

Gay, defined

People



Liz Schmidt Kate Brady English 101 October 9, 2012 Formal definition: Gay (adj.) merry: happy and carefree; brightly ornamental or colorful; homosexual. (n.) A homosexual. (“ gay”) Synonymous definition: Gay (syn.) merry, lighthearted, joyful, cheerful, sprightly, jolly, happy, joyous, gleeful, jovial, colorful, bright. (“ gay”) Negative definition: Gay (adj.) unhappy, lacking color, heavyhearted Because of the literal definition of the word, people that are homosexual are often seen as “ colorful” and “ cheerful”. Etymological Definition: Gay (n) usually male, homosexual.

In middle English, it meant “ excellent person” “ noble lady” “ gallant knight” or “ something gay or bright”; “ ornament or badge” (“ gay”)² Stipulative definition: Gay (adj.) being homosexual Illustrative definition: Two men walking down the street holding hands. Thesis statement: The meaning of the word gay has changed vastly over time, which today, can be offensive.

Liz Schmidt Kate Brady English 101 October 9, 2012 The definition of the word “ gay” has evolved greatly over time. What you consider “ gay” today is definitely not what was considered “ gay” 200 years ago, or even 50 years ago. 00 years ago, the word was used as a term of promiscuity. It was also used as a slang term to call someone a “ young hobo. ” (“ gay”) Today, we use the word mostly as “ homosexual” or referring to someone who is attracted to the same sex. At the same time, the younger age group of America is using the word “ gay” as a way to express dislike toward something. A common way would be saying “ that’s gay” when a friend tells them their team lost the game. This misuse of the word can often lead to offending the homosexual community. The meaning of the word “ gay” has changed vastly over time, which today, can be offensive.

How did the meaning of the word “ gay” once turn from being “ merry and happy” to “ homosexual”? It all started around the 1630’s, when people often used it as both “ splendid and showily dressed” and calling a brothel a gay house. It is believed that the word was used this way up until about the early 1900’s. The slang meaning (homosexual) began to appear in psychological writing in the late 1940’s. At first, the word was used solely among homosexuals themselves, by mostly male prostitutes referring to each other, but also female prostitutes. “ gay-rights movement”) It seems to me that nobody ever really used the term as its true meaning “ merry and happy”. However, there are songs in old musicals where they use it that way, so I guess that meaning wasn’t completely extinct. Although the “ merry and happy” meaning of gay wasn’t really used a whole lot in the past, we do see the “ bright and colorful” meaning in many Christmas songs. One well-known example is in “ Deck the Halls”. The lyrics are “ Don we now our gay apparel”; this most likely implies that they were dressed in bright colors.

Without doubt, the word “ gay” has a boundless history and has been used so many different ways in the past. A teenager walks into their favorite store, and immediately spots something they love. They see that the price is much more than they have currently, and furiously groans, “ Fifty dollars? That’s gay! ” When someone says “ that’s gay” about something that they find just plain stupid, why don’t they just say “ that’s stupid”? The improper use of this word may offend the homosexual community because it is a lot like calling them stupid. From my observation, this whole “ that’s gay” thing started recently, within the last few years.

Mostly young people started saying it about nearly everything that they found idiotic. It's not even homophobic people using the word this way, it's anybody. It's a bad habit that most people probably picked up from hearing others say it. However if you say it wrongly you may be seen as homophobic. How can there be a double meaning of both "homosexual" and "stupid" for the word "gay"? Imagine if instead of "gay" people said "that's straight" about an object they didn't like. Wouldn't it be wrong, to basically call someone's sexuality bad or stupid?

It sounds silly, but the inappropriate usage of the word "gay" is implying that you think there is something wrong with being gay. It's obvious that someone who is gay is going to be offended if they hear someone using the word the wrong way. They could take it as insulting, or they could just be a little annoyed. Either way, it's not right. I once worked with a girl who was homosexual. Sometimes I would easily forget that she was in the room and catch myself saying "that's gay" about something totally random. I never really noticed that it could be offensive until a co-worker said something to me.

She asked me, "Don't you know Emily's gay?" When I said yes, she then told me that I should stop saying "that's gay" in front of her. At this point, I felt really bad about it and definitely wanted to stop saying it completely. Saying "that's gay" is such a bad habit of many young people. I guess Emily understood that it was just a bad habit for me, but not everyone will be that understanding. Furthermore, the word "gay" should be used solely for meaning "homosexual". The other day, I was conversing with a friend about

some news in the media. She had told me that Brad Pitt makes 250 million dollars in just one sitting.

I laughed, and replied, " that's gay. " After I said that I realized I should definitely stop saying that because it doesn't even make any sense if you think about it. The meaning of the word " gay" shouldn't be " stupid", although it is for many people. The definition has changed greatly throughout the years, which may cause some people to take offense by it.

Works Cited

1. " gay-rights movement. " The Columbia Encyclopedia. 2008. Credo Reference. Web. 8 Oct 2012. " gay. "
2. Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus. 1997. Print. " gay. "
3. Online Etymology Dictionary. Douglas Harper, 2012. Web. 8 Oct 2012.