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

Previous research has found that men prefer heterosexual male targets over homosexual males, regardless of perceived gender role, and they prefer masculine male targets over feminine males independent of sexual orientation (Blashill and Powlishta 2009). In addition, men who’s masculinity has been threatened prefer masculine homosexuals over feminine homosexuals (Glick et al., 2004). This experiment is design to explore whether the latter effect is being driven by gender role violations or reactions to sexual orientation.

Hypotheses

1. Participants will like masculine targets more than feminine targets.
2. Participants will like heterosexual targets more than homosexual targets.
3a. When masculinity is threatened, participants will rate masculine heterosexual targets most positively and feminine homosexual targets most negatively, however they will rate the masculine homosexual target more positively than the feminine heterosexual target.
3b. When masculinity is not threatened, participants will rate masculine heterosexual targets most positively and feminine homosexual targets most negatively, however they will rate the feminine heterosexual target more positively than the masculine homosexual target.

Methods

Participants
Participants were 155 male Introduction to Psychology students.

Procedure
Participants answered questions from the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (Bem, 1974) and received a fake score on a graph to represent where they fall on a continuum of masculinity, which served as the manipulation.

Results

Target Likability
A four way interaction among threat condition, target gender role, target sexuality, and participants’ level of homophobia was significant, F(1, 155) = 4.338, p = .039. A simple effects analysis showed that when high homophobes were threatened, they preferred masculine heterosexuals over masculine homosexuals and feminine heterosexuals over feminine homosexuals. High homophobes who were not threatened reported liking the masculine homosexual more than the masculine heterosexual and preferred the feminine heterosexual to the feminine homosexual, F(1, 75) = 2.48, p = .091 (see Figure 1). No effects were significant for low homophobes.

There was a significant interaction between threat condition and target sexuality, F(1, 155) = 4.213, p = .042, with a stronger preference shown for heterosexual targets when participants’ masculinity was threatened and a stronger preference for homosexual targets when participants’ masculinity was not threatened. (Figure 2)

Target Competency
There was a significant interaction between threat condition and target sexuality, F(1, 155) = 4.829, p = .029, with a stronger preference shown for heterosexual targets when participants’ masculinity was threatened and a stronger preference for homosexual targets when there is no threat. (Figure 2)

Negativity Towards Target
A three way interaction was found to be marginally significant among threat condition, target sexuality, and homophobia, F(1, 155) = 3.058, p = .082. A simple effects analysis found that when participants high in homophobia were threatened, they had higher ratings of negativity towards homosexual targets over heterosexual targets, F(1, 75) = 4.004, p = .049.

A marginally significant interaction was found between threat condition and target sexuality, F(1, 155) = 2.831, p = .058, with more negativity expressed toward homosexual targets when the participants’ masculinity is threatened. When there was no threat, participants felt more negative towards the heterosexual target. (Figure 2)

Conclusion

The study demonstrated that men, especially those high in homophobia, who feel their masculinity has been threatened view homosexuality more negatively than those who have not. These findings have many social implications taking into account that the emotions expressed towards the targets by the subjects (i.e., hostility, liking, and positivity) can influence subjects behaviors, perhaps leading to aggressive behaviors towards homosexual men.

References


Figure 1. Participants with High Levels of Homophobia Rating of Target Likability

Figure 2. Interaction Between Threat Condition and Sexuality on Liking, Negativity, and Competence