

Childhood gender nonconformity, sexual orientation and BIS/BAS sensitivity among men

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Background

Relationships of personality traits with sexual orientation and childhood gender nonconformity among men have been poorly characterized. Previous studies revealed mixed results – some of them showing that anxiety-related personality traits are linked to non-heterosexuality and high levels of childhood gender nonconformity (e.g. Guerim et al., 2015). However other studies revealed high levels of approach-related traits among gay men as compared to heterosexuals (see Lippa, 2005).

The study aimed to evaluate the relationships of childhood gender nonconformity, sexual orientation, and BIS/BAS personality components.

Methods

We recruited a group of 2160 men aged 18-50 years ($M=28.24$, $SD=6.88$). We used a web-based survey. Sexual orientation was characterized by the use of Sell's Sexual Orientation Questionnaire; childhood gender nonconformity was measured using Zucker's The Recalled Childhood Gender Identity/Gender Role Questionnaire. Personality traits were assessed using Carver and White's BIS/BAS Scales.

Results

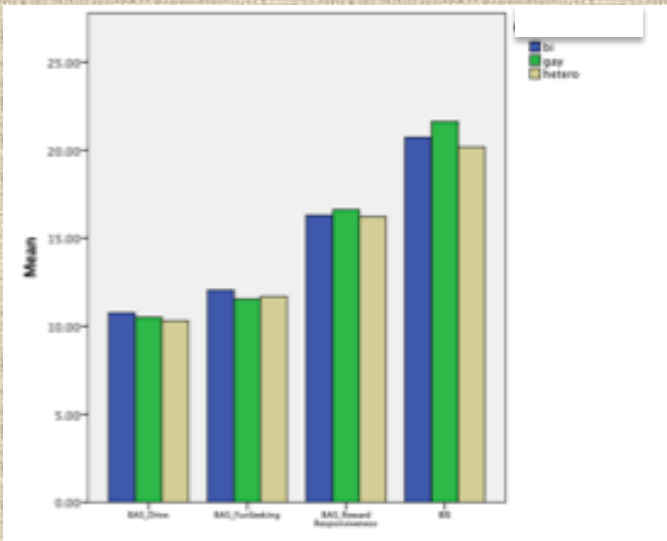
We identified a weak but significant positive relationship between childhood gender nonconformity and BIS (see Table 1). After controlling for age and CGN we identified sexual orientation related differences in BIS sensitivity – gay men scored higher than heterosexuals and bisexuals ($F=8.33$; $p<.001$). Heterosexual men scored lower in BAS Drive compared to bisexual and gay men ($F=4.09$; $p<.05$), while gay men scored higher in BAS Reward Responsiveness compared to bi- and heterosexual men ($F=4.4$; $p<.05$). We also identified differences in BAS Fun seeking – bisexual men scored higher than gay men ($F=4.26$; $p<.05$) (see Figure 1).

Table 1. Correlations between BIS/BAS and childhood gender atypical behavior

	BIS	BAS-D	BAS-FS	BAS-RR	CGAB
BIS	-	-.23**	-.1**	.11**	-.2**
BAS-D	-.23**	-	.35**	.42**	.01
BAS-FS	-.1**	.35**	-	.36**	.03
BAS-RR	.11**	.42**	.36**	-	-.07**
CGAB	-.2**	.01	.03	-.07**	-

Note: ** - $p<.001$; CGAB – childhood gender atypical behavior

Figure 1. BIS/BAS sensitivity and male sexual orientation



Conclusion

Sexual orientation was associated with BIS/BAS sensitivities. Individuals with homosexual orientation showed higher scores in both anxiety- and approach-related personality traits when compared to bi- and heterosexual men.