

Comparative Data of Childhood and Adolescence Molestation in Heterosexual and Homosexual Persons

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In research with 942 nonclinical adult participants, gay men and lesbian women reported a significantly higher rate of childhood molestation than did heterosexual men and women. Forty-six percent of the homosexual men in contrast to 7% of the heterosexual men reported homosexual molestation. Twenty-two percent of lesbian women in contrast to 1% of heterosexual women reported homosexual molestation. This research is apparently the first survey that has reported substantial homosexual molestation of girls. Suggestions for future research were offered.

KEY WORDS: childhood molestation; adult sexual orientation; female pedophiles.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to determine and compare the incidence of childhood molestation of homosexual and heterosexual adults. The previous literature suggests that a history of childhood molestation may be more common in homosexual men and women than in their heterosexual counterparts.

Bradford *et al.* (1994) reported that 25% of 1,925 lesbians surveyed had been sexually abused or raped as children. They said that 31% of the perpetrators were male relatives, 45% other known men, 45% male strangers, and 1% women (it is not known why this totaled 122%).

In interviewing with 35 lesbian women in alcoholic recovery, 16 (46%) revealed sexual abuse, even though they were not asked about sexual abuse (Hall, 1996). The onset of the molestation ranged from <4 years to 12 years, with 10 of

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the women being younger than 7 years at the time of molestation. Fourteen of the 16 women were molested only by men. One was molested by multiple intrafamilial males and one extrafamilial female. Another was molested by her father and by one extrafamilial female.

Simari and Baskin (1982) determined the extent of incestuous experiences in 54 gay men and 29 gay women. Twenty-five (46%) of the gay men reported experiencing incest, all of the homosexual sort, between 9 and 16 years of age with a mean age of 13 years. Twenty-four (96%) of the 25 men who experienced incest viewed themselves as homosexual before the incest. Eleven (38%) of the 29 gay women reported experiencing incest, heterosexual in seven (64%) of the cases, with two (29%) of these women regarding themselves as homosexual before the incest. Four (36%) of the 11 women experienced homosexual incest, with 3 (25%) of them regarding themselves as homosexual before the incest.

In research by Doll *et al.* (1992), 1,001 homosexual and bisexual men in sexually transmitted disease clinics were interviewed. Thirty-seven percent of these men reported having been forced or encouraged to have sex by an older and more powerful person, before the age of 19. The median age of these events was 10 years. The median age difference between the younger and older participants in the sex acts was 11 years. In 94% of the cases, the older person was male, in 5% female, and 1% involved both male and female perpetrators.

Cameron and Cameron (1995) surveyed 5,182 adults and found a history of incest in 22.3% of homosexual men, 1.2% of heterosexual men, 3.4% of homosexual women, and 0.3% of heterosexual women. The authors did not provide any information about the age of molestation. Cameron and Cameron pointed out that their findings are consistent with the findings of Bell *et al.* (1981) who reported a history of sibling incest in 15.6% of homosexual men, 9.0% of heterosexual men, 10.4% of homosexual women, and 5.6% of heterosexual women. Bell *et al.* did not specify the gender of the other partner in the incestuous acts.

Gundlach (1977) surveyed 225 lesbian and 233 heterosexual women, and found that 30% of the heterosexual women and 21% of the lesbians had been raped. Of the 30 women who had been raped before the age of 14, 26 had an adult homosexual orientation while 9 had an adult heterosexual orientation.

On the basis of the previous literature, it would appear that gay men and lesbian women have a greater history of molestation than do heterosexual persons. The perspective from the previous studies, however, is unclear. Not all of the cited studies employed a heterosexual control group, specified the criteria of molestation, specified the gender of the perpetrator, specified the present sexual preference, and that before the molestation, and employed both gay men and lesbian participants. Furthermore, some of the studies focused only upon rape or incest.

This study intended to extend the perspective by the inclusion of gay men and lesbian women and heterosexual control men and women, by using specific

criteria of molestation, by requesting the gender and age of the perpetrator, and by the determination of both current sexual preference and that before the molestation.

METHOD

Although questionnaires were obtained from 981 persons, the data was not used for 39 of them because they did not include gender or sexual orientation or both. The persons regarded as participants consisted of 942 nonclinical population persons, 675 of whom were graduate or undergraduate students currently enrolled and attending classes in colleges and universities in central California. Instructor permission and applicable campus regulations regarding human subjects requirements were sought prior to distributing questionnaires in the classroom. The vast majority of the students who received questionnaires completed and returned them, but the exact percentage is not known. The age range of the college students was 18–68 with a mean of 27.65 and a standard deviation of 10.44. The total years of education of the college students ranged from 12 to 15 with a mean of 14.77 and a standard deviation of 3.59.

Two hundred sixty-seven additional participants with fully completed questionnaires were obtained at the homosexual pride events in the central California area. The principal investigator rented a booth at the event and asked individuals who approached the booth to participate in the research. All of the participants who accepted questionnaires completed and returned them. The age range of the homosexual pride attendees was 18–67 with a mean of 36.60 and a standard deviation of 10.43. The total years of education of the homosexual pride attendees was 8–26 with a mean of 15 and a standard deviation of 2.65. The total years of education with all participants combined was 8–26 with a mean of 14.84 and a standard deviation of 3.34. The 329 males had an age range of 18–68 with a mean of 29.85 and a standard deviation of 11.06. The total years of education for the males was 8–24 with a mean of 14.78 and a standard deviation of 11.33. The 613 females had an age range from 18 to 62 years with a mean of 30.36 and a standard deviation of 11.33. The total years of education for the females was 11–25 with a mean of 14.84 and a standard deviation of 3.33.

The questionnaire contained in Table I was administered to all participants. The principal investigator contacted instructors at several California educational institutions to obtain permission to disperse questionnaires to students in their classes. There were no identifying marks on any of the questionnaires and the participants were informed of their rights to deny participation and be given confidentiality. Graduate students attending the California School of Professional Psychology, Fresno, were contacted through their individual student mailboxes and were given the same questionnaires and confidentiality.

Table III. Number and Percentage of Molested Participants as a Function of Sexual Preference

Participants	Molested			Molested by men			Molested by women		
	<i>N</i>	%	²	<i>N</i>	%	²	<i>N</i>	%	²
Male participants***									
All heterosexual men (<i>N</i> = 205)	50	24.4		12	6.7		41	20.0	
All homosexual men (<i>N</i> = 124)	61	49.2	20.17***	56	45.5	61.19***	20	16.4	.44
Fair homosexual men (<i>N</i> = 121)	61	50.4		56	46.7		20	16.8	
Female participants***									
All heterosexual women (<i>N</i> = 460)	113	24.6		111	24.3		5	1.1	
All homosexual women (<i>N</i> = 153)	65	42.5	17.03***	44	29.3	1.23	33	21.6	75.47***
Fair homosexual women (<i>N</i> = 146)	63	43.2		42	29.4		33	22.6	

Note. All chi squares calculated for percentage differences between all heterosexual participants and all homosexual participants of the same sex.
****p* < .001.

RESULTS

Table III displays the number and percentage of total male, total female, and categories of male and female participants who had been molested, molested by men, and molested by women. It is also to be noted that the percentages for gay pride men are similar to the percentages for all homosexual men because 97.6% of the homosexual men were gay pride participants. All six chi squares compare all homosexual subjects to all heterosexual subjects of the same sex. It is apparent that the homosexual men and women were more likely to have been molested and more likely to have been molested by a person of the same sex than did their heterosexual counterparts.

DISCUSSION

One of the more salient findings of this study is that 46% of homosexual men and 22% of homosexual women reported having been molested by a person of the same gender. This contrasts to only 7% of heterosexual men and 1% of heterosexual women reporting having been molested by a person of the same gender. Although the differences between the molestation rate of homosexual and heterosexual participants have to be viewed with great caution because of the differences in the sampling methods for each population, the absolute magnitude of same-sex molestation in homosexual subjects is worthy of attention. The rates of same-sex molestation in homosexual subjects were 45% for homosexual men

and 22% for homosexual women. If the college students are excluded, the rates are 46 and 23%, respectively.

Perhaps the most salient finding is that 22% of the homosexual women reported having been molested by a woman. It has been well recognized for decades that it is very common for men to molest girls and boys. Molestations by women, however, had been considered rare. Petrovich and Templer (1984) serendipitously found that 59% of male penitentiary inmates had been molested by a woman. Condy *et al.* (1987) extended the findings of Petrovich and Templer, using the same criterion of molestation that they used and that was used in this study, which requires the victims being under age 16 and the perpetrator being at least 16 years of age and at least 5 years older than the victim. Condy *et al.* found that 46% of male inmate rapists, 37% of child molesters, 47% of non-sex-offender inmates, and 16% of male college students had been molested by one or more women. We now know that women molesting girls is probably not rare. This study appears to be the first survey-based research that reported girls having been molested by other females. There have been, however, other studies that report case study or anecdotal female molestation of girls (Dunbar, 1995; Hislop, 1995; Hunter *et al.*, 1993).

In this study, we do not know the adult sexual preference of the women who molested. Most men who molest boys and most men who molest girls are heterosexual in their adult sexual preference (Groth and Birnbaum, 1978). In fact, we do not know to what extent these women are attracted to adults of either gender and to what extent their orientation is pedophilic. Nevertheless, since the female victims in the current study had a mean age of 13 at the time of abuse, and 68% of them were at least 12 years of age, we are dealing more with adolescent molestation than with child molestation. In one study of men who molest, the mean age of the children was 10.7 years (Jaffe *et al.*, 1975). Petrovich and Templer (1984) found a mean age of 10.81 in boys who were molested by women. The present study reported a mean age of 11 for boys molested by men, and a mean age of 13 for girls molested by women. It would appear that men molest children at a younger age than women do. This suggests that molestation by women may have less of a pedophilic component than in men. We know that some male pedophiles have always had a strong pedophile preference and very weak sexual attraction to adults. Groth and Birnbaum (1978) called them "fixated" pedophiles in contrast to the "regressed" pedophiles whose fundamental preference, at least in the past, was predominantly for adults. Whether or not there are women whose primary or sole sexual preference is for children remains to be determined. More research is needed on both the gender and the age aspects of sexual preference of women who molest. Sixty-eight percent of the present homosexual male participants and 38% of the present homosexual female participants (68 and 36%, respectively, if including just the homosexual fair participants) did not identify as homosexual until after the molestation. This suggests that if molestation resulted in homosexuality,

this phenomenon occurs in a greater proportion of male homosexuals. It may not, however, be a casual factor in either gender. Perhaps children or adolescents with a higher potential for homosexual behavior are more likely to enter a situation that leads to same-sex molestation. It must also be borne in mind that the present homosexual participants may not be representative of homosexual persons. The overwhelming preponderance of homosexual participants was in the gay pride group. There were only three homosexual men and seven homosexual women in the college group. On the other hand, the gay pride participants certainly seem to be a nonclinical group. It is most unlikely that all the present findings apply only to homosexual persons who go to homosexual fairs and volunteer to participate in questionnaire research.

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