Cultural Factors Affecting Urban Mexican Male Homosexual Behavior

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Some aspects of the mestizoized urban culture in Mexico are linked to male homosexuality in support of the theory that cultural factors play an important role in the kind of life styles and sex practices of males involved in homosexual behavior. The following factors are considered relevant: the sharp dichotomization of gender roles, dual categorization of females as good or bad, separate social networks maintained by males before and after marriage, proportion of unmarried males, and distribution of income. One result of the sharp dichotomization of male and female gender roles is the widely held belief that effeminate males generally prefer to play the female role rather than the male. Effeminacy and homosexuality are also linked by the belief that as a result of this role preference effeminate males are sexually interested only in masculine males with whom they play the passive sex role. The participation of masculine males in homosexual encounters is related in part to a relatively high level of sexual awareness in combination with the lack of stigmatization of the insertor sex role and in part to the restraints placed on alternative sexual outlets by available income and/or marital status. Males involved in homosexual behavior in Mexico operate in a sociocultural environment which gives rise to expectations that they should play either the insertee or insertor sex role but not both and that they should obtain ultimate sexual satisfaction with anal intercourse rather than fellatio. In spite of cultural imperatives, however, individual preferences stemming from other variables such as personality needs, sexual gratification, desires of wanted partners, and amount of involvement may override the imperatives with resulting variations in sexual behavior patterns.

KEY WORDS: homosexuality; cross-cultural; Mexican; effeminate; masculinity; heterosexuality.

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INTRODUCTION

The objective of this report, which suggests how some aspects of the mestizoized urban culture in Mexico may be linked to male homosexual behavior, is to provide additional evidence in support of the theory that cultural factors play an important role in the determination of the kind of life styles and sex practices of males involved in homosexual behavior.

Although the focus of the report is on the urban population in Mexico, the cultural factors discussed are also believed to be relevant to the homosexual behavior of males living in mestizoized rural settings. Those Mexican males living in Indian cultures or in mestizoized rural cultures still essentially following the Indian way of life are believed to be influenced by a different set of cultural factors.

The report is divided into three parts. The first presents a description of the cultural setting into which Mexican males are born and raised. The second suggests how cultural factors appear to be linked to homosexual behavior in Mexico. The last presents a general discussion of the major findings. The description of the cultural setting is based on the literature available on the Mexican family and on the Mexican National Census of 1970. The linking of the cultural factors to the observed behavior and the general discussion are for the most part based on data gathered by the author in Mexico during the past 6 years.

It should be noted that in this report the terms sex role and gender role will be used to describe different behavioral phenomena. As Hooker (1965) points out, they "are often used interchangeably, and with resulting confusion." Following her suggestion, the term sex role, when homosexual practices are described, will refer to "typical sexual performance" only. "The gender connotations (M-F) of these performances need not then be implicitly assumed." The term gender role will refer to the "expected attitudes and behavior that distinguish males from females."

THE CULTURAL SETTING

The following is a description of those aspects of the cultural setting considered to be particularly relevant to male homosexual behavior in Mexico. It relies essentially on the findings presented by Peñalosa (1968) and McGinn (1966) but also includes some items not cited in their papers as well as some of the author's analyses of Mexican Census (1970) data. Peñalosa made an extensive study of the available literature on the family in Mexico for his review paper on Mexican family roles. McGinn used the available literature and drew on his own research findings from fieldwork in Guadalajara for his paper, which provides a general description of "normative marriage and family roles as found in middle-class Mexico today." Both researchers conclude that there have been few
systematic studies of marriage and family roles in Mexico. Among others, Peñalosa cites Ramos (1962), Paz (1950), Bermudez (1955), Diaz-Guerrero (1961), Piñeda (1963), Ramirez (1961), and Lewis (1959); McGinn basically cites the same sources but notes that the “most complete study” discussed in his paper is an unpublished one by Villaseñor (1964).

Before turning to the descriptive material, it should be noted that the roles described represent the normative cultural ideals of the dominant Mexican national culture of the mestizoided majority of the population. For a critical review of these “normative cultural ideals,” see the polemical essay by Kinzer (1973).

Importance of Manliness

The Mexican mestizo culture places a high value on manliness. One of the salient features of the society is thus a sharp delimitation between the roles played by males and females. Role expectations in general are for the male to be dominant and independent and for the female to be submissive and dependent.

The continued sharp boundary between male and female roles in Mexico appears to be due in part to a culturally defined hypermasculine ideal model of manliness, referred to under the label machismo. The ideal female role is generally believed to be the reciprocal of the macho (male) role.

Machismo is most often characterized by the attributes of the macho male. In thinking about manliness, a Mexican male may thus measure himself, his sons, and his male relatives and friends against such attributes as courage, dominance, power, aggressiveness, and invulnerability. The following statement by a Mexican boxer (quoted in Ross, 1966) illustrates how machismo may be conceptualized:

Machismo means manhood. To the Mexican man machismo means to have the manly traits of honor and dignity. To have courage to fight. To keep his word and protect his name. To run his house, to control his woman, and to direct his children. This is machismo, to be a man in your own eyes.

As a noun macho is defined in English as “a male animal; in particular, a he-goat,” and as an adjective as “masculine, vigorous, robust, male” (Velázquez, 1967). Although not all males in Mexico (probably not even a majority) aspire to actually play the macho role in its extreme form, the available evidence suggests that the folk concept of machismo continues to operate as one of the principal forces dominating the learned part of gender role for Mexican males.

As a consequence of the high status given manliness, Mexican males from birth onward are expected to behave in as manly a way as possible. Peñalosa sums it up as follows: “Any signs of feminization are severely repressed in the boy.” McGinn concludes: “The young Mexican boy may be severely scolded for engaging in feminine activities, such as playing with dolls or jacks. Parents verbally and physically punish ‘feminine’ traits in their male children . . . .” He also notes that in a recent study of the Mexican family in Guadalajara, Villaseñor
found that 94 of the 100 middle-class mothers making up her sample believed it important for a boy “to be manly.” The importance of manly behavior continues throughout the life span of Mexican males.

**Dual Categorization of Females**

Another salient feature of Mexican society is a belief system that leads to the categorization of females as being either “good” or “bad.” A “good” woman is represented as being basically the reciprocal of the macho male; that is, she must be submissive and dependent. Prior to marriage, according to the normative cultural ideal, she must also be chaste and faithful. After marriage she must continue to be faithful and should not demonstrate excessive sexual interest even in her husband. The categorization “good” thus comes down to a basic belief that a woman cannot be considered a prime sexual target and still be considered good. A woman is therefore labeled “bad” precisely because she is primarily thought of by males as being immediately exploitable as a sexual outlet. It is interesting to note that even female prostitutes are apparently responsive to the cultural ideal about female passivity. Roebuck and McNamara (1973), for example, reporting on female prostitution in a Mexican border city, noted that they played “a more feminine and passive role” in the houses of prostitution which only the Mexican men patronized.

A related aspect of the “good-bad” dichotomization of females is the double standard of sexual morality allowed Mexican males. The double standard begins prior to marriage. In the Mexican courtship system the prospective bride is labeled a novia, the prospective groom a novio. The period of courtship may last 5 years or more. Since she may one day be his wife and the mother of his children, a novia must in the eyes of her novio fall into the category “good”; she obviously cannot be considered a sexual target prior to marriage. Under existing mores, however, at the same time a Mexican male is courting a novia he may have a series of sexual contacts with whatever outlets are available. Girlfriends considered appropriate for sexual seduction are referred to as amigas; lovers are referred to as amantes. After marriage the double standard is maintained and the husband may continue to seek sexual outlets in addition to his wife.

Several of the authors’ Mexican respondents claimed that they did not consider it important for their novias to be chaste and faithful. Their feelings were that this aspect of courtship is breaking down in the large urban areas. They nevertheless still believed it to be an important factor for most Mexican males.4

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4 There is no counterpart to this system in the United States. The Mexican couple can be said to have an understanding. McGinn notes that “this arrangement is more serious than the American steady system, yet less formal than an engagement.”

5 Some preliminary data gathered by Taylor (1974) suggest that heterosexual anal intercourse — considered to be a common occurrence by his Mexico City respondents — may be used in Mexico as “a method of maintaining the female’s status as a vaginal virgin during courtship and a common form of birth control.”
Separate Social Networks

A third relevant feature of Mexican society is the separate network of friends retained by males after marriage. Peer group relationships, of particular importance in adolescence, may remain essentially unchanged by marriage. Peñalosa sums it up as follows:

In social life a Mexican man’s marital status is of little practical importance, as a man carries on virtually the same sort of social life after marriage as he did before — and one in which the women have little part.

Social relationships of Mexican males tend to be all male in character both before and after marriage. Men feel free to spend a lot of their spare time with their male friends rather than with their wives.

Drinking establishments in Mexico — cantinas, bars, and nightclubs — are popular locations where Mexican males spend some of their free time away from their families. With few exceptions, these establishments by convention are restricted to male customers. Females who go generally have working relationships as dance hostesses and/or prostitutes. They obviously fall into the “bad” category. A “good” woman in Mexico would never be seen in a public drinking establishment, except possibly in cities which have hotel bars or nightclubs for tourists. Even there, however, a Mexican woman would have to consider herself “liberated” in order to frequent such establishments on any regular basis.

Proportion of Unmarried Males

A fourth relevant characteristic of Mexican society is the proportion of single males past the age of puberty. Although in any given age group the proportion that is single varies over time and within and between counties, states, or regions, marriage patterns in Mexico at present lead to a sizable percentage of males not marrying until in their late 20s. In a recent National Census (1970) the proportion of single males distributed in the total population by age groups between 12 and 39 were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Percent single</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12-14</td>
<td>99.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>94.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>61.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the male population 12 years of age and older, 44% were unmarried at the time of the census.
Fig. 1. Percent single male age group 20-24 vs. percent single male age group 25-29 in Mexico by states and Federal District (D.F.) according to 1970 census. The states of Yucatan, Campeche, and Quintana Roo are combined as the Yucatan Peninsula states (S19); the territory of Baja California south is combined with Baja California north (N20). The remaining states are Sonora (N18), Sinaloa (N15), Chihuahua (N10), Coahuila (N17), Nuevo Leon (N9), Tamaulipas (N13), Durango (N22), Nayarit (N25), Jalisco (N4), Colima (N29), Zacatecas (N21), Aguascalientes (N28), San Luis Potosi (N14), Queretaro (N26), Guanajuato (N7), Michoacan (S6), Mexico (S2), Morelos (S24), Hidalgo (S16), Tlaxcala (S27), Puebla (S5), Veracruz (S3), Guerrero (S11), Oaxaca (S8), Chiapas (S12), and Tabasco (S23).

Differences between Mexican states in proportions of single males for two age groups in 1970 (20-24 and 25-29) are shown in Fig. 1. A significant part of the variation shown may be explained by two factors: marriage customs and migration between states. As seen in Fig. 1, the states showing the lowest percentage of single males (clustered in the lower left quadrant of the figure and thus below the national average) are located in the southern region of the country whereas the states showing the highest percentage (clustered in the upper right quadrant) are located in the northern region. A major difference between these two regions is the continuing influence of Indian cultures on varying but sizable segments of the population in the south as opposed to the north. The connection between the influence of Indian cultures and the relatively smaller percentage of single males in the south relates to the fact that males influenced by Indian cultures, judging from the available ethnographic evidence (Wauchope, 1969), generally marry in their late teens and early 20s. Members of the male
population living under the influence of the mestizoized Mexican national culture, on the other hand, are not pressured by their society to marry at an early age.

Internal migration is another explanatory factor of the differences shown in Fig. 1. There is a high degree of association between states with relatively higher percentages of single males and states with net gains in population from out-of-state migrants. The three northern central states (N7, N21, and N26) having smaller proportions of single males and experiencing little or no influence from Indian cultures show net losses of population from migration in the 1970 census.

Increased urbanization may help explain part of the higher percentage of single males but cannot account for the higher proportions generally found in the northern states. An examination of the 1960 census data of the state of Jalisco showed no correlation between the degree of urbanization in municipios (an administrative area roughly comparable with the U.S. county) and the proportions of single males found in given age groups.

Finally it should be noted that, while single, a large majority of Mexican males—a little over 80% according to the 1970 census—continue to live in some kind of family grouping. This pattern apparently holds true even when single males are in their late 20s or 30s. The available data suggest that the only way a single male is able to move away from his family, even if he wants to and can afford to, is to move to another area.

Distribution of Income

The final characteristic of Mexican society to be considered is distribution of income. In Mexico inequalities in income distribution combined with high birth rates result in large segments of the urban as well as rural population living on incomes that barely provide the basic necessities of life. Although urban dwellers generally fare better than rural folk, the available data suggest that a majority in both parts of the population still tend to be in marginal situations economically. Leyva (1970) presents estimates in a recent study, for example, which show that 66% of the urban families in Mexico live on 1500 pesos or less per month ($120 or less per month U.S. equivalent) in family groupings averaging five members. Comparable estimates of the rural families show that 90% live on 1500 pesos or less per month in family groupings averaging 5.5 members.

A significant outcome of the inequitable distribution of income in Mexico is the crowding suggested by the census data which show that a little over two-thirds of the Mexican population in January 1970 were living in one- or two-room dwellings. Although the percentage of inhabitants living in one- or two-room dwellings in urban areas is less than in rural areas, urban crowding is nevertheless impressive. For example, in Mexico’s second largest urban area, Guadalajara, 43% of the population in 1970 were living in one- and two-room dwell-
ings. Leyva (1970) presents a comparison of population density per room for a number of countries. Mexico ranks among the highest in the world. The average number of persons per room in Mexico in 1960 was estimated by the Mexican National Institute of Housing to be 2.6 in urban areas and 3.4 in rural areas. Comparable figures for the United States are 0.6 in urban areas and 0.7 in rural areas.

**CULTURAL FACTORS AND HOMOSEXUAL BEHAVIOR**

The following presents ways in which the cultural factors described above appear to be linked to homosexual behavior in Mexico. It is based primarily on data gathered by the author (1) in Guadalajara over a period of 1½ years, from the fall of 1969 to the spring of 1971, and (2) in a number of urban areas in the northwestern, central, and southwestern parts of Mexico during relatively short visits over a 4-year period from the summer of 1968 to the summer of 1972. It is also based on information provided by five U.S. respondents who have had extensive homosexual experiences in Mexico for 10 or more years and on the findings made by Taylor (1974) in Mexico City and by Ingham (1968) in a rural setting in central Mexico.

**Effeminate Males and Homosexuality**

In the masculine-oriented Mexican society, one result of the sharp dichotomization of male and female gender roles is the widely held belief that effeminate males basically prefer to play the female role rather than the male. The link between male effeminacy and homosexuality is the additional belief that as a result of this role preference effeminate males are sexually interested only in masculine males with whom they play the passive sex role. Although the motivations of males participating in homosexual encounters are unquestionably diverse and complex, the fact remains that in Mexico cultural pressure is brought to bear on effeminate males to play the passive insertee role in sexual intercourse, and a kind of *de facto* cultural approval is given (that is, no particular stigma is attached to) masculine males who want to play the active insertor role in sexual intercourse.⁶

The beliefs linking effeminate males with homosexuality are culturally transmitted by a vocabulary which provides the appropriate labels, by homosexually oriented jokes and word games (*albures*), and by the mass media. The links are established at a very early age. From early childhood on, Mexican males are made aware of the labels used to denote male homosexuals and the connection is

⁶Although sexual intercourse between males in Mexico may be anal or oral, the author's data suggest that anal intercourse is generally preferred over fellatio.
always clearly made that these homosexual males are guilty of unmanly effeminate behavior.

Evidence in support of the link between effeminacy and homosexuality will be presented. The homosexual vocabulary, jokes and word games, and mass media will be briefly examined first. This will be followed by a presentation of the author’s data on the effeminate male target.

The Homosexual Vocabulary

A large number of Spanish terms are used in Mexico to describe male participants in homosexual encounters. In popular usage the terms clearly distinguish the passive effeminate participants from the active masculine participants. Only the passive effeminate terms, however, also denote a participant homosexual. An equivalence is always made between the effeminate male and the homosexual male.

The only popular, reasonably polite words used to designate a homosexual male are *maricón* and *raro*. Both denote a male effeminate as well as homosexual. The first definition of *maricón* is “sissy” (Velázquez, 1967). Colloquially it is used to mean “fairy” or “queer,” i.e., homosexual. *Raro* translated into English can mean “strange,” “odd,” or “queer.” Used in a certain context with a certain inflection, it can also suggest an effeminate homosexual male.

The Spanish words most often used to describe participants in homosexual encounters are *pedo*, *joto*, and *mayate*. It is the consensus of my informants, however, that, though widely known, they are derogatory vulgar words and generally are not used in polite company. *Pedo* and *joto* designate passive effeminate

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Table I. Interviewee Hearing of Homosexual Joking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often heard</th>
<th>Frequency of response (%)</th>
<th>Sample No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>1-2/wk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At home</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With friends</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At school</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At work</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a*The question asked respondents was “How often (at the above-named locations) has conversation turned to joking (or comments) about homosexuals?”

*b*Unfortunately, no distinction was made between hearing jokes with straight and with homosexual friends.

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7 *Pedo* is probably the word most often used in graffiti. I have seen it more often than any other word scribbled on the walls of bathrooms in cantinas, public buildings, and houses in all parts of Mexico.
participants. *Mayate*, on the other hand, designates the active masculine participant but does not connote him homosexual. As used, *mayate* designates (1) a male who likes to wear loud, flashy clothes, (2) a male prostitute for other males, and (3) any male who takes the active inserter sex role in homosexual intercourse. There are many more words to designate participants in homosexual encounters. However, most of them (40 out of 44) designate effeminate male participants only. And none of them, according to my informants, is widely known and used.

*Homosexual Jokes and Word Games*

Homosexually oriented jokes and word games are pervasive in Mexican society. During my years of fieldwork in Mexico, I frequently observed such interchanges during business transactions, on walks around downtown areas and in local neighborhoods, and in bars and cantinas. This impression was supported by a large majority of my respondents in Guadalajara, as shown in Table 1, who reported observing and/or participating in such joking among friends (96%), at work (87%), and at school (77%). Although not a majority, close to one-half (42%) reported hearing such joking at home. Ingham (1968) also reports frequent homosexual joking and word games in a rural Mexican setting, so they are not just an urban pheomenon. Finally, it should be noted that in Mexico male homosexuality is treated in a joking way by such mass media as television, movies, stage shows, and comic books.

The focus of the homosexual jokes and word games is on the behavior of the effeminate passive male. The following examples provide some idea of the content and the variety of situations in which they take place. It is important to note that while most of the jokes and word games occur between men they also occur between men and women.

The following observations were made in Guadalajara. One afternoon, while waiting for my car to be repaired, I observed a 30-year-old mechanic and his 18-year-old helper trading homosexual jokes centered around the possibility that the younger man was a desirable sex object for *jotos*. On another occasion, in a small cantina one night in the *Zona Roja* (an area set aside in most large urban areas in Mexico for dance bars, houses of prostitution, and cantinas) I observed a well-dressed middle-aged man play a lengthy homosexually oriented word game with one of the bar girls. She had started the word game with this known customer by suggesting that since he had not paid much attention to her during recent visits he must be more interested in men. An individual male may also play the buffoon while with a group of male friends. An informant reported, for example, that in his school in Guadalajara a boy may remark to a pretty girl when she walks by: ‘If I were really a man, I would like to go around with you.’ His male friends respond by laughing and whistling, and calling him *Papacito*. The implication of the label is that he is both handsome and desirable. This is then likely to trigger off a set of jokes about *jotos*. 

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Another informant, who to my knowledge had had no homosexual contacts, reported the following sequence of events between him and his amiga. He claimed it to be typical of the way girls joke with their boyfriends about the possibility of the boy being a joto. While talking to his amiga one evening about 9 o'clock just outside the main entrance to her house in Guadalajara, her mother called to her to come in. She ignored the call. A second call came. Worrying that the mother might get angry with him, he told his amiga that he had better leave so she could obey her mother and go inside. His amiga responded by saying: “Ay tú!” — the literal translation and implication of the exclamation being that “you (are a joto too).” He then responded by saying: “Do you really think so!” The conversation then went back and forth with the amiga implying that he wanted to leave because he was afraid of her and preferred boys.

The Mass Media and Homosexuality

In the mass media of Mexico, homosexuality either is handled as a joke or is ridiculed and condemned, but the connection is always made between homosexuality and effeminate males. For example, from time to time on Sunday afternoons I watched the most popular variety show on Mexican television, Siempre Domingos. A skit depicting homosexual males as weak, passive, and effeminate was often included in the show. This same general theme was also presented in the stage shows of a popular variety theater in Guadalajara and was followed by homosexual characters, when included, in Mexican movies. Los Superfriós, a popular Mexican comic book series, devoted an issue in November 1970 to the story of a Mexican general and his attempts to interest his effeminate son in girls.

The most denigrating view of homosexuality in the mass media is presented by a tabloid newspaper published every Wednesday in Mexico City and distributed throughout Mexico. It is called ALARMA! and focuses on grisly murders, rapes, scandals, and highway accidents all over Mexico. I saw copies of it in practically every home I visited in Guadalajara. During the year and a half I read the publication it had considerable reporting about homosexual activity in Mexico and the United States, and at least once a month it had a banner headline about homosexuals. In the headlines and reportage the same general viewpoint was usually maintained, namely, that homosexual males are degenerate, vicious, immoral, and effeminate.

The Effeminate Male Target

The author's data support the notion that from an early age onward effeminate males in Mexico are targeted as sexual objects for other males and are expected to play the passive insertee sex role in anal intercourse. Of the 47 respondents in Guadalajara who could be rated, 18 responded affirmatively to
Table II. Comparison of Respondents' Effeminacy Scores as a Child and Prepubertal Homosexual Contacts with Postpubertal Males

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effeminacy Score</th>
<th>Prior to first ejaculation sexual contact with postpubertal male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( \phi \) coefficient is equal to 0.87. 
\[ x^2 = 18.07 (1 \text{ df}, p < 0.001). \]

several of the following criteria indicating preadolescent effeminacy — remembered self as effeminate, played with dolls, cross-dressed one or more times, experienced desire at least once to be female, and had little or no interest in sports. All but one of the respondents scoring on the effeminate side as a child (17 of 18) had, prior to their first ejaculation, sexual contacts with older postpubertal males. Thirteen of the 17 had contacts between 5 and 10 years of age. In comparison, as shown by Table II, only nine of 29 males scoring on the masculine side (31%) had, prior to their first ejaculation, sexual contacts with postpubertal males.

Effeminacy in males is observable at a very early age. Green (1968, 1974), for example, reports American parents being able to “clearly identify crossgender behavior at the age of 3 years or younger.” Moreover, as previously noted, in Mexico the adult population — sensitized by the folk concept of *machismo* — may be particularly aware of effeminate behavior in prepubertal males.

Setting aside the question of their effeminacy as children, of those respondents asked about the kind of sexual technique utilized in their prepubertal homosexual encounters (22 of 26), all but one reported that they had played the passive insertee sex role. One reported that only his genitals had been fondled. Of the 21 who reported that they had played the passive sex role, a majority claimed they had been anally penetrated by the penis of their older male partner. About one-third claimed their partner had performed sexual intercourse in some way between their thighs. The encounters reported were more than a casual one-time sexual experience for most respondents. A majority (21 of 26) had, on different occasions, two or more sexual experiences with their older male partners, six having had sexual experiences with the same partner for 1 year or longer.

Following the onset of puberty, effeminate males continue to be sexual targets for other males because of their effeminacy. The consensus of my effemi-
nate respondents in Guadalajara is that regardless of whether they are at school, in a movie theater, on the downtown streets, in a park, or in their own neighborhood they are sought out and expected to play the passive sex role by more masculine males. As one 14-year-old respondent put it, in response to the question of where he had looked for sexual contacts during the year prior to the interview, "I didn't have to search for them ... they looked for me (ellos me buscan a mí)."

The notion of effeminate males as sexual targets is also supported by the fact that effeminacy is used by Mexican males to cue other males as to their availability as sexual objects. The phenomenon of males with varying degrees of effeminacy exaggerating it to lure wanted male sexual partners has been observed by the author, particularly in the setting of cantinas, throughout Mexico. Further confirmation of the phenomenon is provided by the experiences of both effeminate and masculine respondents in Guadalajara and by American male homosexual respondents who have traveled extensively in Mexico.

Masculine Male Participants

The other side of the coin is represented by masculine male participants in homosexual encounters. Given the fact that effeminate males in Mexico are assumed homosexual and thus considered available as sexual outlets, how do the cultural factors contribute to the willingness of masculine males to play the active inserter sex role? The available data suggest that, insofar as the social variables are concerned, their willingness to participate in homosexual encounters is due in part to the relatively high level of sexual awareness that exists among males in the society. This is in combination with the lack of stigmatization of the inserter sex role and in part with the restraints that may be placed on alternative sexual outlets by available income and/or by marital status.

Sexual Awareness

The high level of sexual awareness among males in Mexico appears to be partly the result of the sexual stimuli presented them from birth onward by the scolding, joking, and public media. They are thus sensitized to many different kinds of sexual relationships. By the time they reach puberty, they are especially aware of the availability and acceptability of effeminate males as alternative sexual outlets. According to Taylor (1974), in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships "a very common term referring to people who are in love is enredado or entwined by the anus (el culo)."

The acceptance and desirability of sexual intercourse in Mexican society are further enhanced by the fact that adolescent males are pressured while in their early teens — often at the first signs of puberty — by their brothers, male
cousins, and/or friends to prove their masculinity by having heterosexual intercourse with either prostitutes or available neighborhood girls. The Guadalajara data show, for example, that a majority of the respondents rating themselves as regular or very masculine in early adolescence (18 of 20) had heterosexual intercourse between the ages of 14 and 18, the median age being 16. Moreover, about one-third of those respondents rating themselves slightly or very effeminate (seven of 22) reported they also had tried heterosexual intercourse under pressure of peers or relatives.

Finally, awareness of the body's daily functions and needs, including the sexual, is heightened under the crowded family circumstances in which a majority of the population live. Body contact and/or sexual joking between male members of the family sleeping in the same bed or close together is apparently not unusual, nor is their knowledge about sexual intercourse. It is of interest to note that the prepubertal homosexual contacts of several respondents, which took place over extended periods of time, occurred while sleeping in the same bed with postpubertal relatives.

Lack of Stigmatization

As implied in the above discussion on effeminate males and homosexuality, masculine males who play the active insertor role in homosexual encounters do not appear to be generally conceptualized as homosexuals in Mexico. This lack of stigmatization provides prospective active participants with the important feeling that their masculine self-image is in no way threatened by their playing of the active sex role. There is no doubt some level of same-sex sexual involvement where even a masculine male may be labeled deviant, particularly if he develops a pattern of nonassociation with females, but at the very least, as Paz (1950) has noted, "masculine homosexuality is regarded with a certain indulgence [in Mexico] insofar as the active agent is concerned." The following observations made by the author in many different parts of Mexico support the notion that a great deal of tolerance is extended to those masculine males who utilize passive males as alternative sexual outlets.

One indication of the degree of acceptance accorded the active sex role in Mexico is suggested by the fact that masculine males appear to rarely take offense at the approaches made by effeminate males. A surprising feature of their behavior is the way in which they handle the attention given them by males who so openly and obviously express their sexual interest. Rather than showing anger or no reaction at being approached, the targeted males if not interested will most likely be amused. Moreover, instead of feeling that their masculinity is threatened, many apparently feel it is supported and possibly even enhanced by the attention. A hostile reaction may occasionally be triggered but usually only if an approach is made at what would be considered an inappropriate place or time,
e.g., in front of parents or relatives at home or in some kind of group situation where individual attention might be embarrassing.

Another indication of the kind of acceptance given active participants is suggested by respondents' reports that "masculine" boys talk with each other about their "active" sex experiences with effeminate boys. These conversations take place among groups of friends at school, for example, rather than just between several intimate friends in secret. Although active males may be no more willing than passive males to relate their involvement in homosexual encounters to parents and siblings, they nevertheless continue to participate with the belief that the active sex role does not have the same kind of shame connected with it as does the passive. Their expectation is to be accepted with far more tolerance than are their penetrated sexual partners.

Still another indication of the kind of acceptance accorded the active sex role is suggested by the fact that these males are often willing to engage in much the same kind of sexual foreplay with their passive male partners as would be expected with their female partners and may also allow their genitals to come into contact with those of the effeminate males. Although the percentage of the author's "active" respondents in Guadalajara claiming to restrict foreplay one way or another with their "passive" partners is not small, the fact remains that almost one-half said they regularly engaged in open-mouth kissing with their male partners and a little over two-thirds allowed other males' genitals to come into contact with their own. A majority of the respondents who played the passive and active-and-passive sex roles claimed that almost all of their active partners participated in open-mouth kissing and allowed genital contact.

It appears, however, that a larger percentage of the active group are more concerned about open-mouth kissing than genital contact with another male and are more concerned about having their anus or buttocks touched than either kissing or genital contact. Penetration from the rear represents such a threat to some active participants that when sleeping with another male they try to sleep only on their back.

Relative Costs of Sexual Outlets

The relative money costs of alternative sexual outlets may be an important factor in helping determine the demand for one particular outlet in a sexual marketplace where a large number of prospective buyers may have their choices limited by income. In Mexico, the amount of income available to a majority of males for the pursuit of sexual outlets is extremely limited. As previously noted, inequalities in the distribution of income are such that a majority of Mexican families must live on incomes that barely provide the basic essentials of food, shelter, and clothing.

A comparison of alternative sexual outlets for Mexican males playing an insertor sex role suggests that the lowest-cost outlet is generally offered by males
willing to play the insertee sex role. The "insertor" males may prefer to have sexual intercourse with females. Given their limited incomes, however, a large percentage may find that on those occasions when their sexual need is high and their available cash is low, effeminate males are acceptable sexual outlets.

The major cost difference between female and "insertee male" sexual outlets is the price charged for sexual intercourse. Males playing the passive sex role usually offer their sexual services free. Some females may also provide their sexual services free. Because of the good-bad dichotomization of females in Mexico, however, a majority must play the role of prostitute in the sexual marketplace and levy a charge. Effeminate homosexual males in Mexico may solicit favors from their sexual partners in cash or kind, but they rarely do this as the sole source of financial support. Moreover, when favors are solicited there appears to be an age and income differential, with the effeminate male being younger and/or poorer than the male playing the active role. Male prostitutes in Mexico usually play only the active sex role.

Marital Status

The marital status of Mexican males appears to have an important effect on the type of sexual outlets they choose over time. Prior to marriage, the dual categorization of females into those that are sexual targets (amigas, amantes, and prostytutas) and those that are not (novias) requires Mexican males to spend a lot to time socializing with females (novias) who by social convention can usually offer no sexual outlet. Given the relatively late age at which a large percentage marry (as many as one-third still single in their late 20s), it follows that during the years of high sexual activity a majority of Mexican males wanting sexual contacts must turn to outlets other than their novias. Since they may offer sexual intercourse at little or no cost, females who are willing to play the amiga role — that is, girlfriends considered appropriate for sexual seduction — are probably first choices as sexual outlets for Mexican males. However, not enough females seem willing to play the amiga role to the point of sexual intercourse because current mores about the importance of virginity prior to marriage lead the families of Mexican females to push them in the direction of playing only the novia role. The assurance of virginity is the principal reason for the chaperon system, and, although this system may be losing its hold somewhat, the available data suggest that Mexican males still give great weight to virginity when they assess females as prospective brides. Mexican girls who have sexual adventures prior to marriage run the risk of spoiled reputations and thus problems in making good marriages.

Females with spoiled reputations probably make up the largest group of premarital sexual outlets for Mexican males. They may play the role of prostitute (puta), lover (amante), or commonlaw wife. Regardless of the role played, however, certain monetary costs are generally associated with these possible
sexual outlets. And these costs, as noted above, may operate as a factor limiting the kind and number of sexual contacts any given male may have with females in this group.

A third and potentially cost-free group of premarital sexual outlets available to Mexican males is made up of other males willing to play the passive inserter role in sexual intercourse, as noted above.

Following marriage, Mexican males have a legitimate outlet for sex: their wives. Because of the double standard allowed males both before and after marriage, however, if desired they may continue to maintain sexual contacts begun while still courting. This is facilitated by the separate network of friends retained by them after marriage. As noted previously, men feel free to spend time away from work and family socializing with male friends. They may also feel free to continue previous sex contacts and/or develop new ones. These extramarital sexual contacts may be only with females. They may also include or be only with other males. For example, in response to the question “Do you think many married men have sex with other males after being married?” 92% of my respondents questioned in Guadalajara (46 of 50) replied “yes.” And close to two-thirds (33 of 50) reported that they had had sexual intercourse with one or more married males. Most were not sure of the total number of married contacts they had had since they did not necessarily know the marital status of each partner.

DISCUSSION

An important finding of this study is that males involved in homosexual behavior in Mexico operate in a sociocultural environment which gives rise to expectations that they should play either the active (insertor) or passive (inserter) sex role but not both, and that they should obtain ultimate sexual satisfaction with anal intercourse rather than fellatio. By and large as a result of the sharply defined gender roles in the society, the general belief exists that effeminate males are passive and penetrable, like females; that masculine males are active and impenetrable; and that the anus may provide sexual pleasure like the vagina. Participants in homosexual encounters are thus motivated by their environment to establish a sex role preference and to focus on anal intercourse. The effects of environment, however, must be viewed as being functionally interrelated with personality variables. As Hooker (1961) has suggested, the relations between sociocultural and personality variables “in determining the commitment to, and patterns of, adult homosexuality are complex. For many, the stability of the commitment appears to be a function of the interaction of both sets of variables.”

Although data are not available with which to estimate the percentage of the population involved, the cultural factors and homosexual behavior described above suggest that a relatively large percentage of Mexican males, perhaps a
majority, participate in homosexual encounters at one time in their lives. The
dichotomization of sex roles suggests further that there are probably consider-
able differences in the degree and kind of involvement between participants ac-
cording to sex role preferred and practiced over time.6

Cultural traditions in sexual partnerships in mestizoized Mexico prescribe
the insertor sex role in anal intercourse for "masculine" males interested in
homosexual outlets. This appears to be particularly relevant for the age set of
single males between puberty and the late 20s. The only cultural proscription is
for "masculine" males to play the passive sex role.

The passive sex role is by inference — through the cultural equivalence of
effeminacy with homosexuality — prescribed for "effeminate" males. It becomes
a self-fulfilling prophecy of the society that effeminate males (a majority?) are
eventually, if not from the beginning, pushed toward exclusively homosexual be-
havior. The Guadalajara data (Carrier, 1972) substantiate that some do engage in
heterosexual intercourse and some marry and set up households, but they prob-
ably are a minority of the identifiably effeminate males in the mestizoized seg-
ment of the Mexican population.

In spite of the cultural imperatives for those participating in homosexual
encounters to play either one sex role or the other, and to utilize anal sexual
techniques, individual preferences stemming from a number of other variables
such as personality needs, sexual gratification, desires of wanted partners, and
amount of involvement may override the imperatives, with resulting variations in
sexual behavior patterns. For example, the Guadalajara interview data show that
at the time of interview (see Table III) a little over one-fourth of the respondents
(15 of 53) preferred to play both sex roles, 4% (two of 53) had no sex role
preference, 8% (four of 53) preferred oral-genital contacts, and 2% (one of 53)
preferred mutual masturbation.9 Furthermore, most of the respondents had had
some oral-genital contacts, and close to one-fourth had experienced mutual
masturbation.

The data also show that while a majority of respondents maintained their
sexual preferences and practices over time, a sizable percentage changed them
(Table III) from those carried out during their first sustained year of homosexual
experiences. For example, a little over 40% of those playing the anal active sex
role and close to one-fourth of those playing the anal passive sex role during
their first sustained year had over time incorporated the opposite sex role into
their sexual repertoire. A significant aspect of the behavior of those who change,
however, is that they usually do not play both sex roles with the same partner.
They rank prospective partners as to whether they are more masculine or more
effeminate than themselves. If thought more masculine, the prospective partner

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6 For a detailed comparison of participants by sex role played, see Carrier (1971).
7 No inferences about the distribution of the Mexican male population participating in
homosexual encounters by sex role preference can be made from the interview data since
sex role preference was a criterion for the selection of respondents.
Table III. A Percentage Comparison of Respondents' Sexual Preference and Majority of Homosexual Experiences at Time of Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual preference</th>
<th>Active and passive</th>
<th>Passive</th>
<th>Total‡</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>At time of interview</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual preference</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anal</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active/passive</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masturbation (mutual)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No preference</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority of homosexual experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
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<tr>
<td>Masturbation (mutual)</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median age of respondents at time of interview</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median years between first sustained year and time of interview</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample No.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‡ Grouped by major homosexual activity first sustained year following first ejaculation. For example, the first column shows that of the respondents who were "anal active" in a majority of their first-year experiences, 59% by preference and practice were still anal active at time of interview; 41% had changed and incorporated both sex roles between first year and time of interview.

† The total includes four respondents whose major homosexual activities during the first sustained year following first ejaculation were oral-genital and one respondent whose major sexual activity was mutual masturbation. Their sexual preference and majority of homosexual experiences at time of interview remained the same as first-year experiences.

is generally rated active sexually; if more effeminate, passive sexually. Once this judgment is made — and assuming it is made correctly, i.e., there is concordance between degree of masculinity and predicted sex role — they then play the appropriate opposite role. There is a low probability that both active and passive anal intercourse are practiced by both participants in a given homosexual encounter in Mexico.
From the available data, a judgment cannot be made about the stability of the relationship between sex and gender roles in mestizoed Mexico. In general, however, the participants with the most rigidly developed sex-typed interests appear least likely to change their sexual preferences and practices over time. That is, those participants with strongly developed female sex-typed interests through early socialization continue to maintain those interests and to either exclusively or primarily play the passive sex role, and vice versa. Further, the data on family relationships support this notion in that the more observably effeminate a male the more likely his mannerisms will become accepted by his family in the long run, and pressures to change are diminished. For the masculine male, i.e., the male with strongly developed male sex-typed interests and masculine bearing, the family pressures more likely strengthen his masculine choices.

More data need to be generated on those males who over time play both the active and passive sex roles. At least two basically different behavior patterns are suggested by the data. On the one hand, there are males who from the very beginning appear to have little or no developed preference, despite the cultural imperatives. But there are other males who have a preference from the beginning and thus for a given time period play only one role. As they expand their sexual experiences over time, however, they may start to play the opposite role, thus discovering in one way or another that there is pleasure associated with both sex roles. They may also discover that a certain amount of cognitive dissonance results as a consequence of playing both roles. This would seem to be particularly true for those males who conceptualize themselves as masculine and play a masculine gender role around family, friends, and work associates.

Available data suggest that the males playing both sex roles tend to be more like those who play only the active role than like those who play only the passive. They tend, for example, to be more interested in masculine-type activities, to have had more heterosexual contacts, and to be more interested in their masculine image than males who only play the passive sex role. They also tend to maintain the belief that at an appropriate age they will marry and set up a household. An important factor underlying the behavior patterns of participants who play both sex roles over time may be the need to reduce the dissonance generated by the inconsistency between masculine self-concept and the social judgment that the passive sex role is effeminate.

Despite the fact that there are no legal sanctions in Mexico against consenting adult males having sexual congress in private, the general public tends to view homosexuality with considerable disapproval. The net effect of this attitude is that every effort is made by the Mexican law authorities to keep behavior which might be interpreted as homosexual, i.e., effeminate male behavior, as invisible as possible. One result of this policy is that steady pressure — harassment by both uniformed and plainclothes policemen — is exerted on any institution or location in which obvious (effeminate) homosexual males congregate. Offending establishments are closed or threatened with closure if they do not change their
policies; locations such as movie theaters, parks, and steam baths are from time to time infiltrated by policemen and arrests are made.\(^9\) However, although the number of males searching for male sexual partners may diminish at the locations harassed by the police, the penalty levied on those caught is not considered particularly severe (a small fine rather than imprisonment) unless the arrest becomes publicly known. The searching males may move to a new location or re-establish more discreet behavior at the harassed location. There is some evidence that as of the fall of 1974 this policy may be changing. Respondents recently interviewed by the author suggest, for example, that harassment by law authorities is increasing in Guadalajara and Mexico City. It is perhaps relevant that in describing the composition of terrorist groups the Mexican President noted in September 1974 that, among other things in their background, there is “a high incidence of masculine and feminine homosexuality…” (Fourth State of the Nation Report, 1974).

Counterposed to the Mexican society’s generally disapproving attitude toward homosexuality is the fact that it appears to accept the inevitability of homosexual contacts between men. There seems to be a wide acceptance of the reality that most males have multiple sexual outlets when single and have sexual outlets over and above those provided by the wife when married. Although not socially approved, these extramarital outlets are nevertheless generally accepted as long as they are carried out with a certain amount of discretion. As previously indicated, homosexual contacts between males are thought no better or worse than other kinds of sexual outlets which do not carry social approval, this understanding of course being essentially extended only to those playing the insertor sex role.

An accommodation takes place not only between families and their effeminate sons and brothers but also between the society at large and effeminate males. The principal tactic of accommodation common both to the family and the society at large is for genuine effeminate behavior to be kept as much out of sight as possible. In families, and especially in family gatherings, the effeminate male tries as best he can to behave in a masculine way. If he has sexual contacts with males rather than females, he has them discreetly. The fact that the contacts are taking place is ignored by all parties concerned. Outside the family, effeminate males generally try to make as masculine a presentation as possible—particularly at work and with “straight” friends. The social tension created by the attempted concealment of real effeminate behavior appears to be relieved by the widespread joking about effeminate males and homosexuality which occurs with such frequency among “masculine” males in Mexico.

\(^9\)This explains in part why there are so few exclusively homosexual meeting places. Another important factor is the fear of being seen going into such places. The most common term used to express this fear is quemar (to burn) – one’s reputation is likely to be burned or scorched.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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