

CHILDHOOD PHOTOGRAPHS OF HOMOSEXUAL AND HETEROSEXUAL MEN¹

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Summary.—20 homosexual men and 20 heterosexual men, including a pair of discordant identical twins, contributed photographs of themselves at 6 mo. to 6 yr. of age for judging on personality. 18 traits were rated successfully. Factor analysis yielded two factors, Extroversion and Toughness. Data for only 19 homosexual and 11 heterosexual men were usable for the *t* tests; no significant differences were found, although trends for the homosexual group suggested less Extroversion and less Toughness. For the twins, photographs the mother identified as the homosexual twin were rated as showing less Extroversion and less Toughness. In conclusion, no obvious differences were found in the ratings of homosexuals' childhood photographs but slight differences were hinted at.

There is evidence that boys who become homosexuals are already different from other boys by their sixth birthday. Gay (homosexual) men recall poorer ball throwing skill at 3 to 5 yr. of age than other men do (Grellert, 1982). Obviously feminine boys, who usually become homosexuals, act feminine at as early as 2 yr. of age (Green, 1974). But this evidence has weaknesses. Adults' memories of their own behavior before age 6 could be inaccurate or biased (Ross, 1980). And it is not clear whether obviously feminine boys are typical of the childhood behavior of the majority of gay men.

Childhood photographs provide another way to test whether gay men's behavior was different before age 6. A wide variety of information has been obtained from body language and facial expressions in photographs (Archer, 1980). And, there is reason to believe that homosexuals might show differences in body language during childhood. Popular stereotypes hold that male homosexuals tend to have distinctive mannerisms such as limp wrists and a distinctive way of putting a hand on the hip. Magnus Hirschfeld (1920, p. 112) said that "the child photos of homosexual men and women are often characteristic because of their feminine or masculine impression" [my translation]. Gay men's memories of their childhoods (e.g., Bieber, *et al.*, 1962; Evans, 1969) have indicated that gay men were more feminine, more frail, less physically aggressive, and less social ("lonewolf"), differences which might show up in photographs. A study of feminine boys (Bates, Bentler, & Thompson, 1979) found more body constriction than in normal boys, although not more than in boys referred to the clinic for other problems. To

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see whether photographs would show any differences, childhood photographs of gay men and heterosexual men were judged on several traits.

STUDY 1: AN OPEN-ENDED SURVEY

Method

Subjects.—The study used 20 gay men (self-identified homosexuals) and 20 comparison men (presumed heterosexuals). They were selected for being American born, having at least 30 usable photographs at approximately age 6 mo. to the sixth birthday, and being roughly matched in age with men in the other group. Of the gay men 16 were volunteers from gay organizations in the Los Angeles area such as a runners club, a civil rights group, and a scientists and engineers group. Four gay men were obtained through flyers at a book store and at a community services center. Eight comparison men were obtained from newspaper advertisements offering \$40, 7 men were friends, and 5 were brothers of gay men. Included were a pair of identical twins, one gay and one heterosexual.

The two groups of men were similar in age. Gay men ranged from 23 to 61 yr. in age, with a mean of 45 yr.; comparison men ranged from 27 to 70 yr. in age, with a mean of 41 yr. The two groups were also similar in years of education (gay $M = 17$, comparison $M = 15$). They differed on "ever married" (gay men 20%, comparison men 90%). Both groups were white and predominantly Protestant. Comparison men obtained through newspaper advertisements were aware only of the traits to be used and that their photographs would provide a standard against which other adults' childhood photographs would be compared.

Nineteen gay men completed a childhood play activities checklist. The mean masculinity-femininity score for their play interests was 26. This was slightly less masculine than the score of 30 obtained from 198 gay men in a previous study (Grellert, Newcomb, & Bentler, 1982).

Photographs.—Thirty photographs were selected for each person, except 35 photographs were used for each of the twins. The mother had marked which twin was which. For 19 gay men and 11 comparison men and the twins, I or the subject screened out the unusable shots (blurred, face obscured, etc.). The photographs were numbered and then were selected using a random number table. I tried to get five photographs at each year of age. If there were fewer than five photographs in some years, additional ones were selected for adjacent years. For eight comparison men (mostly men from newspaper advertisements), the photographs were selected by the subject himself or by the subject's wife or mother. I copied the photographs of all the subjects, using a camera and close-up lens so that the child tended to fill the frame. Faces of any other people in the photographs were covered.

Prints (3.5 by 5 in.; 9 by 13 cm) were made and put in photograph albums, with gay men and comparison men in random order.

Procedure.—Each boy's photographs were viewed by 20 judges (5 homosexual men, 5 lesbians, and 5 men and 5 women from the general population), one judge at a time. The judges were asked to write down whatever traits came to mind for each child. Each judge completed an album (containing 12 to 14 boys) in about 20 min. Three albums and 60 judges were used. The homosexual judges were mostly from the same gay organizations as the gay subjects. (A few judges knew a few of the subjects but did not seem to recognize their photographs. There appeared to be no obvious resemblance between the photographs and the adult. This impression is supported by the results.) The general population judges were mostly staff or clients at a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center, acquaintances, people in laundromats, and college students. The homosexual judges were told that half of the boys became homosexuals but not told which ones. The other judges were told only that it was a study of boys' personalities.

Results² and Discussion

Neither the homosexual judges nor the general population judges saw any obvious differences in the gay men's childhood photographs. For all judges combined and all 40 boys combined, the 10 most mentioned traits were, with number of times mentioned: happy 163, shy 95, quiet 33, friendly 29, curious 29, bright 26, outgoing 25, playful 25, sad 23, active 23.

For all judges combined, but comparing only the 19 gay and 11 comparison nontwin men whose photographs were selected by random number, *t* tests on the five most mentioned traits showed no significant differences between the gay and comparison men's photographs.

The two groups of judges did respond differently. For all 40 boys combined, *t* tests on the five most mentioned traits showed that the homosexual judges, compared to the general population judges, mentioned "happy" less ($M = 2.0$ vs 3.5 , $SDs = 1.9$ and 1.9 ; $t_{38} = 3.1$, $p < .01$), "friendly" less ($M = 0.2$ vs 0.8 , $SDs = 0.5$ and 1.3 ; $t_{38} = 2.1$, $p < .05$), and "shy" more ($M = 2.0$ vs 1.2 , $SDs = 1.6$ and 1.2 ; $t_{38} = 2.1$, $p < .05$). Possibly the homosexual judges were aware of previous research (e.g., Bieber, *et al.*, 1962) or were projecting from their own childhood experiences.

Using all 40 boys, *t* tests on the five most mentioned traits showed no significant differences between the two groups of judges in discrimination between the gay and comparison photographs. However, the over-all trend was that the general population judges did better.

²Means, standard deviations, correlations, summaries of factor analyses are on file in Document NAPS-04715. Remit \$9.55 for photocopy or \$4.00 for fiche to Microfiche Publications, POB 3513, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10017.

STUDY 2: RATINGS ON SPECIFIC TRAITS

Method

The same photographs were used. The photographs were rated on traits that had been mentioned the most often in Study 1 or that had tended to show some differences between the gay and comparison men. Similar traits were combined, for example "insecure, unsure." A scale of 1 to 5 (*not at all* to *very*) was used, with half-steps allowed, giving effectively a nine-point scale. Each boy was rated by 10 men and 10 women from the general population. The judges were students and a few nonstudents at local universities and colleges, responding to advertisements offering \$5. They were told only that it was a study of boys' personalities. It took about 20 min. to rate 10 boys. Most judges also did another 10 boys. Fifty-two judges were used. Then another series of ratings was done, in which 41 more judges rated the photographs on 10 additional traits on which I thought gay men might show differences. For each trait, the effective reliability of 20 judges' ratings was estimated by analysis of variance (Rosenthal, 1982). The ratings were then factor analyzed by the principal components method with varimax rotation (Hintze, 1987). The effect sizes from the *t* tests have been expressed as product-moment correlations.

Results²

The effective reliabilities ranged from 0.62 for "obstinate" to 0.91 for "a ham." The correlation matrix for 18 traits having reliabilities of .70 or higher was factor analyzed. Three factors met the criterion of having an eigenvalue greater than 1.00. Their eigenvalues were 11, 3.6, and 1.2. The first two factors were quite distinct, but the third factor was not well defined and was possibly an artifact from having judged the 10 additional traits separately from the first 11. So a two-factor solution was used. Factor 1 involved engaging or socially desirable traits and was labeled Extroversion. Factor 2 was called Toughness (Table 1). Unweighted indexes were made for the factors, using items with loadings of .75 or more. Internal reliability (coefficient alpha) was .90 for the Extroversion index and .76 for the Toughness index.

Using only the 19 gay and 11 comparison nontwin men whose photographs were selected by random number, there were only nonsignificant trends for the gay men to be lower on Extroversion (gay $M = 41$, comparison $M = 44$; $SDs = 6.4$ and 7.4 ; $t_{28} = 1.0$, $p < .2$) and lower on Toughness (gay $M = 17$, comparison $M = 18$; $SDs = 2.6$ and 1.7 ; $t_{28} = 1.1$, $p < .2$). The correlations for Extroversion and Toughness with homosexual orientation were both low, $-.2$.

For the twins, photographs the mother identified as the gay twin showed less Extroversion (gay twin = 34, heterosexual twin = 44), and less

Toughness (gay twin = 15, heterosexual twin = 17). The differences in the judges' ratings of the two twins were reliable for Extroversion ($p < .001$), less so for Toughness ($p < .05$).

For both the 20 gay men and the 20 comparison men, the individual trait with the highest mean rating was "masculine"; the lowest was "feminine."

TABLE 1
FACTOR ANALYSIS OF RATINGS ON 18 TRAITS

Rotated Loadings		Trait
Factor 1	Factor 2	
.94	.16	<i>content, at ease</i>
.94	.18	<i>happy</i>
.94	.25	<i>outgoing, friendly, extroverted</i>
.93	.22	<i>confident</i>
-.92	-.26	<i>withdrawn</i>
-.90	-.30	<i>insecure, unsure</i>
-.90	-.29	<i>shy</i>
.83	.03	<i>curious, inquisitive, eager to learn</i>
.82	.38	<i>playful, mischievous</i>
-.81	-.42	<i>quiet</i>
-.79	.30	<i>resentful, annoyed</i>
.76	.36	<i>"a ham," clowns or acts for camera</i>
.75	-.14	<i>wholesome</i>
.25	.92	<i>tough, strong</i>
-.14	-.90	<i>feminine</i>
.27	-.87	<i>gentle, mild</i>
.34	.86	<i>masculine</i>
-.32	-.86	<i>soft</i>

Note.— $N = 41$, including a comparison male not used elsewhere. The factor loadings are product-moment correlations. Traits not included due to low reliability were "obstinate," "overly polite," and "sensitive." Traits from the open-ended survey in Study 1 are in italics.

Discussion

Contrary to what I had expected, there were no obvious differences in ratings of the gay men's childhood photographs. Although there are differences in the direction hypothesized, they are not statistically significant for the 19 gay versus 11 comparison men. This is due partly to the small comparison sample, but also to the weak correlations that Extroversion and Toughness have with sexual orientation. I had expected a somewhat stronger correlation such as the $-.4$ reported for men's homosexual orientation versus recalled interest in sports at 5 to 8 yr. of age (Grellert, *et al.*, 1982). Perhaps the lack of differences with photographs reflects the limited range of behavior in posed photographs.

Because the mother of the twins might have had to guess when she identified which twin was which in the photographs, the differences found

might have been influenced by her perceptions of the twins. But these differences are consistent with the trends observed for the 19 gay versus 11 comparison men.

In conclusion, no obvious differences were found in gay men's childhood photographs, but slight differences were hinted at. Childhood photographs may be worth further study, especially with discordant identical twins.

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