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By Harry Jivenmukta

WHAT IS SEXUALITY?

1

Human sexual behaviour may be defined as any activity solitary, between two persons, or in a group that induces sexual arousal. There are two major factors which determine human sexual behaviour:

- z the inherited sexual response patterns that have evolved as a means of ensuring reproduction,
- z the degree of influence exerted on people by society in the expression of their sexuality.

Sexuality is a very difficult subject for many people to talk about because traditionally people do not talk about such things publicly. We have all been brought up not to be open about sexuality because it makes people uncomfortable.

But it is important to talk about sexuality because it often helps people to understand both their own feelings and the feelings which other people have. Sexuality is not sex. Sex is about the gender of a person or about the physical act of intercourse. Sexuality is about how a person feels about themselves in sexual terms. Some people feel uncomfortable with the expectations of others. Both girls and boys are expected to fit into a sex stereotype which is expressed every day on television and in other media. But some people do not fit in with these. It is inevitable really, because stereotypes are by definition generalisations which cannot apply to everyone equally.

Sexuality is personal. Everyone has their own type of relationship with the outside world. Just as someone likes Indian food and someone else likes fish and chips, it is the case that people have their own sexual preferences. Some girls may like and fit in with the stereotypes of girls as fun loving, or blonde bimbo, or party girl, or thin, slim and sexy. But others may not see themselves in such simplistic ways. Similarly, boys often do not fit in with their stereotypes.

Sexuality is an important subject because it allows individuals to think about their inner feelings and become more balanced in themselves and find out about the choices they have.

Exercise

1. What is the difference between sex and sexuality?
2. Why do some people feel uncomfortable talking about sexuality?
3. What is the traditional notion of how boys and girls should be? What is the ideal girl and boy in the eyes of the establishment?

A TYPICAL FAMILY

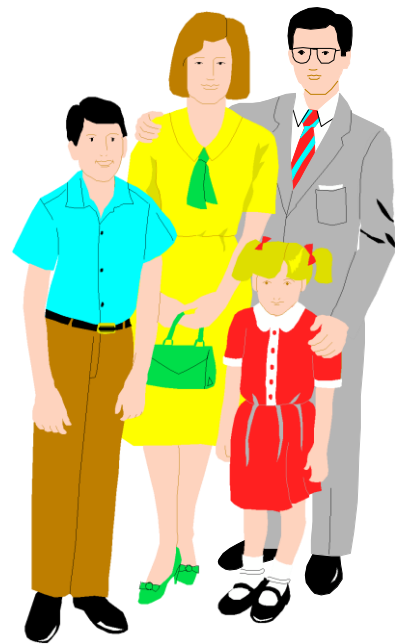
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The picture shows a stereotypical family; a father, mother and two children, (girl and boy). Most people think of this kind of image when they think about the ideal family, although for many people this type of family may not be in their own experience. The family is seen as the basic building block in our society and that is why some people get very upset when others do not fit into this idea. Many people have a family with only a single parent, or some people may have a partner of the same sex. Some people do not have children through choice whilst others may have many children.

The last twenty or so years has seen the traditional family decline because of:

- z divorce,
- z people deciding not to marry but live together instead,
- z sexual preferences for same sex relationships.

Traditionally, girls were expected to follow their mothers and become like them when they grow up and boys would become like their father. There was never an issue with whether the girls or boys would be heterosexual; it was assumed. People who grew up with a different sexuality than the one expected by everyone else had to simply keep it secret. If found out, the person would be considered 'sick', or mentally ill, and would be expected to 'grow out of it'. Most people in the past had never heard of a different sexuality, or if they had, they would never admit to it. As late as ten years ago in the UK, some people thought that it was incredulous that people could be anything other than heterosexual.



Exercise

1. When people talk about a 'typical family' what do they mean?
2. Is it important to have a model of what the ideal family should be? Why?
3. Do girls and boys always look to their parents as role models?
4. Make a list of people or events which have influenced your outlook on life.

Sexuality is essentially all about your self image. This means it depends on how you see yourself inside. Self image is all about how comfortable you are with the way you think of yourself and the way others see you. Some people pretend, just to make other people happy. It is important to be happy yourself. Many homosexuals and non-hetrosexual people have ruined their lives by pretending to be 'straight' and leading their life as a lie because they have been unable to declare that they are different.

It is not easy to be different. Society likes people who are the same, who fit in with the preconceived idea of how people should be. Many people find it very difficult to accept that someone can be different and some people are frightened because they do not understand. Often people who declare their sexuality face great opposition and hatred from people who previously were their friends. But if they are told the facts and if they are prepared to listen then often in time they come to accept that people can be different but do not represent a threat to them.

The media and the culture in this country were traditionally opposed to people who expressed their sexuality differently from the normal heterosexual. Barriers are being broken down. Today people are encouraged to express their true self image and many people are more open to listen to new ideas.



Exercise

1. What is self-image?
2. Should people always be honest about their feelings?

At different times and in different cultures, homosexual behaviour has been approved of, tolerated, or banned; concepts of homosexuality in modern Western society are in flux. Until the early 1970s in America homosexuality was classified as a mental illness, but that designation was dropped amid increased political activity and efforts by homosexuals to be seen as individuals exercising a different sexual preference rather than as abnormal personalities.

The ancient Greeks accepted homosexuality between adult and adolescent males and in some respects considered it a higher form of love than heterosexuality. Christian culture has generally seen it as sinful, and homosexuality was traditionally viewed as socially unacceptable through most of Western culture. Sex researchers of the 20th century have found homosexual activity to be a frequent pattern in adolescence among both males and females. An American report of 1948 found that 30 percent of adult American males had engaged in some homosexual activity, and 10 percent were exclusively homosexual for a period of at least three years between the ages of 16 and 55. About half as many women were predominantly homosexual. A range of surveys suggests that 2 to 4 percent of the population are predominantly homosexual in behaviour, while at least 5 to 7 percent report some same-gender contact in adulthood; both higher and lower percentages have been reported.

Homosexual activity sometimes increases in environments where there are no heterosexual outlets for sexual desires. A large population of bisexuals, people who respond sexually to persons of either sex, has also been recognized. Most people now recognize that there is no single homosexual type. The concepts that all male homosexuals are effeminate or that all lesbians are masculine and aggressive have largely been discarded. Similarly, the notion that homosexuals are 'sick' individuals who need only to meet the right person of the opposite sex to be 'cured' has largely given way, particularly in areas with large homosexual populations.

Homosexuality became a political issue in some countries during the late 20th century, as a late offshoot of various civil rights movements of the 1960s. Homosexuals identified themselves as such to friends and relatives and, in many cases, even publicly. The homosexual, or gay, community became openly known to the heterosexual (straight) population for the first time. Homosexuals demanded their rights to equal treatment in employment practices, housing, and public policy. In many countries, laws to ban discrimination against homosexuals have been adopted.

In the UK it is currently legal for homosexuality between consenting adults. There are still some discrepancies in the law. Campaigners want the law to be changed so that there is no difference at all between the law relating to heterosexual relationships and homosexual ones.

Exercise

1. What is homosexuality?
2. Why do some people react so aggressively towards 'gay' people?
3. What view does your religion have towards homosexuality?

The Gay Rights Movement is a civil rights movement that seeks to eliminate laws barring homosexual acts between consenting adults and that calls for an end to discrimination against homosexuals in employment, credit, housing, public accommodations, and other areas of life. Its ultimate aim is to encourage society's tolerance or acceptance of homosexuality.

The British were early activists; in 1914 the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology was founded for both information and educational purposes. In the United States, the first major male organization was the Mattachine Society, founded in 1950-51 in Los Angeles. The Daughters of Bilitis (named after the Sapphic love poems of Pierre Louys, *Chansons de Bilitis*) was the first major American organization for female homosexuals; it was founded in San Francisco in 1955.

The beginning of militant homosexual activism can be dated. About 3:00 am on June 28, 1969, the Stonewall Inn, a homosexual bar at 53 Christopher Street in Greenwich Village, was raided by New York City police. Instead of passively accepting the situation the 200 homosexuals present began taunting the police and throwing debris; the riot lasted 45 minutes and resumed on succeeding nights. Protest rallies ensued, and homosexual rights organizations proliferated in the United States from the 1970s on. "Stonewall" came to be commemorated annually in late June in Gay Pride Week (alternatively, Gay and Lesbian Pride Week), not only in American cities but in cities in several other countries.

The gay liberation movement in the United States agitated for the repeal of laws prescribing criminal penalties for homosexual sex and tried to obtain other state laws protecting homosexuals' civil rights and outlawing discrimination based on sexual preference.

A relatively tolerant atmosphere toward homosexuality exists in the countries of western and northern Europe. The United States and Great Britain have also become more tolerant; about one-half of all American states have no laws prohibiting homosexual acts between consenting adults, and Britain repealed a similar law in 1967. Tolerance has also increased in most countries of the East Asian rim and in the states of eastern and central Europe. Latin America, with its Roman Catholicism and its culture of machismo, remained largely hostile, as did the Muslim nations of the Middle East and the countries of sub-Saharan Africa. Homosexual activity is still illegal in large parts of the world, though it is apparently practised in every society, either openly or secretly.

Exercise

1. What is the Gay Rights Movement?
2. Why is it important to campaign publicly for equal rights in sexuality?
3. Find out about 'gay' campaigning groups in the UK.

Transsexualism is the disturbance of gender identity in which the affected person believes that he or she should belong to the opposite sex. The transsexual male, for example, is born with normal male genitalia and other secondary characteristics of the masculine sex; very early in life, however, he identifies with women and behaves in a manner appropriate to the female sex. His sexual orientation is generally one of attraction to other males and he wants to be treated by them as if he were a normal female.

With the development of successful surgical techniques and hormone therapy, several thousand transsexuals, male and female, have undergone a permanent sex change. Although both male and female transsexuals exist, the male-to-female operation is more common because the genital reconstruction is more satisfactory. The male transsexual's penis and testes are removed and an artificial vagina is created; breast implants may be inserted, although some breast development usually is promoted with the use of feminizing hormones. Female transsexuals may undergo mastectomy and hormone treatments to produce the male secondary sexual characteristics, but attempts to create an artificial penis have not been particularly satisfactory.

Today it is still frowned at by many people who think that people should remain as they were made and not undergo sex change operations. There is a greater understanding, however, from the medical profession and there are support groups and advisory services for transsexuals.

Transsexuals have been discriminated against even more than homosexuals in terms of employment, housing and the law. Many legal systems do not recognise that a person born one sex can be treated as another. For example, a man who becomes a woman would still be imprisoned in a men's jail if sent to prison, and for marriage purposes a man turned woman could not marry a man because legally the woman would be seen still to be a man.

Exercise

1. What is transsexuality?
2. Should people be allowed to undergo surgery and change their sex?
3. What problems do transsexuals have legally?
4. Do you think the law should be more flexible and cater for sex change?

Transvestites wear the clothes of the opposite sex (cross-dressing), generally to derive some kind of sexual pleasure. It is often mistakenly associated with homosexuality; in fact, however, transvestites may be either heterosexual or homosexual, and the practice of cross-dressing is sometimes even ridiculed among homosexuals. The transvestite must also be distinguished from the transsexual, who desires to become a functioning member of the opposite sex; transvestites comfortably fill gender roles in society and are satisfied with their biological sex. Most transvestites are men and this is at least in part a result of the role of fashion in Western culture; in the mid-to-late 20th century Western women wearing trousers and other clothes once considered to be exclusively men's clothes are not seen as deviant.

Transvestites may quite early in life express interest in the clothes and manners of the opposite sex and, around the time of puberty, may develop erotic fantasies associated with cross-dressing. One type of transvestite whose cross-dressing remains a form of fetishism concentrates on a single favourite garment, such as shoes or underwear. Most transvestites keep the practice a secret because of negative social reactions.

A small segment of the homosexual male population does engage in transvestism; these men are referred to as '**drag queens**' by other homosexuals, and the practice of cross-dressing is called being 'in drag.' Unlike the male transsexual who wants to pass in society as a normal woman, the 'drag queen' often wears flamboyant outfits in a conscious caricature of femininity.

Some male cross-dressers are professional female impersonators, entertainers who usually impersonate female celebrities. Entertainers who cross-dress (usually quite unconvincingly) to comic effect are quite popular in some cultures, particularly in the UK.

Exercise

1. What is a transvestite?
2. Why do some people find transvestitism unacceptable?
3. Why do we laugh at female impersonators but fail to accept serious cross dressers?
4. Does it make any difference if women wear trousers that men can wear traditionally female clothes?

AIDS, which was first conclusively identified in 1981, is caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). The disease is transmitted by contamination of the bloodstream with HIV-infected body fluids, particularly blood, semen, breast milk, and vaginal fluid. The virus is generally transmitted through sexual intercourse, by the transfusion of virus-contaminated blood, by the sharing of HIV-contaminated intravenous needles, or by breast-feeding.

AIDS is not spread by casual physical contact sneezing or coughing, and transmission of the virus through such body fluids as saliva and tears is not proved. Once a person is infected, the incubation period is long, an average of eight years before symptoms appear. During this period the virus is concentrated in the tissues of the lymphatic system where they reproduce.

Two primary strains have been identified:

- z The HIV-1 strain is prevalent in the United States, Europe, and most of Africa,
- z The second strain, HIV-2, is prevalent mainly in western Africa and more rarely elsewhere.

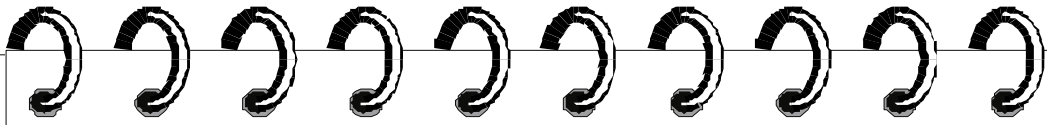
The chief victims of HIV-1 have been male homosexuals, intravenous drug users, haemophiliacs and other persons who have received contaminated blood transfusions, and heterosexual females whose sexual partners have contracted AIDS. The HIV-2 strain seems to be spread in the same ways as HIV-1 but also seems to infect a larger percentage of people through sexual intercourse. The prevalence in urban Africa of sexually transmitted diseases and prostitution is thought to be the major factor in the spread of the disease there. The spread of AIDS through Africa is rapid; in the urban areas of some African nations the rate of infection ranges from 10 to 20 percent of the entire adult population.

Most people who have recently been infected by HIV look and feel perfectly healthy. After a few years, however, many will develop a condition known as AIDS-related complex (ARC). Its symptoms are intermittent or persistent fever, fatigue, weakness, diarrhoea and weight loss. ARC frequently precedes the more serious syndrome of AIDS. Studies have shown that the risk of developing ARC and then AIDS increases steadily over the years after a person has first been infected with HIV.

Presently, there is no cure for AIDS and people die when an illness cannot be fought off by a weakened immune system.

Exercise

1. What is AIDS?
2. How do people become infected with HIV?
3. Who can become infected?



Sexuality is all about personal choice. Just because most people are heterosexual doesn't mean that heterosexual relationships are better than homosexual ones. Heterosexual's make it very difficult for homosexuals to admit their sexual preferences and often homosexuals are afraid to come out because they know it will cause problems.

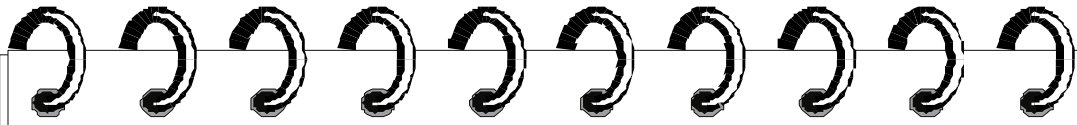
There should be no relationship between the choice of a persons sexual partner and their prospects of getting a good job, or being able to live their life without fear and intimidation. Basically it is the fear that people have because they don't understand that leads them to react negatively and violently against homosexuals. If they understood that we are just ordinary people like everybody else then maybe they would not be so aggressive.

Homosexuals do not want to convert the whole world, they just want to live according to their preferences. Except for their choice of partner there is no difference between a homosexual person and a heterosexual person. Homosexuals also want to have a good job, nice home, and friends.

Homosexuals can be found in all professions, in every town in the country, and in every country in the world. In the last ten years or so things have started to change. Some people are now more informed about homosexual- ity and therefore less afraid. Many gay people have come out and admitted their sexuality, including members of the government. I think that one day people will not be surprised if someone says they are gay any more than they would be surprised today if someone said they like fish and chips.

Exercise

1. Is a person's sexuality a purely personal choice?
2. Should society be able to decide which types of sexuality are acceptable?



It is clear to me that homosexuality is not the natural way that people should have relationships. Heterosexuality means that the human race can continue to survive. In all species it is vital for the continuation of the race. Homosexuality is unnatural and unproductive.

Most religions also say that homosexuality is wrong. It is just not normal for two people of the same sex to have sexual relations. I don't want to sound alarmist but homosexuality is just one example of how modern societies are beginning to degenerate. We should have high moral standards and make sure that our children also have them. If we accept unnatural practices as normal then people will get confused as to what is good and right and what is not right.

Individual rights are okay as long as they do not lower the standards of other people rights. I feel that the recent trend to accept homosexuality as normal brings into question the validity of established ways of living. Homosexuals should be helped and educated to understand that their feelings are not acceptable, and although they feel that it is okay to have such feelings they must recognise that the majority of people do not like them.

If we accept homosexuality as normal then where will it end? All sorts of fringe and unacceptable types of behaviour will begin to emerge. We cannot accept everything. Sometimes society has to say enough is enough. And I say enough is enough.

Exercise

1. Is heterosexuality the only 'normal' form of sexuality?
2. What is the difference between 'unnatural' and 'not normal' in terms of sexuality?