

A Queer Eye On Masculinity: The Impact of Traditional Masculinity Norms and Gender Norm Perceptions on Gay Men's Attitudes Towards Transgender Individuals

Marie Therese Mispa Akouavie Lawson

s4237706

Department of Psychology, University of Groningen

PSB3E-BT15: Bachelor Thesis

Group number: 20

Supervisor: Dr. Islam Borinca

Second evaluator: Gemma Schino

In collaboration with:

Babette Bijen , Denise Cramer van der Bogaart , Elena Dirks, Ida Keller

January 16, 2024

Abstract

The present quasi-experimental study (N = 144) investigates whether and how traditional masculinity endorsement and perceptions of gender norms impact gay men's attitudes toward transgender individuals. The experiment, which was conducted online, involved assessing participants' endorsement of traditional masculinity as well as experimentally manipulating their gender norm perception by either confirming the steadfastness of traditional masculinity or suggesting a feminization of masculinity norms. Finally, the experiment measured attitudes toward transgender people. The findings support the precarious manhood hypothesis, suggesting that gay men who endorse traditional masculinity hold more negative opinions toward sexual minorities, in this case, transgender people. Exposure to experimental conditions and the interaction effect between the endorsement of masculinity and gender norms were not significant, highlighting the complex nature of attitude formation regarding trans identities. Theoretical implications emphasize the compensatory character of masculinity, as well as highlight the need for measures to promote a more inclusive LGBTQ+ community. Practical implications that advocate for measures that address the negative consequences of masculinity endorsement, as well as theoretical implications and future research directions, are discussed.

A Queer Eye on Masculinity

The National Center for transgender equality defines gender identity as "the internal knowledge of one's gender"(The National Center for Transgender Equality, 2023, p. 1) with scholars adding that the concept applies to everyone, not just members of the trans community (Harrison & Michelson, 2020). The existing literature on gender identity further posits that transgender individuals experience a discrepancy between the gender identity they desire and the one which they were assigned at birth, with feelings of incongruence concerning gender identities inside and outside the traditional gender binary (Jones et al., 2023; Perez-Arche & Miller, 2021). Research has identified and termed feelings of unease as well as prejudice toward trans identities as transphobia and established that it differs from homophobia in that it centers around those who deviate from expected gender roles and gender identities, rather than sexual orientation (Warriner et al., 2013).

Recent years have seen an increase in public debates concerning transgender rights as well as their place in society, but despite their increased visibility studies show that the majority of transpeople still face discrimination which commonly manifests as job loss, eviction, bullying, physical harassment, and denial of medical services. Empirical evidence further reveals that, despite widespread support for trans rights, policies addressing specific issues receive little support, suggesting that while there is widespread support for the concept of trans rights, people are less willing to rally behind concrete initiatives aimed at implementing or protecting these rights. Furthermore, collective research consistently demonstrates the prejudice faced by trans people in various life areas, as well as linking those experiences of prejudice to psychological distress and suicidal ideation. Accordingly, scholars have called for an active investigation into the factors and mechanisms underlying transphobia, with the aim of public health and social justice at the forefront (Broussard & Warner, 2018; Harrison & Michelson, 2020; Tebbe & Moradi, 2011)

Scholarly explorations trying to illuminate the factors contributing to transphobia revealed several important findings. Firstly, studies have established that LGBTQIA+ members are frequently perceived as gender transgressors, challenging societal expectations of gender identity and expression (Konopka et al., 2019). Further, the growing literature proposes that prejudice against transgender people may stem from binary gender role socialization, as they are perceived as threatening to the traditional gender binary (Broussard & Warner, 2018). Moreover emerging trends in research point to cisgender men harboring higher levels of transphobia than cisgender women. Additionally, studies collectively point to masculinity threat influencing attitudes towards sexual and gender minorities, with gender identity and adherence to traditional gender norms assuming the role of predictors (Broussard & Warner, 2018; Conlin et al., 2020; Harrison & Michelson, 2020; Konopka et al., 2019; Perez-Arche & Miller, 2021; Wellman & McCoy, 2014). Despite these findings, research has largely ignored the attitudes of non-straight people regarding transgender identities. Further, while there is documented evidence of transphobia within the queer community, studies addressing this topic are rare (Wang-Jones et al., 2018; Tebbe & Moradi, 2011; Warriner et al., 2013). It is for that reason that this thesis aims to explore attitudes toward transgender individuals in the context of masculinity endorsement and gender norm perception, further aiming to close the research gap concerning non-straight attitudes, by shifting the focus away from hetero samples and focusing on the attitudes of gay men instead.

Traditional Masculinity

The literature on gender norms asserts that apart from being an important social framework, gender norms reflect societal expectations and thus govern social and individual behavior (Thepsourinthone et al., 2022). Masculinity is frequently depicted in terms of autonomy, aggression, and power leading many men to establish their masculinity by adopting these very stereotypes (Borinca et al., 2020; Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2019; Lewis et

al., 2018). Moreover, the literature suggests that masculinity is commonly equated with heterosexuality, a notion that is supported by empirical evidence, which identifies heterosexuality as an important component of traditional masculinity (Borinca et al., 2020; Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2019). Moreover, gender theories have historically positioned masculinity hierarchically above femininity, reflecting the sentiment of masculinity as an indicator of status as well as mirroring the hierarchical construction and perception of gender norms (Hoskin, 2019). Scholarly works on masculinity perception hold that it is frequently understood as elusive and precarious, requiring constant as well as public affirmation and validation to remain kept (Borinca et al., 2020; Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2019). The precarious manhood hypothesis expands on this perception of masculinity by defining it as socially precarious and asserting that traditional masculinity must be earned and validated through public displays, putting men who deviate from these stereotypes at greater risk of gender-based threats. The hypothesis further stresses the importance of public demonstration and validation as well as the ease with which masculinity can be lost. Consequently, establishing and maintaining masculinity, demands constant vigilance in the face of various expectations, resulting in a fragility unique to the gender norm of masculinity (Borinca et al., 2020; Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2019; Hoskin, 2019; Konopka et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2023; Wellman & McCoy, 2014).

Gender Norm Transgressions & Gender Threat

Existing studies consistently demonstrate that, beyond its fragile construction and societal demands, masculinity is defined by its rigidity, as evidenced by the vast pressure, that especially young men, feel to conform to traditional masculinity (Borinca et al., 2020; Thepsourinthone et al., 2022). Additionally, research findings document the negative impact of gender policing among men, linking it to psychological distress across various stages of life (Lewis et al., 2018). Empirical evidence suggests that gender transgressions committed

by men, are perceived as graver, and are frequently followed by discriminatory or violent behavior, from family, friends, and even strangers. Moreover, studies have linked masculine gender transgressions, especially when perceived as feminine to increased experiences of discrimination, violence, and declining mental health. (Hoskin, 2019; Thepsourinthone et al., 2022). Research into male perceptions of gender norm transgressions and gender threats holds that men who endorse traditional masculinity norms consistently demonstrate negative attitudes toward gender norm violations (Borinca et al., 2020). In addition, cumulative evidence points to men responding to perceived threats to their masculinity by engaging in compensatory behaviors. The literature has termed this inclination masculine overcompensation and further maintains that it oftentimes manifests in exaggerated displays and support of stereotypical masculinity, impulsive or aggressive behavior as well as anti-femininity sentiments and prejudice against sexual minorities, particularly gay men. Supporting this notion, various studies indicate that men, especially those holding traditional views about gender, respond to supposed threats to their masculinity by increasing their explicit support for traditional gender norms as well as expressing prejudice towards femininity and sexual minorities (Harrison & Michelson, 2022; Jones et al., 2023; Konopka et al., 2019; Lewis et al., 2018).

Anti-femininity

The existing body of literature concerning masculinity maintains that it is often constructed in opposition to femininity, making anti-femininity a central aspect of masculine gender identity and expression. Indeed, empirical evidence shows that men, motivated by the desire to exclude femininity from their gender identity, feel a greater need to distinguish between masculine and feminine traits (Borinca et al., 2020; Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2019). Consequently, demonstrating masculinity for many becomes synonymous with rejecting feminine traits, indicating that for some men the continuous avoidance of femininity is an

essential component of preserving their masculinity (Borinca et al., 2020). Furthermore, scholarly explorations have established the anti-femininity mandate, as a cross-cultural masculinity norm, revealing that particularly gender non-conforming men are affected by the anti-femininity sentiment of traditional masculinity (Broussard & Warner, 2018; Konopka et al., 2019). Building on this research findings show that gender nonconformity and feminine behaviors in men are frequently perceived as an indicator of same-sex attraction, especially by straight men (Broussard & Warner, 2018). Scholars postulate that stereotypes associating gay men with femininity contribute to antigay attitudes, causing straight men, particularly those high in traditional masculinity endorsement to distance themselves due to a fear of being associated with femininity and consequently mislabeled as gay (Borinca et al., 2020; Hunt et al., 2016). Further, a review of the literature shows that gay men have been historically excluded from traditional masculinity as avoiding femininity is often equated with avoiding homosexuality (Borinca et al., 2020; Thepsourinthone et al., 2022).

Explorations concerning the perception of gender nonconformity among men, demonstrate that gender non-conforming men continuously face prejudice, especially if their behavior is interpreted as feminine. Empirical evidence shows that straight men generally evaluate feminine men more negatively, oftentimes assuming them to be gay when information about sexual orientation is absent (Broussard & Warner, 2018). Furthermore, scholarly inquiry into the antifemininity norm embedded within traditional masculinity has consistently linked it to increased prejudice toward sexual minorities with research findings consistently demonstrating that threats to gender prototypicality, such as exposure to femininity, increase anti-gay attitudes among straight men (Borinca et al., 2020; Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2019; Konopka et al., 2019). Moreover, empirical findings indicate that conformity to traditional masculinity is associated with sensitivity toward identity misclassification and negative opinions of sexual minorities, leading some scholars to characterize traditional masculinity as

inherently homophobic with research findings supporting this perspective by revealing men to be sensitive to behaviors that might lead to mislabeling (Borinca et al., 2020; Conlin et al., 2020; Thepsourinthone et al., 2022). Collective research supports the idea that the sexual prejudice embedded within traditional masculinity is credited to perceived violations of traditional gender norms with antifemininity as well as homophobia functioning as defense mechanisms. This manifests in straight men consciously avoiding feminine traits to avoid being mislabeled as gay as well as establish and maintain their masculine gender identity (Borinca et al., 2020; Broussard & Warner, 2018; Conlin et al., 2020; Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2019; Hunt et al., 2016; Konopka et al., 2019; Thepsourinthone et al., 2022).

Social Change

Recent years have seen a reinterpretation of masculine gender expression which has affected the perception of masculinity norms and has led to a widespread sentiment of masculinity norms becoming more feminine (Borinca et al., 2020; Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2019). Contrary however research outcomes show that men's self-ratings of traditionally feminine characteristics have remained steady, and the social dichotomization of femininity and masculinity remains (Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2019; Thepsourinthone et al., 2022). Studies on men's reactions to changing masculinity norms are limited and produce mixed findings, nonetheless, collectively implying that endorsement of traditional masculinity influences the emotional and behavioral responses of men. Results demonstrate that men who exhibit anti-femininity endorsement engage in defensive behavior in reaction to the perceived feminization of masculinity norms; with scholars further suggesting that this response may influence attitudes toward sexual minorities, highlighting the necessity to consider social change as well as gender norm perception when exploring the impact of traditional masculinity endorsement on men's attitudes (Borinca et al., 2020; Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2019; Iacoviello et al., 2019; Thepsourinthone et al., 2022).

Traditional Masculinity Endorsement Among Gay Men

Scholarly work regarding the perception of gay men maintains that there is a widespread sentiment of same-sex attraction equaling a departure from traditional gender norms, specifically masculinity (Sánchez, 2009). The literature further asserts that there is a common perception of gay men being more feminine than their straight counterparts (Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2019; Thepsourinthone et al., 2022). While there have been studies, suggesting a higher level of gender non-conformity among gay men, study results also show that the endorsement of traditional masculinity among gay men is more common than widely assumed (Sánchez, 2009). Furthermore, the limited research on how gay men experience masculinity suggests a complex relationship, revealing that while valuing masculinity, gay men continuously face social issues related to it. Study results suggest that the mutual influence of perceived and desired masculinity as well as childhood gender role socialization lead to psychological adversity in the form of gender role anxiety, highlighting the need for explorations on how the endorsement of heteronormative ideals affects sexual minorities (Lewis et al., 2018; Sánchez, 2009).

Contrary to their widespread perception as effeminate, the available data shows that gay men's perception and embodiment of traditional masculinity commonly parallels that of straight men. Notably, a few studies have indicated that for a subset of gay men masculinity is achieved by 'straight acting', which entails a mimicking of heteronormative masculinity, and thus contributes to the reinforcement of heterosexist ideas about gender norms among gay men (Thepsourinthone et al., 2022; Sánchez, 2016).

Thepsourinthone et al. (2022) investigated the construction and experience of gender norms among gay men, focusing on masculinity and internalized homonegativity. The researchers interviewed 32 self-identified gay men about their perceptions and experiences concerning gender norms. Participants highlighted the restrictive nature of gender norms by

defining masculinity through actions, communication styles, lifestyle choices, and physical attributes. Further, while some stressed the importance of masculinity in the queer social order, others thought that embracing femininity helped them blend in socially outside of the community. In their responses participants further addressed the fear of appearing feminine in public, the formation of a masculine character as a protection tactic, and the shame associated with male femininity. The results of the study highlight the intricate interplay between conforming for social acceptance and embracing femininity among gay men, while also calling for further exploration of masculinity endorsement among gay men (Thepsourinthone et al., 2022).

Antifemininity

Similar to straight men, gay men, particularly those identifying as very masculine show a preference for masculine features, as well as a bias against femininity. Scholarly work has termed this bias among gay men 'femiphobia' or 'sissyphobia,' maintaining it has been marginalizing feminine gay men for decades (Hoskin, 2019; Sánchez, 2016). Supporting this notion studies on personal advertisements and online communities reveal that some gay men express negativity towards stereotypically effeminate behavior, preferring more masculine partners and reflecting internalized homophobia (Hunt et al., 2016; Sánchez, 2009).

The literature has offered several explanations, with some arguing that negative childhood experiences with gender-atypical conduct lead to rejection, resulting in some gay men actively distancing themselves from femininity. Another theory connects femiphobia to a greater social tendency for hypermasculinity, which is reinforced by gay-targeted media.

Yet others posit that anti-femininity is caused by internalized homophobia, a notion supported by studies that link masculine consciousness and unfavorable sentiments about effeminacy to internalized homophobia (Sanchez, 2016; Thepsourinthone et al., 2022).

Hoskin (2019), aimed to fill the research gap on anti-femininity among gay men and explored

the interplay of anti-femininity and discrimination in the queer community. The researchers conducted 38 in-depth interviews with respondents characterizing anti-femininity as a regulatory and discriminatory force in LGBTQIA+ communities as well as society as a whole (Hoskin, 2019). Further studies found support for the link between anti-femininity and discrimination suggesting them to be contributors to gender-related stress, as well as the normalization of heteronormative masculinity norms among gay men (Thepsourinthone et al., 2022).

Attitudes Toward Transgender Individuals

The existing body of literature surrounding the societal perception of transgender individuals maintains that trans individuals are frequently perceived as gender transgressors, challenging traditional expectations of gender identity and expression (Konopka et al., 2019). Scholarly clarification attempts are based on social identity theory and self-categorization theory, which claim that individuals devalue those who are thought to be blurring group borders, a concept known as distinctiveness threat, which positions transgender people as violators of binary gender distinctions. (Broussard & Warner, 2018).

The Role of Gender Identity & Traditional Gender Norm Adherence

The growing body of literature concerning perceptions and attitudes toward trans identities consistently points to gender identity as predictive of attitudes toward transgender individuals (Harrison & Michelson, 2020). Perez-Arche & Miller (2021) explored factors impacting opinions about transgender and nonbinary people, discovering that gender identity significantly influenced perceptions toward transgender individuals among their sample, with their findings suggesting higher levels of masculinity endorsement as well as anti-egalitarianism as predictive of negative opinions toward transgender identities (Perez-Arche & Miller 2021). Echoing this, research findings consistently show that cismen exhibit lower support for trans rights along with more negative attitudes toward trans people than

ciswomen do, especially if they perceive a threat to their masculinity (Broussard & Warner, 2018; Conlin et al., 2020; Harrison & Michelson, 2020). Additionally, research findings suggest that gender threat might be a stronger predictor of transphobia among men than gender identity alone, as studies found that men with strong masculine gender identity are more vulnerable to gender threats in the form of transgender identities than others (Harrison & Michelson, 2020; Konopka et al., 2019). By the same token, emerging empirical evidence suggests that opinions toward transgender individuals are further formed by adherence to traditional gender norms (Harrison & Michelson, 2020). Some scholars go a step further, positioning traditional gender norm adherence at the center of negative attitudes toward transgender people (Tebbe & Moradi, 2011). Indeed study outcomes indicate that adherence to traditional gender norms and roles significantly predicts negative opinions toward transgender people, causing feelings of discomfort and perceptions of undermining binary gender construction (Conlin et al., 2020; Harrison & Michelson, 2020; Wellman & McCoy, 2014). Supporting this the literature notes that gender essentialist beliefs, which are prevalent in traditional gender ideology, hold that gender categories are permanent, defined by sex and biology, and that gender distinctions are innate and unchangeable. While these subjective perceptions of gender have not been substantiated by empirical evidence the endorsement of gender essentialism has been linked to increased hostility toward transgender people (Perez-Arche & Miller, 2021). Additionally, the literature maintains that transgender people face prejudice when they are perceived to be deviating from assigned sex roles or failing to adhere to established gender norms connected with their gender identification, illustrating the complexities of societal attitudes toward gender identity and expression (Broussard & Warner, 2018).

Transphobia within the Queer Community

Although sparse, there is empirical as well as anecdotal evidence suggesting conflict over transgender equality within the queer community with documented cases such as an anonymous gay group petitioning LGBTQIA+ advocacy organizations to "Drop the T" due to worries about traditional gender norms. The limited literature asserts that transphobia within the queer community might be attributed to perceived gender transgressions (Wang-Jones et al., 2018). Supporting this empirical evidence shows that some members of the LGBTQ+ community perceive transgender identities as distinct from the rest, regarding them as either being too queer or not queer enough as well as considering their existence a threat to the queer community (Wang-Jones et al., 2018; Warriner et al., 2013).

The Present Thesis

The present thesis aims to explore whether and how gay men's attitudes towards transgender individuals are impacted by their endorsement of traditional masculinity norms as well as their perception of contemporary gender norms. Building on the existing body of research we propose two main effects: one of traditional masculinity endorsement as well as one of gender norm perception. Going beyond this we propose that there is an interaction between traditional masculinity endorsement as well as contemporary gender norm perception on attitudes toward transgender individuals among gay men.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1a (Main Effect – Traditional Masculinity)

Gay men who show high endorsement of traditional masculinity norms are expected to exhibit stronger negative attitudes toward transgender individuals.

Hypotheses 2a (Main Effect – Gender Norm perception)

Compared to gay men receiving information suggesting the persistence of traditional masculinity norms for men, gay men exposed to information suggesting a feminization of masculinity norms, will exhibit stronger negative attitudes toward transgender individuals.

Hypotheses 3a (Interaction Effect: Traditional Masculinity*Gender norm perception)

In contrast to gay men who score low in the endorsement of traditional masculinity norms and are exposed to the stability condition, gay men who score high in the endorsement of traditional masculinity and are exposed to the feminization condition will show significantly stronger negative attitudes toward transgender individuals.

Method

Participants

Due to the uniqueness of our participant criteria—adults who identify as gay cisgender men—recruitment for this study proved more complicated than initially assumed. Upon concluding the data collection period, our initial sample consisted of $N = 208$ participants. Following the removal of participants who did not match our specific requirements, our final sample comprised $N = 144$ gay cisgender men from the United States. The participants ranged in age from 19 to 81 years ($M = 38.77$, $SD = 13.85$). As indicated in Appendix A we used an online questionnaire created on the platform Qualtrics (<https://www.qualtrics.com>) to ensure effective and quick data collection, attract an array of participants, and thus improve the generalizability of our findings. In addition, the survey was constructed and presented in English.

Study design

The current thesis utilized a quasi-experimental between-subjects design. The first independent variable used standardized scores to examine participants' endorsement of traditional masculinity as a continuous measure. The second independent variable made use of two distinct conditions to manipulate participants' perceptions of contemporary gender

norms for men. Half of the participants were subjected to the *stability condition*, emphasizing men's adherence to traditional gender norms. The other half of the participants were exposed to the *feminization condition*, which suggested a shift away from masculine and toward feminine gender norms for men. Finally, participants' perceptions and gender beliefs toward transgender individuals were used as the dependent variable.

Procedure

Participants for this study were recruited through the online platform Prolific, which allows for precise participant characteristic specifications. Participation in the study was voluntary, and completion of the questionnaire was reimbursed with a sum of \$1.20. Before engaging with the study material, participants were asked to provide their informed consent as well as demographic data, namely age, gender identity, sexual orientation, and nationality.

There were four distinct sections to the questionnaire. The first section measured participants' endorsement of traditional masculinity norms. Following this, participants were then randomly assigned to either of the two experimental conditions of our experimental manipulation of gender norms (stability vs. feminization). To ensure that participants actively engaged with the material presented, a mandatory reading period of one minute was added. The experimental manipulation was followed by a manipulation check. The final part of the questionnaire gauged participants' perceptions and gender beliefs toward transgender individuals. The study was thoroughly reviewed and approved by the University of Groningen's ethics committee.

Material & Stimuli

In total, we used three measures to assess our hypotheses – endorsement of traditional masculinity norms (IV₁), gender norms (IV₂), as well as perception and gender beliefs towards transgender individuals (DV). Additionally, we measured the effectiveness of our experimental manipulation with a manipulation check.

Endorsement of Traditional Masculinity

To assess participants' endorsement of traditional masculinity norms we utilized the Male Role Norms Inventory (MRNI) (Thompson & Pleck, 1987). Participants were presented with 26 items (e.g., “*It bothers me when a man does something I consider feminine*”, “*I might find it a little silly or embarrassing if a male friend of mine cried over a sad/love scene in a movie*”) and asked to signify their agreement on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Our sample showed an average score of ($\alpha = 0.93$, $M = 3.30$, $SD = 0.99$) with higher scores on this measure indicating a stronger endorsement of traditional masculinity norms.

Gender norm perception

As part of the experimental manipulation respondents were randomized to one of two conditions (stability vs. feminization) of our second independent variable, gender norms. Both groups were presented with a fabricated article adopted from Falomir-Pichastor et al. (2019). The one-page text, supposedly extracted from a sociological journal, summarizes the findings of a global investigation into how gender identity changed in Western societies between 1990 and 2010. This made-up study allegedly evaluated important characteristics that set men and women apart, including physical attributes, emotionality, household chores, romantic relationships, family, childcare, and the importance of a career. The findings were represented graphically on a continuum, showing how men's gender norms changed over time, moving from masculinity to femininity (Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2019). Participants in the stability condition were presented with information emphasizing the steadfastness of traditional masculinity norms among men, while respondents in the feminization condition received information, implying a shift toward more feminine gender expression among men.

Manipulation Check

To ensure the success of our manipulation, we asked respondents to convey their understanding of the information presented. The manipulation check (MC) included four items (e.g., *"Men's behavior has changed in recent years."*, *"Today, men are still as masculine as they were in the past."*) which respondents were asked to rate on a Likert Scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Absolutely). Participants were further encouraged to share personal experiences (e.g., *"These findings certainly echo something you have already seen for yourself. Please provide a short example that illustrates the study's findings:"*), supporting the information presented in the made-up articles. The principal component analysis identified one item with poor loading, which was consequently removed from further analysis. The remaining three items average a response of ($\alpha = 0.95$, $M = 4.29$, $SD = 1.34$).

Attitudes Toward Transgender Individuals

We used the sex/gender beliefs subscale of the Transgender Attitudes and Beliefs Scale (TABS), to measure attitudes toward transgender individuals among our participants. Participants were presented with 10 items (e.g., *"Humanity is only male or female; there is nothing in between."*, *"Whether a person is male, or female depends strictly on their external sex parts"*) and instructed to report their agreement on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (absolutely). To reflect overall attitudes and beliefs toward transgender people, an average score of all items was computed, with a higher score indicating more negative attitudes and beliefs ($\alpha = 0.89$, $M = 2.36$, $SD = 2.04$).

Results

The Assumption and manipulation checks were carried out in JAMOV and SPSS. The main analysis, which consisted of an ANCOVA was performed in JAMOV.

Assumption Checks

To ensure the robustness of our Analysis, we performed tests on the assumptions underlying an ANCOVA, specifically the assumptions of normality of residuals, homogeneity of variances, outliers, autocorrelation, and multicollinearity. The first check revealed our dependent variable gender beliefs did not follow a normal distribution (K-S test = 0.09, $p = 0.16$; Shapiro-Wilk test = 0.93, $p < .001$). A Levene's test indicated the assumption of residuals homogeneity met ($F(1, 142) = 0.002, p = .97$). Further there were no outliers (max. Cook's distance = .07), and tests for autocorrelation (Durbin Watson = 1.96) and multicollinearity (VIF = 1.03) revealed no assumption violations.

Manipulation Check

An ANOVA was performed to determine if the manipulation worked as intended. The analysis revealed a significant difference between conditions ($F(1, 142) = 296.28, p < .001$). The significantly higher score of participants in the feminization condition ($M = 5.65, SD = 0.98$) compared to the traditional masculinity condition ($M = 2.78, SD = 1.81$) indicated that they believed masculine gender norms to have become more feminine in recent years. This suggests that participants comprehended the information as intended, per the conditions to which they were exposed.

Main Analysis

To test our hypotheses, we used a full-factorial ANCOVA with our experimental manipulation of gender norms (feminization condition = -1, traditional masculinity condition = +1) as a fixed factor and endorsement of masculinity (standardized scores) as a moderator. We defined a model for this analysis that tested all of the main effects as well as the interaction effect (see Tables 1 & 2).

Hypothesis 1a (Main Effect – Traditional Masculinity)

Our analysis revealed a significant main effect of endorsement of traditional masculinity norms on perceptions and gender beliefs towards transgender individuals ($F(1, 140) = 57.73, p < .001, \eta^2p = .29$). Specifically, the results revealed that among our sample gay men who exhibited a stronger endorsement of traditional masculinity norms showed stronger negative attitudes towards transgender individuals ($\beta = 0.55$), thus providing support for hypothesis 1a.

Hypotheses 2a (Main Effect – Perceived Feminization)

Investigating the main effect of perceived feminization on perceptions and gender beliefs towards transgender individuals, the analysis revealed no significant main effect of gender norms on perceptions and gender beliefs toward transgender individuals ($F(1, 140) = .89, p = .35$), therefore not supporting hypothesis 2a.

Hypotheses 3a (Interaction Effect – Traditional Masculinity*Gender Norms)

Assessing the proposed interaction between endorsement of traditional masculinity norms and gender norm perception, the analysis found no statistically significant interaction between endorsement of traditional masculinity norms and gender norm perception on attitudes toward transgender individuals among our sample ($F(1, 140) = 1.84, p = .18$)

Table 1*ANCOVA for Sex/Gender Beliefs*

Source	SS	df	F	Sig.	η^2p
ETM ^a	73.37	1	57.73	<.001	0.29
GN ^b	1.13	1	0.89	0.35	0.006
ETM*GN	2.34	1	1.84	0.18	0.013

a. ETM = Endorsement of traditional masculinity norms

b. GN = Gender Norms

Table 2*Parameter estimates*

Source	β	df	Sig.
ETM	0.55	140	<.001
GN	0.14	140	0.35
SC* ETM	0.20	140	0.18

Discussion

This thesis employed a quasi-experimental approach to investigate whether and how traditional masculinity endorsement as well as gender norm perception may impact gay men's attitudes toward transgender individuals. For this, we proposed two main effects: one of endorsement of traditional masculinity and the other of gender norm perceptions, as well as an interaction effect between these two on the attitudes of gay men toward transgender individuals. We further aimed to offer a comprehensive understanding of trans attitude formation as well as fill the gap in research by focusing on the attitudes of gay men.

Findings

Our findings lend support to the first hypothesis by revealing a positive link between endorsement of traditional masculinity and negative attitudes towards trans people. In other words, the more gay men in our sample endorsed traditional masculinity, the stronger their negative attitudes toward trans people. This is consistent with the perspective of precarious manhood, highlighting the biased character of traditional masculinity. Further, our results expand on the precarious manhood hypothesis by suggesting that the prejudice inherent in traditional masculinity can be applied to gay men as well while also, affecting their attitudes, particularly toward trans identities. Contrary to previous research findings, learning either about the feminization or the stability of male gender norms did not lead to more negative

assessments toward transgender individuals in our sample. This implies that while gender norm perception might impact the attitude of straight men, toward trans people this might not be the case for gay men. This further implies that the notion of gender threat in the form of trans identities might not hold for non-straight individuals. Finally, we found no significant support for our third hypothesis, challenging our proposed interaction effect of perceptions of gender norms and masculinity endorsement on negative sentiments toward trans people among gay men. Not finding a significant effect on both hypotheses 2 and 3 might suggest that while the combination of gender identity and gender norm perception is predictive of sentiments about transgender people in straight populations, this combination of predictors might lack predictive power among non-straight populations.

Theoretical implications

The theoretical foundation of this thesis was laid by research concerning the precarious nature of masculinity as well as the relationship between anti-femininity, gender norm perception and threat as well as prejudice toward sexual minorities. With our findings, we lend support to the precarious manhood hypothesis by emphasizing the discriminatory character of traditional masculinity and extending its applicability to gay men and their attitudes toward sexual minorities, specifically transgender identities. Further, our findings lend support to the limited empirical evidence suggesting traditional masculinity among gay men, as well as transphobic sentiments among members of the gay community. Moreover, our findings suggest that other than in straight populations, the perception and adherence to traditional gender ideation might be understood differently. Consequently, our findings, while supporting the notion of traditional masculinity as a predictor for negative attitudes toward trans individuals among gay men, suggest that factors other than gender norm perception and gender threat impact gay men's sentiments toward trans individuals.

Practical implications

Addressing the theoretical basis of our findings can help inform practical interventions targeted at reducing negative perceptions against trans people both within and outside the LGBTQ+ community. Strategies that confront and challenge masculinity norms have the potential to promote more inclusive attitudes. Further efforts aimed at education can make use of these findings, by addressing the proposed negative consequences of traditional masculinity endorsement and incorporating them into their educational work.

Limitations

Our studies had various strengths, starting with the strong theoretical basis the present thesis was grounded in. Further, the use of an online survey allowed for quick and efficient collection of data. Additionally, the scales we chose had been established and proved reliable and consistent when it came to capturing our variables of interest. Moreover, we made use of a unique sample, by focusing on the attitudes of gay men. Despite our strong theoretical base and rare sample, this thesis had its limitations. The online recruitment approach may create selection bias, and participant replies may be influenced by the reward offered. Furthermore, our small sample size of 144 may limit the validity and generalizability of our findings. Additionally, while we focused on gay men, our participant pool was limited to the United States, not offering a wide variety of cultural variations to our findings. When analyzing the data, these restrictions should be kept in mind.

Future Research

Future studies might increase our understanding of attitudes towards trans people by investigating the role of gender (non)conformity as a predictor as existing research, such as that of Broussard and Warner (2018), suggests that transgender people who are viewed as nonconforming may encounter more prejudice. Further, with evidence pointing to the queer community perceiving trans identities as distinctive (Warriner et al., 2013), investigating the

impact of distinctiveness threats both inside and outside the community might yield fruitful results. Additionally, given research results linking antifemininity in gay men to internalized homophobia (Hunt et al., 2016) as well as consistently linking anti-femininity to prejudice in straight men (Borinca et al., 2020; Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2019; Konopka et al., 2019) future research into the role of internalized homophobia might be beneficial. Finally, with studies linking the negative attitudes of men toward sexual minorities to gender threat (Konopka et al., 2019), exploring the mechanism behind gender threat in non-straight individuals as well as its consequences might add valuable information.

Conclusion

Taken together, the present thesis aided in illuminating the impact of traditional masculinity as well as gender norm perceptions on men's attitudes toward trans people. While the endorsement of traditional masculinity norms was found to positively predict unfavorable sentiments toward trans individuals, results demonstrated unexpected findings involving the manipulation of gender norm perceptions, highlighting the complexities involved. Theoretical implications highlight the discriminatory and compensatory nature of traditional masculinity, calling for actions to create a more inclusive LGBTQ+ community. Further, our findings laid the ground for interventions as well as education work centered around the consequences of traditional masculinity endorsement. Despite its limitations, this thesis lays the groundwork for future research into gender (non)conformity, gender threat, and internalized homophobia, underlining the significance of understanding and supporting multiple identities within the LGBTQ+ community.

References

- Borinca, I., Iacoviello, V., & Valsecchi, G. (2020). Men's discomfort and anticipated sexual misclassification due to counter-stereotypical behaviors: The interplay between traditional masculinity norms and perceived men's Femininization. *Sex Roles*, 85(3-4), 128-141. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-020-01210-5>
- Broussard, K. A., & Warner, R. H. (2018). Gender nonconformity is perceived differently for cisgender and transgender targets. *Sex Roles*, 80(7-8), 409-428. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-018-0947-z>
- Conlin, S. E., Douglass, R. P., & Moscardini, E. H. (2020). Predicting transphobia among cisgender women and men: The roles of feminist identification and gender conformity. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, 25(1), 5-19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19359705.2020.1780535>
- Falomir-Pichastor, J. M., Berent, J., & Anderson, J. (2019). Perceived men's feminization and attitudes toward homosexuality: Heterosexual men's reactions to the decline of the anti-femininity norm of masculinity. *Sex Roles*, 81(3-4), 208-222. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-018-0985-6>
- Harrison, B. F., & Michelson, M. R. (2020). Gender roles, masculinity, and support for transgender rights. *Transforming Prejudice*, 83-108. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190068882.003.0004>
- Hoskin, R. A. (2019). Femmephobia: The role of anti-femininity and gender policing in LGBTQ+ people's experiences of discrimination. *Sex Roles*, 81(11-12), 686-703. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-019-01021-3>
- Hunt, C. J., Fasoli, F., Carnaghi, A., & Cadinu, M. (2016). Masculine self-presentation and distancing from femininity in gay men: An experimental examination of the role of

masculinity threat. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 17(1), 108-112.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0039545>

Iacoviello, V., Valsecchi, G., Berent, J., Anderson, J., & Falomir-Pichastor, J. M. (2019).

Heterosexual men's attitudes towards homosexuality and ingroup distinctiveness: The role of perceived men's feminisation. *Psychology & Sexuality*, 11(1-2), 45-61.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/19419899.2019.1675749>

Jones, B. A., Cahill, L., & McDermott, D. T. (2023). Gender, traditional gender ideology,

gender essentialist beliefs, and masculinity threat as determinants of attitudes toward trans and gender diverse people in a U.K. sample. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000658>

Konopka, K., Rajchert, J., Dominiak-Kochanek, M., & Roszak, J. (2019). The role of

masculinity threat in Homonegativity and Transphobia. *Journal of Homosexuality*,

68(5), 802-829. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2019.1661728>

Lewis, B. J., Hesse, C. L., Cook, B. C., & Pedersen, C. L. (2018). Sexistential crisis: An

intersectional analysis of gender expression and sexual orientation in masculine overcompensation. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 67(1), 58-78.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2018.1525943>

The National Center of Transgender Equality. (2023, January 7). *Understanding transgender people: The basics*. National Center for Transgender Equality.

<https://transequality.org/issues/resources/understanding-transgender-people-the-basics>

Perez-Arche, H., & Miller, D. J. (2021). What predicts attitudes toward transgender and

Nonbinary people? An exploration of gender, authoritarianism, social dominance, and gender ideology. *Sex Roles*, 85(3-4), 172-189. [https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-020-](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-020-01212-3)

[01212-3](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-020-01212-3)

- Qualtrics. (2023, December 19). *Online survey software*. Retrieved December 19, 2023, from <https://www.qualtrics.com/uk/core-xm/survey-software/?rid=ip&prevsite=en&newsite=uk&geo=DE&geomatch=uk>
- Sánchez, F. J. (2016). Masculinity issues among gay, bisexual, and transgender men. *APA handbook of men and masculinities*, 339-356. <https://doi.org/10.1037/14594-016>
- Sánchez, F. J., Greenberg, S. T., Liu, W. M., & Vilain, E. (2009). Reported effects of masculine ideals on gay men. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 10(1), 73-87. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013513>
- Tebbe, E. N., & Moradi, B. (2011). Anti-transgender prejudice: A structural equation model of underlying constructs. *PsycEXTRA Dataset*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/e702692011-001>
- Thepsourinthone, J., Dune, T., Liangputtong, P., & Arora, A. (2022). It's a man's world: A qualitative study of gender and sexuality amongst Australian gay men. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(4), 2092. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19042092>
- Wang-Jones, T. “., Hauson, A. O., Ferdman, B. M., Hattrup, K., & Lowman, R. L. (2018). Comparing implicit and explicit attitudes of gay, straight, and non-monosexual groups toward transmen and transwomen. *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 19(1), 95-106. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15532739.2018.1428138>
- Warriner, K., Nagoshi, C. T., & Nagoshi, J. L. (2013). Correlates of homophobia, Transphobia, and internalized homophobia in gay or lesbian and heterosexual samples. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 60(9), 1297-1314. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2013.806177>

Wellman, J. D., & McCoy, S. K. (2014). Walking the straight and narrow: Examining the role of traditional gender norms in sexual prejudice. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 15(2), 181-190. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0031943>

Appendix A: Qualtrics Overview

As previously mentioned, this thesis made use of Qualtrics, a reliable online survey tool that is well-known for its adaptability and strong quantitative analysis features (Qualtrics, 2023). A three-part questionnaire measuring support for traditional masculinity through 26 Likert-scale items, an experimental manipulation measuring views of male gender norms, and a manipulation check was administered with the help of Qualtrics. Ten more survey items were used to examine gender perceptions of transgender people. Qualtrics is a favored tool for researchers combining survey data with platforms like SPSS because of its quantitative statistical analysis features, which have been recognized in professional and academic journals (Qualtrics, 2023).