The Effect of Masculinity Threat on Perceptions of Homosexual or Heterosexual, Masculine or Feminine Targets

The current study examined the effect of threatening a male’s masculinity on judgments of targets who vary in sexual orientation and gender role. 211 male students took a personality test. 104 participants received false feedback that they had a “feminine” personality. 107 received feedback that they had a “masculine” personality. Participants read vignettes describing a heterosexual masculine, heterosexual feminine, homosexual masculine, or homosexual feminine male target, embedded among three other vignettes to minimize suspicion. The participants rated targets on likability, competence, and positivity/negativity. In line with previous research, participants whose masculinity was threatened liked heterosexual targets more, perceived heterosexual targets as more competent, and responded more positively to heterosexual targets than homosexual targets. Participants who were high in homophobia and had their masculinity threatened showed a preference for masculine heterosexual targets. Thus, homosexuals may be at particular risk of being negatively judged, especially among men whose masculinity has been threatened.