

SYMPOSIUM ON SEXUAL DEVIATION

Homosexuality and Lesbianism

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Definitions

Homosexual behaviour often occurs among persons who do not have a settled homosexual orientation. Sometimes, as among prisoners, it can be the direct result of lack of contact with the opposite sex. Around puberty, especially among males, it may represent the easiest way of testing sexual performance. In Kinsey's great survey of American white males, 37 per cent had had at least some overt homosexual experience to the point of orgasm since adolescence, 10 per cent had been more or less exclusively homosexual for at least three years between ages 16 and 55, but only 4 per cent remained so all their lives. Kinsey regarded sexual preference as potentially changeable and a matter of degree, not the clear, permanent dichotomy that had been popularly supposed.

Recent evidence suggest that if reported sexual desire or measured sexual arousability (Freund, 1974) are used as defining criteria, rather than actual orgasmic outlets, the great majority of people, as they grow older, and notwithstanding early or occasional contrary experience, acquire a dominant and lasting preference, which usually goes together with self-identification with either a heterosexual or a homosexual orientation and life-style. The exceptions include persons with strong homosexual feelings who strive to keep their inclinations in check to avoid admitting that the despised label 'sexual deviant' applies to them. Although it may be unfair to classify individuals too categorically, especially in view of the different meanings and emotions associated with different kinds of homosexual experience, nevertheless there exists a hard core of individuals, sometimes referred to as primary homosexuals, who have been more or less exclusively interested in their own sex since childhood, and who are unlikely ever to change their orientation, either spontaneously or in response to therapeutic interventions (Bell *et al.*, 1981).

Predominantly homosexual individuals sometimes evince obvious cross-gender interests and mannerisms, which may have been present since childhood (Green, 1974; Zuger, 1978), or may develop in adulthood with increasing self-identification with a male 'queen' or female 'butch' image. Occasionally, the phenomenon takes the extreme form of transsexuality, an obsessive preoccupation with wanting to be accepted as a person of the opposite sex, which is often more powerful than the desire for actual sexual contacts. Such cases are in a

distinct minority. Most homosexual males and females want to be and actually appear normal representatives of their biological sex and are primarily attracted to others of a similar kind. Erotic practices between homosexuals tend to vary with the occasion and the partner, adherence to stereotypical roles of masterful masculine insertor and passive, feminine recipient belonging more to imagination than reality.

The precise distribution of the different manifestations of homosexuality and bisexuality are still matters of some speculation for the simple reason that forms of sexual behaviour considered reprehensible or deviant are necessarily secretive. A comprehensive analysis of the sexual habits and feelings of a representative sample of the population is virtually unattainable. The reported features of homosexual attitudes and behaviour are highly dependent upon how the sample is drawn. The family man living in seemingly impeccable heterosexual style, who indulges in brief, impersonal contacts with men in lavatories on his way home from work, is not going to appear in any sample from the membership of 'gay' organisations. The views and experiences of the 'liberated', uncloseted patrons of gay bars and gay groups may be equally unrepresentative of the silent majority. The clients of psychiatric practices who seek help because they are unhappy about their orientation may have little in common with others who are contentedly adjusted to homosexual living. Men appearing before the courts for public indecency, importuning or molestation of young boys are likely to be highly unrepresentative of the vast majority whose behaviour never comes to public notice. Information about homosexuals has to be pieced together from a variety of sources and appropriate caution exercised in making generalisations.

Bisexuality

From the biological standpoint, notwithstanding occasional instances of hermaphroditism, or the vestiges of organs of the opposite sex which are part of normal anatomy, males and females are two distinct classes. Neither chromosomal sex nor genital development allows for an extensive intermediate group of bisexuals.

In contrast, a potentiality for homosexual behaviour is characteristic of humans and of most mammals. Whereas most people develop a distinct sexual preference, a minority of unknown dimensions remains

more or less equally arousable by the attractions of either sex. Persons who are predominantly homosexual at one stage of life and predominantly heterosexual at another are not properly speaking bisexual, since at no stage are they without a preference. The label bisexual is sometimes applied improperly to persons of clearly heterosexual preference who have had occasional homosexual experiences in special circumstances, or to homosexuals who, perhaps for social reasons, have had brief, experimental heterosexual relationships. More difficult to classify are individuals whose life-style is essentially heterosexual, and who may be married and committed to a family, but who experience strong homosexual urges and have extra-marital homosexual contacts. They are not bisexual in the sense that their homosexual and heterosexual relationships have equivalent emotional and erotic meaning. They may, for example, be capable of sustaining an ongoing relationship with one sex but not with the other.

Masters and Johnson (1979) used the term ambisexual for a relatively small group of persons for whom the gender of the sex partner is of no importance and for whom, necessarily, long term commitment to one partner would be inappropriate. Under laboratory observation these individuals interacted in coitus with heterosexual partners or in contacts with homosexual partners with equal readiness and an efficiency comparable with fully heterosexual or fully homosexual subjects. There is no doubt, therefore, behavioural bisexuality in the fullest sense exists, although its prevalence is unknown.

The most noteworthy feature of the men and women classed as ambisexual by Masters and Johnson was 'lack of interest in either a committed relationship or a family structure' (p. 172). The investigators queried, without being able to produce an answer, whether longitudinal observation might not reveal that ambisexuals are ultimately obliged, by loneliness, or by further developments in their emotional orientation, to commit themselves to a partner of one sex or the other. On the other hand, experience of the frequent failure of marriages entered into with the idea of 'curing' a homosexual tendency, and the frequent lapses into homosexual behaviour by individuals who have been through conversion therapy, suggest that the complete abandonment of well established patterns of sexual response is problematic. Regression to previous sexual habits in the face of difficulties in a dyadic relationship is a well known phenomenon among intermittent exhibitionists and some heterosexual paedophiles, and is probably equally true of persons of unstable or ambiguous sexual orientation.

Male and female patterns

It can be argued that the contrasts between lesbians

and male homosexuals exemplify the socio-biological differences between the sexes. Males are more quickly aroused by visual stimuli, more likely to masturbate at puberty utilising varied sexual fantasies and hence more liable to become conditioned to deviant interests. (Gosselin and Wilson, 1980; p. 151). Fetishists, voyeurs and sadists are all far commoner among males than females. Lesbians are almost never charged with sexual molestation of children. Kinsey's figures for the incidence of female homosexuality were much less than for male homosexuality. For example, less than 1 per cent of married females and only 2 to 6 per cent of unmarried females had been more or less exclusively homosexual in their responses or overt experiences between age twenty and thirty-five (Kinsey *et al.*, 1953, p. 474). At any age, there were only about a half to a third as many females who were primarily homosexual, but direct comparisons are complicated by the higher incidence of anorgasmia in females, by the tendency of men to equate sex with ejaculation and women to require an emotional relationship, and by the female's facility to participate in intercourse and to satisfy a sexual partner without herself being fully aroused. Switches from heterosexual to homosexual practice and back again at relatively advanced age are commoner in the female.

From the few systematic surveys that have been carried out (Saghir and Robins, 1973; Kenyon, 1970; Schafer, 1977; Bell and Weinberg, 1978; Masters and Johnson, 1979) some undoubted contrasts in the histories and life-styles of male and female homosexuals have emerged. Lesbians are less often promiscuous, less often given to 'cruising' and 'one night stands', more often interested in nest building and cohabitation with a sexual partner, more likely to want a child, either naturally or by adoption, and much less likely to seek sexual outlets with prostitutes. Regardless of sexual orientation, self-masturbation at adolescence is virtually universal in males, less so in females. The conclusion would seem to be that in attitude, feeling and behaviour most lesbians are predominantly feminine, just as most male homosexuals are predominantly masculine.

There are, of course, exceptions to this rule. The incidence of tomboyish behaviour in childhood is notably high among lesbians, more so than is effeminacy during the boyhood of homosexual males. This could be due to the much greater tolerance of tomboy behaviour and the fact that it is not uncommon in the histories of heterosexual women. Positive dislike of members of the opposite sex is more prevalent among lesbians than among male homosexuals, some of whom greatly enjoy platonic relationships with women. Lesbianism is in fact sometimes linked with an aggressive form of women's liberation, as is the

concept of the 'political lesbian' who has to show she doesn't need men. This characteristic is compatible with, but not particularly strong evidence for, psychodynamic theories that attribute lesbianism to jealousy of the assumed superiority of the male or to a hatred stemming from childhood disillusionment with an unsatisfactory father figure.

Ontogenesis of sexual orientation

The mechanisms whereby different stimuli become sexually arousing is little understood. Since orgasms are readily attained by self-manipulation, the development of desire for the participation of another person with a particular bodily configuration would seem hard to explain, unless some neurological programming of the brain impels the seeking out of such a stimulus in order to achieve greater satisfaction. Some authorities, however, would explain the phenomenon entirely in terms of socio-cultural learning. Individuals acquire a taste for sexual stimuli that are socially defined as permissible and enjoyable; stimuli are likely to be so defined when they serve the interests of effective reproduction (Gagnon and Simon, 1973). In reality, the process of psycho-sexual development more likely involves a complex interaction between individual learning experience and inborn potentialities based upon somatic and cerebral sex differentiation.

The establishment of gender identity, the acquisition of skills in the performance of culturally accepted gender roles, and the development of strong preferences for sex partners of a particular sex or possessed of particular physical attributes, are phenomena that do not always march in unison. A transsexual male, subjectively convinced he is really a woman, can be in reality a married man and a father. The aggressively assertive feminist who dislikes maternity and housewifery can be a passionate heterosexual lover. The athletic super-man can be the eager recipient of homosexual advances.

In the ordinary course of events gender identity is established in infancy, sexual preferences becoming manifest later. Homosexual preferences arise with particular frequency where there has been difficulty or discontent in childhood with gender identity or gender role, but among the vast majority of individuals with no such problems homosexual preferences still occur quite often. The important determining factors of a homosexual orientation or of homosexual interests almost certainly vary from one person to another. In some cases no definite sexual preference develops, in others a stable and permanent sexual orientation develops even before puberty, and in others again an established sexual preference may change over time.

Genetic factors may be important, especially where a primary, exclusive orientation is concerned. The

famous twin study of Kallmann (1952) suggested complete concordance of homosexuality among identical male twins, but this has never been replicated and examples of monozygotes discordant for homosexuality have since been reported by a number of investigators (Mesnikoff *et al*, 1963; West, 1977; p. 81). Hormonal variations have long been suspected to be relevant, but estimations of steroid levels in blood and plasma have yielded highly inconsistent results and are in any event subject to considerable episodic fluctuations and to variations attributable to diet, sexual activity and other variables difficult to control (Tourney, 1980). A more promising suggestion is that homosexual tendencies may be potentiated in humans, as they can be in rats, by some failure of sex differentiation of the brain due to abnormal hormone levels or hormone administrations during a critical phase of foetal development (MacCulloch and Waddington, 1981). The theory derives from some original observations by Dörner (1976), who claimed to find an anomalous, feed back response to oestrogen in a sample of male homosexuals but this seems not to have been replicated and the theory is still highly speculative.

Cross-cultural observations (Carrier, 1980) point to the enormous influence of culture in determining the social implications of homosexual behaviour and in influencing its incidence and manifestations. Some cultures have tolerated or encouraged homosexuality during youth, and some have given official recognition to a small minority of transsexuals or transvestites, but the demand for social equality for substantial numbers of people following an exclusive and permanent homosexual lifestyle is probably unique to modern Western civilisation. In cultures where the social status of women remains low, and virginity at marriage is highly prized, lesbianism tends to be ignored, the use of boys as substitute sex objects by older men attracts only mild disapproval, but permanent homosexual liaisons between age peers seem both rare and intolerable.

The influence of parental attitudes and child rearing practices has been emphasised by psychoanalysts, especially the celebrated constellation of dominant mother and unsatisfactory father figure in the backgrounds of male homosexuals, which is supposedly related to oedipal guilt and fear of heterosexuality. Evidence for the influence of this particular constellation in the generality of male homosexuals is uncertain (West, 1977; p. 86). Other forms of parental deviance, such as poor sex role modelling, or deliberate treatment of a child as if he or she were of the opposite sex, have also been implicated (Stoller, 1968).

A supposed connection between early onset of puberty and homosexuality in males has been ex-

plained as the result of simple conditioning through early experiences with same sexed peers, but the evidence for this has been disputed (Bell *et al.*, 1981). The early conditioning theory does not fit well with the recollections of many homosexuals, who remember their sexual desires being clearly developed before they had any actual contact with a sex partner. McGuire *et al.* (1965) counter this argument with the suggestion that masturbation to the accompaniment of homosexual fantasies is a sufficient reinforcer without overt homosexual behaviour.

Anxiety in heterosexual situations, which psychoanalysts attribute to factors present in infancy, can arise from more contemporaneous influences, such as fears of unattractiveness, rejection experiences, doubts about potency, lack of courtship skills etc. etc. Any one or more of these problems might influence a particular individual in the direction of alternative sexual outlets.

This very brief and necessarily incomplete citation of aetiological theories suffices to show that knowledge in this area remains at a primitive level. The problems of definition of homosexuality and above all the problems of sampling present serious obstacles to research. A promising line of investigation would be to make use of the various cohort studies now going on here and in the United States to relate adult sexual habits to family factors and early childhood experiences.

Problems arising from homosexuality

The assumption that homosexuality is a disease condition, indicative of significant inferiority of temperament, moral sense or social competence, was once widely accepted in the medical world, especially by adherents of psychoanalysis, but it no longer attracts much credence. In 1973 the American Psychiatric Association deleted homosexuality *per se* from its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. In October 1981 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe passed a resolution recommending that the World Health Organisation delete homosexuality from its International Classification of Diseases.

Although no general correlation between mental health and sexual orientation is objectively demonstrable, there can be little doubt that many homosexuals are subjected to considerable stress as a result of the strong disapproval of certain sections of the public and the condemnation of homosexuality by religious authority. The necessity to keep their sex lives secret for fear of discrimination in employment and ostracism by relatives, and the internalised guilt feelings engendered by such deceit, is still a live problem. Opinion polls in this country and in the United States have demonstrated that substantial proportions of the population consider that homosex-

uals should not be allowed to occupy responsible posts or have jobs involving contact with young persons. (Marmor, 1980, p. 125). Homosexuals who attempt to escape into marriage, while allowing themselves occasional, covert, anonymous indulgence with prostitutes or strangers encountered in lavatories, are in particular danger of blackmail, prosecution or physical assault (Sagarin and Macnamara, 1977; Miller and Humphreys, 1980). It would be surprising if these circumstances had no deleterious effects upon the individuals involved, and in fact threat of exposure as a homosexual is a well known motive for suicide.

No amount of agitation against unfair discrimination will be likely to change society's attitudes in the short term, and no foreseeable change in the structure of society, based as it is on conventional family units, is likely to produce places and status for homosexuals equivalent to those of heterosexuals. As the sociologist, Plummer (1981), points out, homosexuality calls uncomfortably into question some of the most fundamental assumptions on which most people base their lives. The problem of adjustment to minority status must remain a reality problem for homosexuals, as it is for some ethnic and religious groups.

Although stable partnerships, if not actual cohabitations, are probably commoner than is generally supposed, substantial numbers of male homosexuals are extraordinarily promiscuous for a large part of their lives (Bell and Weinberg, 1978). Various explanations have been advanced, that social pressures are against men living together, that promiscuity is a biologically determined feature of masculinity that comes more fully into play in the absence of family commitments, or that fears of emotional commitment to another person are responsible for a homosexual life-style. Whatever the reason for it, promiscuous habits run counter to conventional morality and provide added reason for opprobrium. The other unconventional social and sexual habits of some male homosexuals, such as steam bath orgies, 'leather and chains' sadism and the more extreme methods of anal penetration (Lowry and Williams, 1981) arouse even stronger condemnation.

Habits of sexual promiscuity, a predilection for anal contacts, and extensive foreign travel, all contribute to the high incidence of certain sexually transmitted diseases among homosexual males. The over-representation of homosexuals among syphilis clients at V.D. clinics has long been noted. Although failure to report initial symptoms due to fear of exposure of their homosexuality may once have been an important factor, it is more likely that the unobtrusiveness of some primary chancres in the anal area produces unwitting carriers of infection. The prevalence of hepatic B immunity among male homosexuals bears

witness to their high risk of exposure to this dangerous virus, which may be present in the semen and saliva as well as the blood of infectious carriers unaware of their condition. A dramatic development recently reported (*Lancet*, 1981) is the occurrence among promiscuous American homosexuals of a lethal skin cancer, Kaposi's sarcoma, believed to be related to a breakdown of the immune system.

The impression that homosexual males are particularly prone to molest children is probably false (Newton, 1978). A relatively large number of males are prosecuted for consensual indecencies with boys, but many of these incidents involve post-pubertal teenagers. Analogous behaviour with girls of similar age would either not be illegal (in the case of the over sixteens) or be less likely to be reported to police and lead to prosecution. Offenders who have contact with pre-pubertal children fall into two broad categories, those who are primarily attracted to children and those who use children as a substitute for the adult sex they would actually prefer. Many of the latter are men who have had adult relationships that have broken down. Surveys suggest that regression from sex with adults to sex with children occurs almost exclusively among homosexuals (Groth and Birnbaum, 1978). Male homosexuals usually have a stable preference for the sexually mature, often with an almost fetishistic obsession with well developed genitals, so it is perhaps unsurprising that phallometric assessment revealed less responsiveness to children among homosexuals than among heterosexuals (Freund, 1981). Nevertheless, men with a primary attraction to pre-pubertal boys, although much less numerous than heterosexual paedophiles, are often very persistent and difficult to deter from their socially disapproved interests.

Some of the social problems associated with homosexuality are variants of what occurs in heterosexual contexts. The prostitution of youths to older men arouses special concern because of the fear that if they were not homosexual to begin with they will become so as a result of experience. That risk is probably exaggerated (West, 1977; p. 224). A more realistic danger is that disaffected, unemployed or runaway youths will lose incentive for regular work and training and acquire tastes and habits that can never be satisfied by honest means once their youthful attractiveness fades. It is rightly pointed out by some protagonists of man/boy love relationships (O'Carroll, 1980) that the sexual patronage of an older man can sometimes provide wayward youngsters with an emotional and social security that they would not otherwise enjoy, much to their own benefit and that of society at large. It need not necessarily prevent the development of heterosexual relationships. Unfortunately, many such affairs are

short-lived and exploitative rather than caring and pseudo-parental.

The loneliness of the elderly is exacerbated by the high value placed upon youthful good looks by male homosexuals and the lack of welcome for older males in gay bars and meeting places. Heterosexual society is not altogether without manifestations of the same masculine tendency to prefer younger sex partners. As divorce becomes easier, so does the number of discarded older wives whose divorced husbands have found a younger woman.

Confrontations between the needs and wishes of the homosexual minority and the heterosexual majority are inevitable where children are involved. The wish of some lesbian couples to adopt children runs counter to generally accepted ideas about the ideal parental home and the desirability of providing adequate sex role models for children. In point of fact, such surveys as have been carried out do not substantiate the fears that the children of such unions experience undue problems of sexual identity, or that they are any worse placed emotionally, economically or otherwise, than children reared in one-parent families (Green, 1978; Kirkpatrick *et al*, 1981). The dispute between parents and education authorities on the one hand, and civil rights activists on the other, as to the appropriateness of employing homosexual teachers, is unlikely to reach any final or conclusive resolution in the near future. So long as the education of young children in the plainer facts of ordinary sex remains a subject of dispute, contact with teachers who are liable to promulgate permissive views on homosexuality must remain highly controversial.

In prison and institutional settings violent homosexual assaults occur, but very often as a means of asserting social dominance rather than for purely erotic motives (Lockwood, 1980; Scacco, 1975; Weiss and Friar, 1975). Outside, in spite of the supposed prevalence of consensual sadistic practices, assaults in a homosexual context appear curiously rare, and most of the known victims are among boys. One reason may be that grown men are not very easily overpowered, but on the other hand heterosexual rapes are sometimes accomplished with guns or other weapons, which could presumably just as well intimidate a male victim. Gang rapes are virtually exclusively heterosexual activities, perhaps because of the difficulty of collecting together a group of like-minded aggressors with a minority sexual orientation. An alternative and equally plausible interpretation is that absence of sexual violence is a characteristic of the homosexual temperament.

Violence arising in the context of sexual jealousy is believed by some to be especially prevalent among lesbians, but firm evidence is lacking. What is sadly

indisputable is the prevalence of aggression, in the shape of 'queer bashing' and robbery and beatings following homosexual encounters, by individuals whose hatred of homosexuality, especially after they have been tempted into participation themselves, spills over into violence (Meldrum, 1979).

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