are those with only interests in females (to various degrees) and those 'on' the blue line are those with only interests in males. Those 'on' the purple line are those with equally strong interests in each sex. We may call people 'on' these lines for perfect examples (but more on that later) of homosexuality, heterosexuality and bisexuality, respectively (and relative to their sex, of course).

It would be an interesting experiment to make people draw their own spot on the map, but AFAIK this has not been done. If it were done, we could see if we really better terms for describing the various sexualities related to preference for members of the sexes.

The easiest way to introduce more precise concepts/terms while retaining intuitiveness is introducing a line between two of the current lines and calling them something like “heterosexual-

bisexual”/ “homosexual-bisexual” or “half homosexual half bisexual”/”half heterosexual half bisexual”. These would have something like 75% of their attraction to members of any sex to members of one sex. One can continue introducing more lines and concepts/terms like this to gain yet more precise concepts/terms but I don't really see the need as people do not know their own preferences with such precision.

One last point is that people who are asexual (have no sexual attraction towards either sex) are technically perfect examples of bisexuals since their attraction towards both members of both sexes is equal (0=0). However, there is an easy conceptual remedy for this, the perfect examples of any of the three concepts/terms are also those who have the most common total level of attraction towards members of any sex, in simpler terms, those with the most common amount of sexual lust. Thus, the perfect example of a homosexual is a person of sex S who is only attracted to members of the sex S and whose level of sexual attraction towards members of any sex is equal to the most common level. Similarly for the perfect example of heterosexuals and bisexuals.