

SOME ASPECTS OF SEXUAL KNOWLEDGE AND SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR OF LOCAL WOMEN RESULTS OF A SURVEY IX FEMALE HOMOSEXUALITY

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SYNOPSIS

Only 3 of 1012 women admitted to having had or to be still practising homosexuals.

The reasons for homosexual behaviour and problems associated with homosexuality and its social significance are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Homosexuality refers to sameness of individuals concerned or a desire to be physically intimate with someone of one's own sex at some time, or always, during one's life. This can be considered as a natural and normal variety of life experience. It is abnormal only when you consider as "normal" and "healthy" only an interest in reproductive sex (1,2).

Female homosexuality is variously described as lesbianism, sapphism or tribadism. The essential feature is a definite preferential erotic attitude to another female. This usually but not, invariably also involves some physical expression of attraction. So it is possible to speak of homosexual behaviour, overt homosexuality or a practising lesbian (3).

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MATERIALS AND METHOD

1012 females, who were patients of the Obstetric and Gynaecology Unit of Toa Payoh Hospital were interviewed personally by the author with respect to their sexual knowledge, sexual attitudes and sexual behaviour.

RESULTS

Only 3 women of the 1012 admitted to ever having indulged in or to still practising homosexual activities at the time of interview.

Their ages ranged from 21 to 30 years.

One had indulged once only when an adolescent and the experience consisted of kissing and generalised body contact. She was now married with two children and came to hospital for termination of her third pregnancy.

Another had given up lesbian practices after having been inducted into it while at a home for delinquent girls. She had carried on with the activities for two years. During this time she took over being the active partner and had subsequently got married. She had just had her second child.

The third was single and still a practising lesbian. Her partner was her room-mate who was middle aged and rather obese. However, she being an airline stewardess had also been having heterosexual contacts while travelling and had come into hospital for a termination of pregnancy.

The incidence thus is only about 0.03 percent.

134 or 13.2 percent of those interviewed did not know that homosexual practices between women existed or could be practised by women or that these practices were acceptable. They did know about the existence of male homosexuality.

DISCUSSION

There is no satisfactory study to give a comprehensive, unsensational and reliable account of female homosexuality. Most figures of incidence are merely guesses from inadequate data (3).

Kinsey (1) found on his survey that by age 45, 13 percent of the women had had homosexual experiences with orgasm. One estimate (3) from the UK gives a figure of 1:45 adult females and an American (4) estimate is that 18 percent of the adult female population probably have had homosexual experiences. The incidence in this study was only 0.03 percent.

Relatively few lesbians remain predominantly homosexual for many years and nearly all who do so are unmarried (1). The same trend is seen in this study.

Lots of questioning has been made about whether homosexuality is more common in the male or the female and opinions to support both viewpoints exist (1,4). In Kinsey's survey a lower incidence among the females was reported.

The widespread belief that there are more female homosexuals than males is mainly due to the fact that females usually are more openly affectionate than males. Further females often hold hands, kiss each other, put arms around each other and openly express their admiration and affection for other females without having any homosexual thought in mind. However, if males make such open displays they would be considered to have homosexual tendency. Males tend to interpret these female actions as evidence of the development of homosexual relationships later!

Sexual contacts between individuals of the same sex is known to occur in practically every species of mammals studied (1,4).

An individual's response and behaviour depends on the inherent capacity to respond to any adequate stimulus. Thus if offered the opportunity and not conditioned against such activities, any individual could respond to stimuli from any other individual of own sex (1).

The factors leading to homosexual behaviour are:

- the basic capacity of every individual to respond to any efficient stimulus.
- the incident leading an individual into the first sexual experience with an individual of the same sex.
- the conditioning effect of such an experience.
- indirect parental and other conditioning which others' opinion and social codes have on an individual's decision to accept or reject this type of social conduct.

Although most cultures condone only heterosexual contacts, homosexual contacts between the sexes is accepted to some degree and female homosexuals are hardly ever prosecuted as the males are (1,3).

Homosexuality is largely confined to single or previously married and widowed, separated or divorced females. Frequencies and incidences are low among married women. The effect of marriage is inevitably to stop the homosexual activities and lower the incidences and frequencies in married women (1). Two of those who had homosexual sexual experiences had given up homosexual activities after marriage. The only practising homosexual was a single woman.

It is not known whether the increase in female homosexuality is real or whether more cases are surfacing in today's permissive, liberated atmosphere. Another development is that women, who are wives and even in their 40's are discovering themselves to be erotically attracted to another female and leave home or carry on with their new venture discreetly.

It was only discovered when swinging groups were active, that the wives were ever ready to enter into lesbian activities (5).

The increase in the number of bisexuals and lesbians may be also increasing for political reasons — to dissociate themselves from depending on men (2).

A high proportion of unmarried females who live together never have contacts which are in any sense sexual (1). For most women homosexual activity is only continued for a short period in their life (1). Many have only one or two encounters at a younger age, as did one of the cases in this study.

A high proportion have only one partner and many live as bisexuals ie respond to both homosexual and heterosexual stimuli. The practising lesbian in this study was a bisexual. She and one other had only had one partner. Sometimes the homosexual and heterosexual activities occur at different periods of their lives and at others concurrently. Two of the cases belonged to the former group and the practising lesbian to the latter. A wide gradation is seen from one extreme to the other, ie individuals who react psychologically to both males and females and have overt sexual relation with males and females (1,3).

In general homosexuality is more often found in the more restrictive communities where sexual behaviour is subject to formal rules (1,3). Though religious doctrines condemn homosexuality, their restrictions regarding premarital heterosexual contacts is the reason for increased homosexuality in the more religious devout. One case each belonged to the Catholic and Muslim faith respectively.

There is a higher incidence of homosexuality in the

higher educational groups and moral restraints on premarital heterosexual activity is the most important single factor contributing to the development of homosexual activity (1). The three cases in this study had education in school for up to 10 years.

Homosexual activity is most marked among younger teenaged daughters of those social groups who send their daughters to college (1). Further restriction in college and prolongation of studies and consequent delay in marriage interfere with any possible early heterosexual experiences for these girls. All these factors and maybe the freer acceptance and lesser social concern about homosexuality in the upper educational groups may be further contributory factors to the development of homosexuality.

Educational levels and religious background correlate with the incidence of homosexuality (1,3). Social factors too play an important part in the development of socially appropriate behaviour. Factors such as loneliness, feelings of rejection, paranoid attitudes, worry over security and hostility compounded by the problems of childlessness and feeling of inequality in a man's world all reinforce homosexual behaviour (3).

A further factor is the treatment of lesbianism in mass media. Recently there is an ever increasing acceptance to the extent of commercial exploitation (3).

Lesbianism is found with increased incidence among prisoners due to the one sex closed establishment and the higher psychiatrically abnormal population there. Thus prison is a good ground for the development of the situational or facultative homosexual as compared to the obligatory homosexual to thrive (3).

There is no current agreement on the causes of lesbianism (1). Arguments as to whether the origin is biological or psychological is still raging (2).

One consistent theme is centred around the girl's difficulties with her father involving hatred, rejection or both (3). Many histories give the picture of a close binding seductive over indulgent mother who dominates a distinctly ambivalent or hostile father (4).

Many homosexuals claim that their behaviour is beyond their control and blame biologic factors (3). Controversy exists whether the hormonal status of the individuals plays a part but the possibility exists that hormonal mechanisms may influence sexual behaviour. Also early hormonal influence may affect the sexual orientation and other components of behaviour (4).

Homosexuality is multiply determined by psychodynamic, socio-cultural, biological and situational factors (4).

A popular notion is that the girl is seduced into homosexuality by the older lesbian (3,5). However, very few lesbians prefer or desire a very young sexual partner and many prefer partners of the same age or older.

Some evidence does support the relationship between the parent's wish for their daughter to have been a son and homosexuality of their daughters (3).

Another notion is that early traumatic experience with males may have a lasting effect in promoting fear or hostility towards men. An important factor is fear of an inhibition in developing heterosexual drives aided or abetted by parents. Often the true lesbian has no erotic interest in men and are indifferent to men's attitudes and are repulsed or frightened by men's advances (5).

There is a good deal of basic and fundamental sexual drive in homosexuals but this is blocked or interfered with by anxiety, inhibition or threats as evidenced by the high percentage who do get married or have heterosexual partners or become pregnant. A

large percentage do feel embarrassed or indifferent in male company (3).

If there is a chemical defect, its nature is still obscure. It need not influence the direction of libido directly. Environmental factors do play a part. On present evidence the activity is heterogenous but the degree to which genetic and environmental factors are important is uncertain (5).

It could be concluded by saying that homosexuality is a partly psychological phenomenon. The whole field of neuroendocrinology is throwing some doubts on previous negative conclusions on the role of hormones (4).

Generally it is believed that Lesbians are heavy built but some authorities say this to be a misconception (4). Further, they do not agree that homosexual men are effeminate and homosexual women are masculine. Also it is often said that homosexuals have bigger breasts, waists and slightly bigger hips. The three women in this study were all average built women with reasonable attractiveness.

Majority of Lesbians are well adjusted productive persons (3,4). They are different but not disordered people. Some lead a contented, active life but the majority have emotional difficulties as do heterosexuals. The emotional stability and personal maturity of homosexuals are no different from heterosexuals. Some exist as aimless, restless, distorted individuals.

Most Lesbians seem to turn to an asexual life earlier than normal women.

Mean age of onset of Lesbianism is around 16 years of age and full physical experiences are had by age 21 (1,3). In this study all the three cases were between 20 to 30 years of age.

Techniques in Homosexuals (1,3,4,5)

The techniques used by Lesbians are the same as ordinarily used in heterosexual petting preceding coitus or may serve as an end in itself. Only difference is that there is no vaginal penetration with a true phallus.

In the majority lip kissing and generalised body contacts occurs. Simple deep kissing, breast manipulation orally or manually usually occur. Genitals may be manipulated manually or orally. Genital apposition occurs at time. Usually vaginal penetration with objects serve as a substitute for the male penis is quite rare.

The techniques of sexual relations between females may be as effective as or even more effective than the petting or pre-coital techniques used in heterosexual contacts. What is different is primarily that there is no one institutionalized way of having them, so they can be as inventive and individualized as the people are inclined to be (2). There is generally more feelings, tenderness, affection, sensitivity and more orgasms. This higher frequency of orgasms in homosexual contacts has been remarked on by many authorities (1).

Further the relationships tend to be longer and involve more overall body sensitivity since once orgasm occurs it does not automatically signal the end of sexual feelings as occurs in heterosexual contacts (1,3,5).

Some Lesbians felt lesbian sex to be a better and more equal relationship. Many women said again and again that they enjoyed Lesbian contacts (2,3). Further many said that they might be interested in having sex with another woman or at least were curious about trying it for the experience. All the three women in this study said they enjoyed Lesbian sex better. Further the two married women said they did not enjoy heterosexual intercourse and were just tolerating it to carry on with their married lives. The female clitoris, inner

surfaces of the labia minora and entrance to the vagina are the areas chiefly stimulated by the male penetration in coitus. Similar tactile or oral stimulation of these same structures may be sufficient to bring orgasm in Lesbianism.

Nearly 50 to 66 percent had reached orgasm by homosexual activities at least in some of their contacts in Kinsey's study (1). In the cases in this study one had not progressed beyond simple kissing. The other two had engaged in various practices and had been orgasmic. Homosexual activities are very effective in bringing a female to orgasm (1).

Females who find satisfaction in deep penetration in coitus, may find lack of this sort of physical stimulation less satisfying and inferior to those available in heterosexual coitus. The higher occurrence of orgasm in homosexual relations depends upon the considerable psychological stimulation produced by such a relationship. Also the fact that two individuals of the same sex are likely to understand the anatomy and physiological responses and psychology of their own sex better than they understand that of the opposite sex are other factors contributing to the occurrence of orgasm frequently (1).

Females in heterosexual relationships are more likely to prefer techniques closer to those commonly used in homosexual activities, ie they would prefer a considerable amount of generalised emotional stimulation before there is any specific sexual contact. They would want physical stimulation of the whole body, the clitoris, labia minora and also stimulation which once has begun is followed through to orgasm without any interruptions. Males, depending to a greater degree than most females do upon psychological stimuli often introduce interruptions into their heterosexual relationship and these interfere with the attainment of orgasm.

From observing Lesbian activities it is possible for males to learn about female sexual responses and they can make use of these techniques to make their heterosexual contacts as effective as females make in most of their homosexual contacts. Heterosexual contacts could become more satisfactory if they (the males) more often utilise the sort of knowledge which most homosexual females have of female anatomy and female psychology (1).

Problems Associated with Homosexuality

There is an increased incidence of venereal disease. The dildo can cause vaginal lacerations if used rashly.

Problems related to socio-legal or economic pressures include discovering one's homosexuality, parental rejection, difficulties at school and work (4,6). A sense of guilt and difficulty in leading a double life also exists. Peer group pressure and political ideology are other problems.

Many active in homosexual practices during their early teenage years, later do get married and withdraw from being active homosexually and live an active heterosexual life. Many of these women when they marry suffer from orgasmic dysfunction because of prior imprinting of homosexual influences upon their sexual response. Prior homosexual experiences creates a negatively psychosexual influence and when these women marry they have to reorientate their sexual value systems from one means of sexual ex-

perience to the other for the first time (6).

Many women with overt Lesbian orientation are poor lubricators (6). Many women who behave bisexually are homosexually orientated and attempt regular coital activities for socio-economic reasons. Although they lubricate well in homosexual activities, with a male in coital activity they lubricate poorly and have no interest in their male companion as a sexual partner. One of the cases in this study, though married and with two children, said that she never enjoyed heterosexual coitus and married for the sake of economic security only (6).

Some previously homosexual women, when they withdraw from homosexuality and attempt heterosexual coitus can suffer from vaginismus (6).

Lesbians seldom or never prostitute for partners as do male homosexuals though it is possible that some prostitutes may be homosexually inclined (5).

Social Significance (1)

Society becomes involved when homosexual activities affects the person or property of other members of a social organisation (1). Homosexuality is condemned because they depart from the norms and the publicly pretended custom of society. However the public is less concerned about homosexual activities among females compared to that among males.

Morally homosexuality is condemned because it does not serve the primary function of sex ie procreation and so is considered to be a perversion.

Homosexuality threatens the existence of the human species and the integrity of the home and society (1).

Legally there is less public concern over homosexual activities among females and legal attitudes are less punishing towards female homosexual (1,3).

There is a need to help society to adapt, adjust and accept female homosexuals for what they are and as a way of life. Lesbianism is not a sickness and the majority are mentally healthy and do not desire to be heterosexuals (7).

There is a need for sexual therapy with homosexuals. Their problems correspond to those of heterosexual couples, viz premature ejaculation for the male and inability to orgasm for the female partner (ie the Lesbian) (5).

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