

Sexual Health in Women Who Have Sex with Women



Patricia Robertson, MD
Professor, Obstetrics and Gynecology
University of California, San Francisco

Jordan Rullo, PhD, LP
Assistant Professor
Mayo Clinic, Rochester, MN

Disclosures

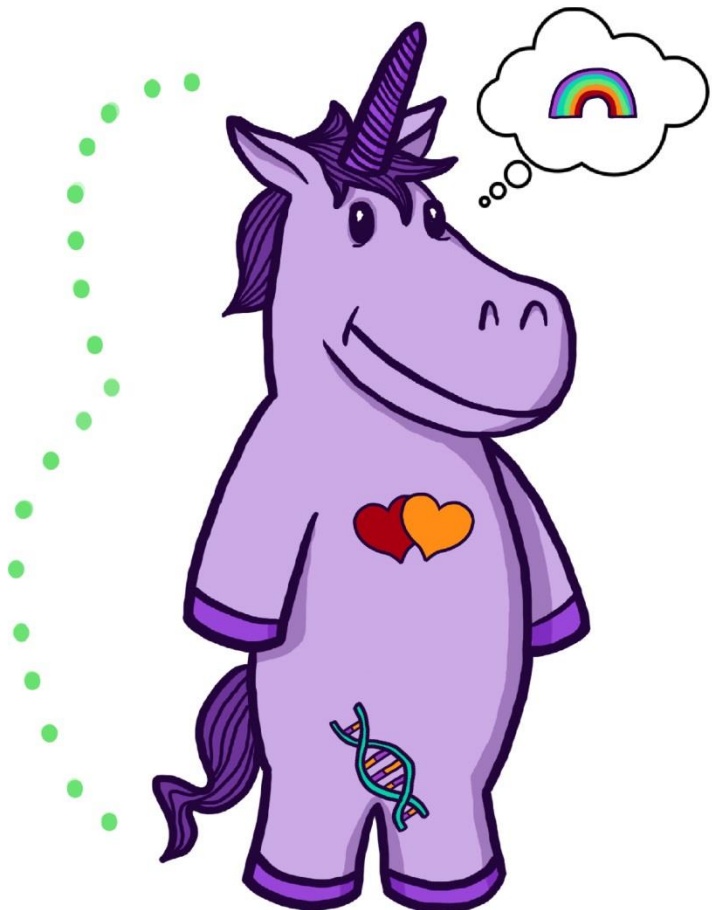
- None

Objectives

- To provide cross cultural care of women who have sex with women in the clinical setting as a health care provider
- To effectively care for common sexual health issues of women who have sex with women

The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by:
TSER
Trans Student Educational Resources



Gender Identity

-  Female/Woman/Girl
-  Male/Man/Boy
-  Other Gender(s)

Gender Expression

-  Feminine
-  Masculine
-  Other

Sex Assigned at Birth

-  Female
-  Male
-  Other/Intersex

Physically Attracted to

-  Women
-  Men
-  Other Gender(s)

Emotionally Attracted to

-  Women
-  Men
-  Other Gender(s)

To learn more, go to:
www.transstudent.org/gender

Design by Landyn Pan and Anna Moore

Prevalence of Women Who Have Sex with Women (WSW)



- 9.3% of women in the United States have reported ever having had a same-sex partner (14.9% in women aged 20 – 24 years)

NHANES

Prevalence of Self-Identified Lesbians

- 1 – 5%, depending on methodology

Self-Identified Lesbians and Sexual Partners



- 70% are sexually active with women only
- 30% are sexually active with women and men

Diversity among Lesbians



- Ethnic (21% of same-sex couples are interracial/interethnic, higher than heterosexual couples)
- Age
- Educational Level
- Income
- Location

Disclosure of Lesbian Orientation



- The majority of lesbians want their health care provider to know they are lesbian
- Lesbians unlikely to disclose sexual orientation spontaneously to the provider
- Inclusive forms important as well as diverse educational material

The Electronic Medical Record and the LGBT Community

- Disclosure recommended by the IOM and JCAH
- Fluidity of SO/GI
- Risk of disclosure on EHR for LGBT persons
 - job loss
 - discrimination by clinicians due to SO/GI

Preferred Name and Pronoun Question

- Preferred name:

- Preferred gender pronouns:
- ___ He/Him
- ___ She/Her
- ___ They/Them
- Other _____

Gender Identity Question Part 1

- Do you think of yourself as:
 - ___ Male
 - ___ Female
 - ___ Female to Male (FTM)/Transgender
Male/Trans Man
 - ___ Male to Female (MTF)/Transgender
Female/Trans Woman

Gender Identity Question Part 2

- Genderqueer, neither exclusively male nor female
- Additional gender category/(or Other), please specify: _____
- Something else

Sex Assigned at Birth Question

- What **sex were you assigned at birth** on your original birth certificate?

Female

Male

Decline to answer

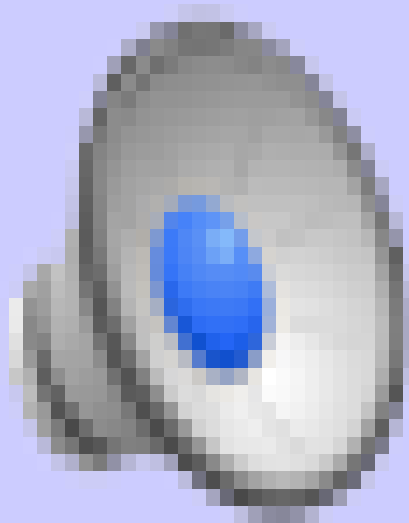
Sexual Identity Question

- Do you think of yourself as
 - Lesbian, gay or homosexual
 - Straight or heterosexual
 - Bisexual
 - Something else, please describe: _____
 - Don't know
 - Choose not to answer

Comprehensive Sexual History

- Are you sexually active currently with men, women, or both?
- What is the number of sexual partners you have had in the past year?
- What is their gender?
- Have you had a past history of STIs?
- Is there a need to prevent pregnancy?

Comprehensive Sexual History



Comprehensive Sexual History

- When you have sexual contact, do you have (check all that apply)

Oral-Genital contact

Genital-Anal contact

Genital-Genital contact

Oral-Anal contact

Sexual aids

Kinky sex

Other: _____

Comprehensive Sexual History

- Do you use protective barriers e.g. condoms in the following sexual contact situations: check all that apply
 - ___ Oral-Genital contact
 - ___ Genital-Anal contact
 - ___ Genital-Genital contact
 - ___ Oral-Anal contact
 - ___ Sexual stimulation device

Sex Stimulation Devices

- Used by about 50% of WSW
- Beware of toxic chemicals e.g. phthalates
- Cleanse well and dry
- Potential of HPV to linger on the device
- Do not use rectally, then vaginally
- Do not share
- Have a base or string on rectal devices

Comprehensive Sexual History

- Are you satisfied with your sexual function? If not, please continue
- How long have you been dissatisfied with your sexual function?

Comprehensive Sexual History

- The problem(s) with your sexual function is: (mark one or more)
 - ___1 Problem with little or no interest in sex
 - ___2 Problem with decreased genital sensitivity (feeling)
 - ___3 Problem with decreased vaginal lubrication (dryness)

Comprehensive Sexual History

- ___ 4. Problem reaching orgasm
- ___ 5. Problem with pain during sex
- ___ 6. Other: _____

Which problem is most bothersome?

Independent Variables Associated with Sexual Dysfunction in Lesbian Women

- Overactive bladder symptoms
- Nulligravity
- Low sexual frequency
- Having a non-female partner or no partner
- Subjective bother about sexual function

Use of Lubricant in Lesbian Couples

- 21.9% used lubricant in their most recent sexual activity as a couple
- Most common reason was to make sex more comfortable
- Overall, lubricant use enhanced their sexual experience

Lesbian Couple Relationships

- % of lesbians in a couple who have had sex in the past year: 89.3%
- % of lesbians who have had sex with someone else since in a couple: 8.2%
- % of lesbians who have had a meaningful love affair with someone else since in a couple: 4.0%

Gotta, 2011

Childhood Abuse of Lesbians

- Increased risk of sexual abuse

37% for lesbians vs. 19% for heterosexual female youth

Hughes, 2001

5.3 RR for bisexual women, 3.4 RR for lesbian women for
childhood sexual abuse vs. heterosexual women (14.9% overall rate)

Sweet, 2011

- Increased risk of psychological abuse
- Increased risk of physical abuse @ home:

33% of lesbians vs. 10.3% of heterosexual
women

Corliss, 2002

Sexual Assault of Female Adolescents

- Incidence of 15.5% in lesbians and 7.5% in female heterosexual youth

Balsam, 2005

Family Acceptance Project

Differences between LGB health outcomes with and without family support

- depression: 22.4% vs. 63.5%
- substance problems: 48.0% vs. 68.9%
- unprotected sex: 23.7% vs. 45.9%

Ryan, 2009

Frequent Factors in Lesbian IPV

- Intimidation, sexual abuse, physical abuse, isolation, minimizing, denying, blaming the abused, using economic abuse, using coercion and threats often about “outing” the victim to friends, family, employer. Allen, 1999

- Perpetrator often older, more powerful

Ristock, 2003

Depression in Lesbian Women

- Higher prevalence in lesbian women than heterosexual women
- Use of therapists rather than antidepressants compared to heterosexual women
- If using SSRIs, decreased sexual interest

Resources

For Patients:

Lavenderhealth.com

For Providers, and Staff Training:

www.lgbthealtheducationcenter.org

Summary

- Don't be assumptive about your patient's gender, sexual orientation, or sexual practices: ask!
- Integrate preventive medicine as you listen to the patient history, keeping in mind health disparities for lesbians and your ability to improve them
- Lesbian health is an emerging research field: be alert for more information