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Male and female sexual orientation differences in gambling

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine whether sexual orientation differences in gambling exist that parallel those for sex—a question motivated by the idea that male homosexuality arises from prenatal brain feminization and that female homosexuality arises from prenatal brain masculinization. For gambling frequency, we hypothesized that male homosexuals would be more similar to female heterosexuals than male heterosexuals, and that female homosexuals would be more similar to male heterosexuals than female heterosexuals. Subjects were 10,598 individuals classified as homosexual men ($n = 935$), heterosexual men ($n = 4187$), homosexual women ($n = 275$), or heterosexual women ($n = 5201$). Data came from survey interviews conducted by staff members of The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction from 1938 to 1963. Results showed that (a) homosexual men gambled less than heterosexual men, the greatest difference occurring at low levels of gambling frequency, and (b) homosexual women gambled more than heterosexual women, the greatest difference occurring at high levels of gambling frequency. Parallels are drawn between gambling and two other addictive behaviors, tobacco use and alcohol consumption.

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1. Introduction

Sex differences are consistently observed in gambling research. Men and women differ in their motivation for gambling, their interest in gambling, and how and in what form gambling takes place. A substantial body of evidence exists that differences between homosexuals and heterosexuals mimic comparable sexually dimorphic somatic, cognitive, and behavioral differences between men and women. Thus, given the presence of sex differences in gambling, we predict significant sexual orientation differences in gambling. That is, male homosexuals will resemble female heterosexuals in their gambling activity, and female homosexuals will resemble male heterosexuals in their gambling activity.

Sexual orientation differences have been identified across a wide domain of traits. For somatic traits, homosexual men, compared with heterosexual men, have been found to experience puberty earlier (Blanchard & Bogaert, 1996), weigh less (Bogaert & Blanchard, 1996), are shorter (Blanchard & Bogaert, 1996; Bogaert & Blanchard, 1996), and have larger penises (Bogaert & Hershberger, 1999). Homosexual men also have elevated rates of nonright handedness (Lalumiere, Blanchard, & Zucker, 2000), more dermal ridges on the left hand (Green & Young, 2000), and a larger second to fourth digit finger length ratio (Robinson & Manning, 2000). Homosexual women, compared with heterosexual women, are stronger (Perkins, 1981), heavier (Beren, Hayden, Wilfrey, & Grillo, 1996), and taller (Bogaert, 1998).

Cognitive differences between homosexuals and heterosexuals are less-well established than somatic differences, but a consensus is developing that heterosexual men, on the average, have a higher level of spatial ability than homosexual men (e.g., Cohen, 2002). Results for women are less clear, primarily because fewer studies have used homosexual women as a comparison group: For example, while Tuttle and Pillard (1991) found that homosexual women did better on spatial tasks than heterosexual women, Gladue, Beatty, Larson, and Staton (1990) found that heterosexual women did better.

Behavioral differences between homosexual and heterosexual persons have also been the subject of investigation, perhaps yielding the most replicable results in sexual orientation research. Retrospective, and importantly, prospective studies (Green, 1987) have shown that male and female same-sex sexual orientation is strongly associated with atypical gender behavior during childhood. For males, this includes decreased aggression, decreased sports participation, playing with “female” toys (e.g., dolls), the desire to be female, and being perceived as a “sissy” by others. For females, this includes increased sports participation, involvement with stereotypically masculine activities such as automobile repair, and being perceived as a “tomboy” by others. However, the effect size for childhood gender atypicality is usually smaller for females than for males. Gender atypicality also becomes smaller by adulthood for both men and women, probably due to the effects of socialization (Harry, 1983). Nonetheless, significant sexual orientation behavioral differences persist into adulthood, the most notable example being the female-like distribution of occupations between homosexual men and the male-like distribution of occupations among homosexual women (Bailey & Oberschneider, 1997).

The most well-supported theory of why sexual orientation differences in somatic, cognitive, and behavioral traits are present is based on the hypothesis that sexual orientation depends on the early sexual differentiation of hypothalamic brain structures (Ellis & Ames, 1987). The differenti-

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