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# Being Gay Is Just as Healthy as Being Straight

Evelyn Hooker's pioneering research debunked the popular myth that homosexuals are inherently less mentally healthy than heterosexuals, leading to significant changes in how psychology views and treats people who are gay.

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## Findings

In the 1950's, Dr. Evelyn Hooker studied 30 homosexual males and 30 heterosexual males recruited through community organizations. The two groups were matched for age, IQ, and education. None of the men were in therapy at the time of the study. Dr. Hooker administered three projective tests, which measure people's patterns of thoughts, attitudes, and emotions--the Rorschach, in which people describe what they see in abstract ink blots, the Thematic Apperception Test [TAT] and the Make-A-Picture-Story [MAPS] Test), in which people tell stories about different pictures. Unaware of each subject's sexual orientation, two independent Rorschach experts evaluated the men's overall adjustment using a 5-point scale. They classified two-thirds of the heterosexuals and two-thirds of the homosexuals in the three highest categories of adjustment. When asked to identify which Rorschach protocols were obtained from homosexuals, the experts could not distinguish respondents' sexual orientation at a level better than chance. A third expert used the TAT and MAPS protocols to evaluate the psychological adjustment of the men. As with the Rorschach responses, the adjustment ratings of the homosexual and heterosexuals did not differ significantly." Based on these findings, Dr. Hooker tentatively suggested that homosexuals were as psychologically normal as heterosexuals.

## Significance

Hooker's work was the first to empirically test the assumption that gay men were mentally unhealthy and maladjusted. The fact that no differences were found between gay and straight participants sparked more research in this area and began to dismantle the myth that homosexual men and women are inherently unhealthy.

## Practical Application

In conjunction with other empirical results, this work led the American Psychiatric Association to remove homosexuality from the

DSM in 1973 (it had been listed as a sociopathic personality disorder). In 1975, the American Psychological Association publicly supported this move, stating that "homosexuality per se implies no impairment in judgment, reliability or general social and vocational capabilities...(and mental health professionals should) take the lead in removing the stigma of mental illness long associated with homosexual orientation." Although prejudice and stigma still exist in society, this research has helped millions of gay men and women gain acceptance in the mental health community.

#### Cited Research

Hooker, E. (1957). The adjustment of the male overt homosexual. *Journal of Projective Techniques*, 21, 18-31.

#### Additional Sources


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