

Progesterone and bisexuality: Is there a link?

April 3 2017

Bisexuality is quite common among men and women whose mothers received additional doses of the sex hormone progesterone while pregnant. This is one of the findings of a study led by June Reinisch, Director Emerita of The Kinsey Institute in the US, published in Springer's journal *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. The study tracked the sexual development of 34 Danes whose mothers were treated with the hormone to prevent miscarriage.

According to the research team, progesterone appears to be an underappreciated factor influencing the normal development of variations in human sexuality and psychosexuality. The findings warrant further investigation given that little is known about the effects on offspring of natural variations in levels of maternal progesterone and that progesterone is widely used to treat pregnancy complications.

Men and [women](#) all naturally produce the sex [hormone](#) progesterone. It is involved in women's menstrual cycles, and helps to maintain pregnancies and development of the fetus. It plays a role in neural development and the production of other sex hormones as well as steroid hormones that help to regulate stress responses, inflammation, and metabolism in the body. Physicians often prescribe progesterone and its bio-versions to support the fertilization process, to prevent miscarriages or premature births, or to increase babies' birth weights.

The 34 participants in the study were drawn from the Copenhagen Perinatal Cohort, which comprises information collected from virtually all children born between 1959 and 1961 at the university hospital in

Copenhagen, Denmark. The 17 men and 17 women were selected because their mothers exclusively received the progesterone luteocyclin to prevent a miscarriage. These men and women were compared with a carefully selected control group who were not exposed prenatally to luteocyclin or any other hormone medication, but who otherwise matched the study participants based on 14 relevant physical, medical, and socioeconomic factors. The participants were all in their mid-20s when asked about their sexual orientation, self-identification, attraction to each sex, and sexual history using questionnaires and a structured interview with a psychologist.

It was found that men and women whose mothers were treated with progesterone were significantly less likely to describe themselves as heterosexual. One in every five (20.6 percent) of the progesterone-exposed participants labeled themselves as other than heterosexual. Compared to the untreated group, the chances were greater that by their mid-20s they had already engaged in some form of same-sex sexual behavior (in up to 24.2 percent of cases), and that they were attracted to the same (29.4 percent) or to both sexes (17.6 percent). Both exposed males and females also had higher scores related to attraction to men.

"Progesterone exposure was found to be related to increased non-heterosexual self-identification, attraction to the same or both sexes, and [same-sex sexual behavior](#)," says Reinisch. "The findings highlight the likelihood that prenatal exposure to progesterone may have a long-term influence on behavior related to sexuality in humans."

The research team believes further studies on the offspring of women medically treated with progesterone and other progestogens during their pregnancies as well as studies examining the effects of natural variation in prenatal [progesterone](#) levels are warranted to provide more insight into the role that this hormone plays in the development of human behavior.

More information: June M. Reinisch et al, Prenatal Exposure to Progesterone Affects Sexual Orientation in Humans, *Archives of Sexual Behavior* (2017). [DOI: 10.1007/s10508-016-0923-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-016-0923-z)

Provided by Springer

Citation: Progesterone and bisexuality: Is there a link? (2017, April 3) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-04-progesterone-bisexuality-link.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.