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Sex

Extract from «The Observer», Sunday, November 8, 1953

A widespread discussion of topics connected with sex is going on, in the Press and elsewhere. It ranges over the divorce rate, the Kinsey reports, sex crimes, pornography, and homosexuality. There is a tendency not only to mix these topics up, sometimes, to present them all as symptoms of increasing moral laxity. For example, the Kinsey reports—the second of which is reviewed on another page—have been treated in some quarters as offering material for «spicy» extracts, and in others as though they were themselves a form of pornography, cloaked in academic respectability.

The Kinsey reports are open to plenty of criticism, both as to method and as to findings, but their justified purpose is to bring to light, by objective inquiry, a great deal of useful information which in the past has never been generally available. Although sex instruction is supposed to be widely given nowadays, most doctors encounter young people and married couples who are unhappy and anxious through not knowing enough—perhaps not even knowing what is normal in sex life and what is not.

Certainly, mere information about sex, gathered from books or questionnaires, has a strictly limited value, for a sexual relationship is also a human relationship, and the full human experience that should go with it cannot be gained by merely technical knowledge. But it is none the less desirable, in our view, that these matters should be studied and publicly discussed.

In all societies, primitive or civilised, sexual behaviour is necessarily the subject of social convention. What we lack is conventions, governing what may be done and said, that are socially accepted and make sense. Our time being characterised by scientific thought, and by means of mass communication through Press and radio, the attempt to study this subject scientifically, which the Kinsey reports represent, and to make the findings generally known is, in itself, perfectly sound, and a step in the right direction.

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This does not mean that any sort of publicity in the field of sex is justified. On the contrary, for newspapers to feature sex crimes, particularly offences against young persons and children, does great harm. This, in the worst instances, is vicious pornography, not uncommonly disguised by being accompanied, elsewhere in the same paper, by attacks on the scientific study of sex and the pretended taking of a high moral line on sexual licence (or on stag-hunting or politics). In fact, the effect of publicising these offences is to encourage them, for it is well known that persons with an inclination to a particular form of crime are apt to imitate what they read about.

Equally unnecessary and harmful is the publicity given to cases of homo-

sexuality. We believe that this question, in particular, calls for a scientific, rather than for a sensational or a merely moralistic, approach. It provides the best example of the need for more scientific thinking in our public life, and for less irresponsibility in our journalistic practices and conventions.

Homosexuality

By a consultant in psychological medicine

Extract from «The Observer», Sunday, November 15, 1953

There is a strong human tendency to approach major sexual problems with violent emotional prejudice and a superstitious intolerance of anything which savours of objectivity; and nowhere is this more apparent than in the case of homosexuality. Recently considerable public attention has been focused on this problem, and some remarkable conjectures as to the frequency and implications of male homosexual practices have been made. It is reasonable to inquire what scientific evidence is available to guide further deliberations in this field.

The police figures in this country are of little help, since they include offences punishable under various Acts, some of which relate not only to homosexual crimes but to such varied activities as bestiality and living on the immoral earnings of a prostitute. Arguments based on such figures are inevitably misleading; they may well bear no relationship at all to the incidence of homosexual practices between consenting adult males who are discreet or fortunate enough to escape blackmail.

Random Samples

Some evidence can be drawn from privately conducted questionnaires, applied to random samples of the population along the lines of the Kinsey reports. Resulting estimates of the incidence of homosexuality in Western society as a whole have ranged from between two and ten per cent, of the adult population, where confirmed and consistent homosexual practices are concerned, to between fifty and sixty per cent, if any homosexual interest, no matter how transient or divorced from physical expression, is included.

There are reasonably substantial grounds for believing that a homosexual phase occurs as a temporary stage of sexual development in normal adolescence; moreover it may recur among normal adults when circumstances render it the only possible form of sexual expression, as, for example, in prison. But in only a very few of these cases will the tendency persist when heterosexual opportunities are again available.

More lasting homosexual dispositions and activities seem to spring from at least two possible sources. The first of these is a failure of emotional development to proceed beyond the homosexual stage of adolescence, usually associated with other aspects of emotional immaturity and arising from an abnormal or defective relationship with one or both