

Oedipus: The Deep Rooted Reality to Homosexuality

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The present study investigates certain psychodynamic processes of homosexuals and compares it with that of heterosexuals. The objectives of the study were to: (a) explore the oedipal relations and conflicts of male and female homosexual subjects, (b) explore and compare the oedipal relations and conflicts of male and female heterosexual subjects, (c) compare the oedipal relations and conflicts amongst the homosexual and heterosexual subjects. Forty-four individuals participated in the present study of which 22 were homosexuals (13 males and 9 females) and 22 were heterosexuals (13 males and 9 females). The Klein Sexual Orientation Grid was used to assess their sexual orientation. Cohort matching technique was used to match the homosexuals with their heterosexual counterparts. 10 cards of Thematic Apperception Test were administered to elicit the unconscious oedipal desires and conflicts of both heterosexuality and homosexuality. Common themes were elicited by three raters who are experts in the fields of psychology and psychoanalysis. Both the homosexual and the heterosexual groups have oedipal desires towards the opposite sex parent, with over oedipal attachment and consequent inversional bond resulting from relatively stronger castration anxiety in the homosexual subjects. The unconscious dynamics of the gender role in male homosexuals was found to be feminine with an aspiration to be masculine at times, while female homosexuals were found to be more masculine. The oedipal stage and its consequent dynamic processes are crucial phenomena which contribute enormously upon sexual orientation.

Homosexual orientation is a term used to refer to an enduring pattern of or disposition to experience sexual, affectional or romantic attractions primarily to "people of the same sex"; it also refers to an individual's sense of personal and social identity based on those attractions, behaviours expressing them, and membership in a community of others who share them. The word homosexual is a Greek and Latin hybrid with "homos", deriving from the Greek word for "same", thus connoting affections between members of the same sex, including lesbian.

In "The Psychogenesis of a case of Homosexuality in a Woman" (1920), Freud explains that the girl having homosexuality was experiencing the revival of the infantile Oedipus complex at puberty as she was disappointed, on not being able to bear a male child to her father, which her hated rival mother could do. Thus, she turned away from her father and from men altogether, changed into a man and took her mother in place of her father as her love-object. There arose the search for a mother-substitute to whom she could become passionately attached. If the girl becomes homosexual and left men to her mother ("retired in favour of the mother"), she removed something, which had hitherto been partly responsible for her mother's disfavour. Freud also stated, "A man with predominantly male characteristics and also masculine in his love-life may still be inverted in respect to his 'object', loving only men instead of women. A man in whose character feminine attributes evidently predominate, who may indeed behave in love like a woman, might be expected, from their feminine attitude, to choose a man for his love-object, but he may nevertheless be heterosexual and show no more inversion in respect

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of his object than an average normal man. The same is true of women here also mental sexual character and object-choice do not necessarily coincide" (Freud 1920).

In man, identification with mother, resulting out of strong attachment (Winterstein, 1956) and inclination towards a narcissistic object choice (Bergler, 1944; Siegel, 1988; Bergerat, 2002) coincides with the high value set upon the male organ and the inability to tolerate its absence in a love object (Freud, 1920; Berliner, 1944; Hart, 1956, 1958; Jaffe, 1983). Colette Chiland (1994) also states that homosexuals in general suffer from a deficit in their capacity for a relationship with the same-sex parent. Ken Corbett (1993) goes against this view of homosexual's feminine identification and argues that male homosexuality is a differently structured masculinity and not simulated femininity. Castration fear (Lewinsky, 1952; Winterstein, 1956; Dobson, 1999) at the hands of an angry father-rival leads to the renunciation of women, meaning that all rivalry with him (or with all men who may take his place) is avoided (Freud, 1920). The parental constellation most likely to produce a heterosexual with severe homosexual fixations or a homosexual person are a detached, hostile father and a close-binding, overly intimate, seductive mother who dominated and minimized her husband (Dobson, 1999; Dracoulides, 1954). Hart (1956, 1958) found that maternal narcissism and penis envy in some women intensifies the male Oedipus complex. Women with these traits overvalue their sons (who represent the mother's penis) and correspondingly undervalue their husbands. The son, unable to identify himself with an adequately esteemed father, fails to achieve satisfactory masculinity for himself. Wulff (1941) rather considers fixation on father figure and not castration fear, to be the dynamics behind male homosexuality. Fisher and Greenberg (1996) negated Freud's view of a distant father and a close attachment to mother as the basic dynamic of homosexuality. They found data, which reinforced the concept of the negative father but failed to support the idea of the overly close, seductive mother. They also suggest that there is a correlation between negative fathering and adult homosexuality but not the oedipal drama surrounding mother.

Early childhood jealousy against rivals like elder brothers led to extreme hostile aggressive attitude against brothers or sisters, which might culminate actual death wish but could not survive further development. Thus, these feelings are repressed and transformed, so that the rivals became the first homosexual love-objects (Freud, 1920). Kenneth Lewes (1998) argues against the negative and positive oedipal mechanisms. He states of the plicate Oedipus complex, in which the father serves simultaneously as both the object and the prohibitor of erotic excitement in the oedipal-age boy. According to Saul and Aaron T. Beck (1961), homosexuality in the male serves as a pathway of gratification or discharge of diverse infantile needs, and is a defense against certain drives or affects that are potentially disruptive to the ego.

Bergler (1944) found that selection of a love object in female homosexuals was based on introjective identification with mother and narcissistic projection of herself into the object. In men's case it is too strong admiration and attachment to father. Terzaghi sees female homosexuality to be richly overdetermined with preoedipal and oedipal factors contributing to its development, which made it impossible for her to successfully resolve the Oedipus complex. According to Bergler (1943), homosexuality in women is determined by a preoedipal conflict. It represents the attempt to deny the maternal rejection and simultaneously allays guilt and anxiety by choosing mother substitutes as love objects. Bergler (1943) contends

that actual traumatic experiences producing such hatred cannot in and of themselves lead to homosexuality; there must also be a biologic substratum of the 'oral instinctual drive and a personality of the narcissistic-libidinous type'.

Keeping this background in view the present study attempts: (a) to probe into the oedipal relations and conflicts of both the male homosexual and the female homosexual groups and compare the same, (b) to probe into the oedipal relations and conflicts of both the male heterosexuals and female heterosexuals and compare the same, and (c) to compare the oedipal relations and conflicts amongst the homosexual and heterosexual groups.

Materials and Method:

Forty four individuals (22 Homosexuals : (13 Male and 9 Female) and 22 heterosexuals: (13 males and 9 females) were taken for the study. All were above 18 years with Mean age 23.50yrs. The Klein Sexual Orientation Grid was used to assess their sexual orientation. Cohort matching technique was used to match the homosexuals with their heterosexual counterparts. 10 cards of Thematic Apperception Test were administered to elicit the unconscious oedipal desires and conflicts of both heterosexuality and homosexuality. Common themes were elicited by three raters who are experts in the fields of psychology and psychoanalysis.

Sample:

The sample consisted 2 groups (22 Homosexuals : (13 Male and 9 Female) and 22 heterosexuals: (13 males and 9 females) with minimum age above 18 years, education above Secondary level and whose both parents were surviving after the subject turned 10 yrs of age. Subjects with history of Bisexual, organics and psychological disorder were excluded from the study.

- 1. Homosexuals:** People having an erotic desire or sexual preference for members of the same biological sex have been selected in the sample of homosexuals. It is intended to refer to sexual ideation or activity involving members of the same biological sex. This selection was based according to the ratings provided in the Klein's Sexual Orientation Grid – whoever scored 6 or 7 in all of the 6 variable components (except for that of social preference*) were included in this group.
- 2. Heterosexuals:** People who have an erotic desire or a sexual preference for members of the opposite biological sex been selected in the sample of heterosexuals. It is intended to refer to sexual ideation or activity involving members of the opposite biological sex. This selection was based according to the ratings provided in the Klein's Sexual Orientation Grid – whoever scored 1 or 2 in all of the 6 variable components (except for that of social preference*) were included in this group.(The words male and female are used in this research report to indicate biological sex of the person and not gender).The two groups were matched on the basis of sex, age and educational level.

Tools Used:

- Information schedule, prepared by the researcher, to acquire personal background information.

- Fritz Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG), by F. Klein (1948) to assess sexual orientation of the subjects.
- Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), by L. Bellack(1975), to probe into the dynamics of oedipal relations.

Cards: (1, 6BM, 7BM, 8BM, 9BM, 13MF for male) and (1,6GF, 7GF, 9GF, 13MF,18GF for Females).

Procedure:

The data for the present study were collected from two institutions based in Kolkata – Swikriti and Sappho for Equality, for the homosexual sample. The subjects of the heterosexual group were matched following the cohort matching technique according to their age, sex and educational qualification with the homosexual sample. All the subjects, of both the groups, came from urban and semi-urban residential areas.

Those subjects were included as homosexuals, who scored either 6 or 7 in all the variable components of the KSOG (except the variable of social preference, as cultural influences mostly guided the subjects to socialize with members of both biological sexes) and those with scores ranging between 1 and 2 were selected as heterosexuals.

Personal information was extracted by administering an information schedule. Subsequent to this, the TAT was administered to the subjects with the relevant cards for males and females separately. The obtained data were then qualitatively analyzed and discussed.

Treatment of the Data:

Three raters interpreted the data obtained from the administration of the TAT cards. The raters were experts in the fields of psychology and psychoanalysis. The common themes that were elicited through inter rater agreement were taken for interpretation in the total context of the study.

Results and Discussion:

Research shows that dynamic development during the pre-oedipal and oedipal phases shapes a child's personality structure, sexual orientation being an important part of it. The following results focus mainly on the contribution of the oedipal phase of a person's development guiding his/her sexuality.

The results obtained from the TAT protocols show the relation between the perception of mother figure, father figure and the oedipal relations amongst both the male and female homosexuals. All the 22 homosexuals participating in the present research had been found to show an oedipal conflict resulting in an inversional orientation. The results point to a very inherent root of positive oedipus in the childhood, which worked behind as the dynamic force. In case of the male homosexuals, there was possibly a strong oedipal desire to possess mother sexually, and also a substantive wish to replace father from mother's life or remove him totally, as he was perceived to be the rival.

Table 1
Showing Analysis of TAT Protocols for Male Homosexual Subjects

Dimensions	Male Homosexuals
Mother Figure	There is restriction of oedipal fulfillment by mother.
Father Figure	They desire father's absence and show ambivalence towards him (presence is threatening). They apprehend authority intervention. Dominant male power is the constant source of anxiety for them.
Oedipal Relation	Open oedipal desire and its pain leads to drawing of attraction to father figure leading to inverted oedipus (origin-oedipus). Castration anxiety is coming from dominance.
Heterosexual Interest	Heterosexual inclination is present in them. There is quite a lot of interest in heterosexuality. Feels resistance because of fear of punishment.
Homosexual Relation	They feel extremely conflicted in homosexual orientation. Attempted inversional processes arouse more anxiety rather than pleasure in them where the system ultimately succumbs to punishing superego. Apprehension, confusion and ambivalence of inversional domination are felt.
Masculinity/Femininity	There is a presence of masculine inadequacy and a doubt regarding masculine virility. They portray feminine qualities and lack in masculinity.
Adequacy/Identity	There is a sense of inadequacy. Intense need to have distinctive identity is also evident.

Table 2
Showing Analysis of TAT Protocols for Male Heterosexual Subjects

Dimensions	Male Heterosexuals
Mother Figure	There is a presence of attraction and affinity towards the mother.
Father Figure	There is a proper source of masculine identification. Dependence on support of father figure to prove self sufficiency is evident. Apprehension of and apathy towards authority intervention is shown at times.
Oedipal Relation	Strong oedipal conflict is causing the fear of passivity. (Castration fear).
Heterosexual Relation	Opposite sex member is directly appreciated, but sexual resistance is present in many subjects.
Self / Adequacy	Lack of self confidence, esteem and sense of adequacy is prominent. There is a presence of personal insufficiency and a lack of confidence.

There was the presence of a firm fear of being castrated by the father, which possibly is the reason for the consequent inversion in the individual. The open oedipal desire had with it the natural provocation to get more and more attached to the mother figure, but perhaps the guilt of bearing or even openly expressing such incestuous desire prevailed over the infantile wish and so there occurred a conflicting desire to distance themselves from the object of incest, i.e. the mother or to defensibly incline towards the father figure and develop a superficial inverted oedipal relation which later develops into homosexual trends and orientation. In certain cases, however, a non-submissive attitude towards their father figure had been observed and even

a reactive aggressive attitude. Perhaps they wanted to possess their mother and therefore a claim on their mother's virginity by any other men (specifically father) is not tolerated. This could possibly be another reason to show distance and reclusive or reactive aggression towards the father to protect the oedipal mother and enjoy its direct satisfaction. Apart from fixation on mother, there occurred identification with mother in the men, which is the outcome of the strong attachment, and in a certain manner, this helps the son to be loyal to his first love object, i.e. the mother. Thus in case of the present sample, the homosexual orientation is perhaps itself an outcome of strong mother figure identification which develops from the oedipal desire towards her (Jonas, 1944; Winterstein, 1956). It is unconsciously a wish to remain faithful to mother in a more socially acceptable way. Thus a strong fixation in being identified with the mother gives rise to the sexual interest in father from the mother's point of interest. In heterosexual males if the father loves enough then the reciprocation between them develops and the child is able to identify with him and looks upon the mother from father's viewpoint, i.e. as his wife. But in case of the homosexuals, they are fixated at the stage of mother identification and therefore develop to be a homosexual. G.S. Bose (1956) contended that the male child turns homosexual when the libido is fixated at the action identity phase of the mother-father relationship where the child places itself in the position of the mother (identity of the ego) and finds pleasure in playing the mother's role and also gets interested in whatever interests the mother, including the father. Thus if a male child gets fixated at this phase the sexual interest remains as it was upon the father and his oedipus conflict does not get resolved and hence develops into a homosexual individual.

In the present gay group, there had been a recurrent feature of strong castration fear amongst almost all of the subjects, along with which there was the presence of domination felt from an authority figure. The homosexual individual actually fears being punished by the father in the form of castration for this unimaginable sexual desire, and thus renounces from being sexually involved with any women at all so that the rivalry with the father or any such man who could take his place is avoided (Freud, 1920; Lewinsky, 1952). Castration anxiety is a common phenomenon even in the male heterosexuals as is evident from the present sample of male heterosexual individuals, who showed castration fear developing from the guilt of oedipal inclinations. The difference between the two groups lie in the fact that in case of the heterosexual individual the castration fear helps him to develop his superego which then guides him to identify with his father and turn his sexual wishes towards the mother into love and affection (Freud, 1900), whereas in case of the homosexual individuals the castration fear is so strong that they totally renounce from having sexual attraction or feelings towards the opposite sex and incline towards men. It therefore seems that castration anxiety is much stronger in case of the present homosexual population because of the perception of a punitive father. It might then as well be concluded that homosexual males lose the oedipal battle with their father, of possessing their mother and thus deviates towards inversion.

Based on the information collected about their background and personal life, in the present sample, it was observed that except for 3 subjects the rest of the male homosexuals mostly had elder brothers and few had elder sisters. The sibling jealousy perhaps could be so intense that it gave rise to extreme hostility against them which was actually repressed and transformed so that they became their first love objects (Freud, 1922). If the heterosexual male group is compared in this case it is found that except for 5 subjects the rest were either only child or had younger siblings in their family.

Table 1 shows that there was an inherent interest in heterosexual relationship in mostly all of the male homosexuals. But perhaps because of a fear of castration they repressed this need for heterosexual relation or even reacted negatively towards it. It might be for this fear they totally renounce heterosexual relations leaving women for the father (Freud, 1920). The fact of having an unconscious heterosexual tendency is also evident from the expression of apprehension, doubt and conflict felt in the homosexual life in the present sample. They seem to be in conflict in the inversional context and cannot trust the inversional bond because of this apprehension. Even though some might feel comfortable in male bondage, they apprehend being exploited and dominated by the partner. Thus guided by the infantile fear of castration, most of them play submissive and subjugative passive role in their relation. The Neo Freudian standpoint, according to Bieber et al (1963), is that homosexuality is a pathologic, biosocial, psychosexual adaptation consequent to pervasive fears surrounding the heterosexual impulses. While compared to the heterosexual male group, it can be seen that they show open attraction and interest towards the opposite sex people. This heterosexual inclination, in spite of going through a phase of castration anxiety, might be explained by the fact that in them castration fear is quite low in strength and they could resolve their Oedipus conflict by turning their sexual interest upon mother to affection and substituting her with a contemporary female on reaching the genital stage.

Table 3
Showing Analysis of TAT Protocols for Female Homosexual Subjects

Dimensions	Female Homosexuals
Mother Figure	Mother is perceived extremely negative, non-understanding, highly dominating punishing and critical about their deficiencies and differentiating. They show partial respect towards mother's decision hence compromises with her and so cannot identify.
Father Figure	Perception of father figure is abusive, not trustworthy, no support, driving towards immorality. There is also a need to be close with father. There is a desire to possess a penis. There is a feeling of over interference and domination from the desired oedipal figure.
Oedipal Relation	Oedipal impulse is evident. Oedipal orientation and inclination towards father is also present.
Heterosexual Interest	Root lies in heterosexuality. Seclusion is preferred to avoid tensions of heterosexual life. Intense ambivalence is present towards heterosexuality. Doubt and instability is associated with heterosexual support.
Homosexual Relation	Being well understood, reciprocated and respected in their own form of identity. Feels supported in life and attracted towards such partners. They seek support from homosexual partner.
Masculinity/ Femininity	Female roles are well appreciated and seen in positive frames. Prominent negativity is associated with male temperaments and attitudes. Non-acceptance of femininity in self is evident.
Adequacy/Identity	There is no clear identification with any parent due to negligence which leads to injured self.

Most of the homosexual males in the present sample showed less of masculinity and expressed doubts about their masculine virility. There was a tendency to aspire for masculinity and self-identity as they suffered from identity crisis, which seems to be related to their doubt regarding their gender role. Due to the lack of masculine identity most of them were effeminate in their attitude. The conflict between their biological sex, sexual orientation and the stereotypical gender roles, create confusion and inadequacy with a resultant sense of diffidence. However, the underlying unconscious process working behind might be that they have a strong identification with the mother figure, which turns them into the feminine self. Bose (1929) noted that there's a fixation in the feminine attitude towards the father in which the male child develops feminine traits and passive homosexuality. According to Bakwin (1968) there is a high risk of homosexuality in children with deviant gender-role behavior, that is, effeminate or "sissy boys" and "tomboyish girls". A significant number of homosexual men also have been found to have histories of cross-gender behavior during childhood (Raphling, 1989).

Table 4

Table Showing Analysis of TAT Protocols for Female Heterosexual Subjects

Dimensions	Female Heterosexuals
Mother Figure	There is a feeling of lose of interpersonal bond with parents; particularly the negativities are regarding the mother. Mother domination is felt.
Father Figure	Lack of trust upon father figure is prominent. Separation anxiety is present.
Oedipal Relation	Oedipal leanings are evident giving rise to guilt, conflict, confusion and sense of rejection regarding incestuous involvement.
Heterosexual Relation	A generalized apprehension is there regarding heterosexual advances in life.
Self / Adequacy	There is a lack of self confidence and presence of low self image.

The analysis of the TAT protocols show that in case of the female homosexuals (Table 3) they portray a negative attitude towards their mother, perceiving them to be dictating, dominating, non-understanding, punishing and highly critical. They showed less respect, and had a non-compromising and non-submissive attitude towards the mother figure. Though not much is evident about the perception of the father figure but there was presence of strong oedipal attraction towards the father figure and complexities of a triangular relation is clearly present. The findings of an over oedipal attraction to the father on the part of the female leading to homosexuality is similar to the findings of dynamics of male homosexuality. Thus, inversion is a defensive way to be distant from the oedipal object choice because of interference and domination of the mother felt in a triangular relationship. Homosexuality thus gives riddance from incest guilt of the girl child. The inversional process puts up a blockade in front of