Stereotypes of and Prejudice toward Gay and Straight Men: A Study of Stereotype Congruity and Stereotype Strength

Kathryn Suzanne Rau
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by

Kathryn Suzanne Rau

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Mary E. Kite

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

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Ball State University
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Abstract

Gender stereotypes and stereotypes associated with sexual orientation have received a great deal of research attention, but studies to date have failed to bring together three seemingly connected ideas: likeability, stereotype congruity, and stereotype strength. In order to assess the stereotypes of and attitudes toward gay and straight men, participants rated the likeability of targets who exhibited either feminine or masculine characteristics. Participants also rated gay men and straight men on a stereotype strength measure, which assessed the extent to which each group was perceived as adhering to or violating their group’s stereotypes. Results showed that women liked all targets more than men liked the targets and that women liked gay targets more than men did. Results did not indicate that feminine gay men were liked more than masculine gay men nor did it indicate that masculine straight men were liked more than feminine straight men. Results showed that femininity is a strong component of the gay male stereotype just as masculinity is a strong component of the straight male stereotype. The results from this experiment indicate that the gay feminine male stereotype is not as negative as was previously conceived (e.g., Storms, 1978).
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Gender stereotypes are complex and multi-dimensional, consisting of beliefs about women's and men's gender-associated traits, roles, physical characteristics, emotions, and cognitive abilities (see Kite, 2001). Gender-stereotypic traits, however, have received the greatest attention by researchers. The traits associated with beliefs about gender are comprised of two clusters, communal and agentic. (Bakan, 1966; Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972; Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Communal characteristics revolve around concern for the welfare of others, including such descriptors as affectionate, helpful, kind, sympathetic, interpersonally sensitive, nurturant, and gentle (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Agentic characteristics describe an assertive, controlling, and confident tendency, including such attributes as aggressive, ambitious, dominant, forceful, independent, self-sufficient, self-confident, and prone to act as a leader (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Although elements of both dimensions can be attributed to men and women, communal characteristics are most often attributed to women and agentic characteristics are most often attributed to men.

Characteristics of Gender Roles and Social Roles

Of interest to Eagly and Karau (2002) were not only the characteristics attributed to men's and women's gender roles, but also the characteristics attributed to particular social roles. Specifically, Eagly and Karau were interested in the characteristics attributed to both women and to people occupying the role of a leader. As noted above, communal characteristics are most often attributed to women; they are also attributed to people occupying traditional female roles such as mother and housewife (Eagly & Steffan, 1984). In contrast, research indicates that successful leaders are perceived to be more similar to men than women, and are believed to have
agentic characteristics such as competitive, aggressive, and self-confident, (see Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, Block, Martell, & Simon, 1989; Lee & Hoon, 1993). Because the stereotypes associated with women are primarily communal and the stereotypes associated with leaders are primarily agentic, the inconsistency between the stereotypes of women and the stereotypes of leaders could be a source of prejudice for women in leadership roles. Moreover, Eagly and Karau (2002) note, “when a stereotyped group member and an incongruent social role become joined in the mind of the perceiver, this inconsistency lowers the evaluation of the group member as an actual or potential occupant of the role” (pp. 574). Therefore, in future or current leadership roles, evaluations of the women may indeed be lower than evaluations of their male counterparts because the two roles—leader and woman—are perceived to be inconsistent or incongruent. The incongruency exists because perceivers see communal characteristics and agentic characteristics as occupying opposite ends of the interpersonal spectrum.

**Role Congruity Theory**

Eagly and Karau (2002) developed Role Congruity Theory to describe the prejudice that results when women are in positions of leadership. Their theory surmises that prejudice is most likely when women are perceived to be effective leaders. As Eagly and Karau (2002) explain, because women who are effective leaders tend to violate standards for their gender when they manifest male-stereotypical, agentic attributes and fail to manifest female-stereotypical, communal attributes, they may be unfavorably evaluated for their gender role violation, at least by those who endorse traditional gender roles. A woman who fulfills a leader role may thus elicit negative reactions, even while she may also receive some positive evaluations for her fulfillment of this role (pp. 575-576).
Role Congruity Theory predicts that successful women leaders, while receiving praise for their effective leadership skills, may accrue negative evaluations based on their exhibition of attributes that violate traditional gender roles. Research based on preference polls supports this theory. On a Gallup Poll taken from selected years between 1953 and 2000, respondents reported whether they would prefer a male or female boss (Simmons, 2001b, cited in Eagly & Karau, 2002). Data from all years suggested a preference for male bosses, though preference for male bosses was strongest in 1953 and 1975 (Simmons, 2001b, cited in Eagly & Karau, 2002). Other research indicates a preference for male leaders in political office (Simmons, 2001a, cited in Eagly & Karau, 2002). Results of these and other studies on preference for leaders suggest people are somewhat more prejudiced against female leaders than toward male leaders.

Eagly and Karau’s (2002) theory suggests that prejudice results from the incongruity between characteristics associated with gender roles and those associated with social roles. Their work to date, however, has examined the incongruity between the female gender role and the leadership role. This researcher is interested in discovering whether prejudice results from incongruity between characteristics associated with gender roles or prejudice associated with sexual orientation. In the next section, I introduce the common stereotypes associated with gay men and lesbians and the corresponding attitudes. As will be discussed, gays and lesbians are believed to have gender-associated characteristics that are incongruent with their gender.

Stereotypes of and Attitudes toward Gay Men and Lesbians

Kite and Deaux (1987) examined the link between the stereotypes associated with gay men and lesbians. Using an attribute listing measure and a component probability rating measure, Kite and Deaux showed that, generally, gay men were seen as possessing characteristics similar to heterosexual women and lesbians were seen as possessing
characteristics similar to heterosexual men. Some of the attributes mentioned for gay males included positive toward males, feminine, high-pitched voice, and feminine qualities. Some of the attributes mentioned for lesbians included positive toward females, masculine, short hair, and masculine appearance. Based on a probability measure, Kite and Deaux (1987) concluded that people believe lesbians have characteristics similar to heterosexual men. Likewise, people believe gay men have characteristics similar to heterosexual women. The perception is that lesbians violate traditional feminine gender roles, whereas gay men violate traditional masculine gender roles. Further, people tend to believe in the bipolarity of gender, reporting that what is not masculine is feminine and what is not feminine is masculine (see Deaux & Lewis, 1984; Foushee, Helmreich, & Spence, 1979, cited in Kite & Deaux, 1987). Thus, the perception is that lesbians’ traits are masculine and not feminine and gay men’s traits are feminine and not masculine.

Components of Gay Male Stereotypes

Of particular interest in this experiment were stereotypes associated with gay men as opposed to those stereotypes associated with lesbians. More research has been devoted to attitudes toward gay males, in part because of gay male stigmatization in our society (Herek, 2000). With AIDS still being a primarily gay male disease within the United States, for example, gay men are under far more scrutiny than lesbians. Another reason for higher gay male stigmatization is that gay males are perceived to violate the male gender role, which is perceived as more serious than lesbians’ violation of the female gender role (McCready, 1994; Feinman, 1984). Therefore, I wanted to study specific stereotypes associated with men, taking into account both the feminine and masculine components of those stereotypes.
Although it is important to assess stereotypes of gay men in terms of gender role expectations, it is also important to consider the multi-dimensionality of stereotypes about gay men. Although personality traits have received considerable attention because of their central role in the gay male stereotype (Simmons, 1965; Staats, 1978; Stangor, Sullivan, & Ford, 1991), stereotypes about gay males also include physical characteristics, behaviors, and attributes related to sexuality (Kite & Deaux, 1987; Madon, 1997). In addition, current research suggests that behaviors and physical characteristics may be more important than personality characteristics in determining stereotype content (Madon, 1997; McCauley, Jussim, & Lee, 1995). Madon (1997), for example, used many measures, including adjective checklists, rating scales, and free response measures, to identify the content of gay male stereotypes. Madon (1997) discovered that gay males were perceived to have positive female sex-typed qualities and were thought to violate acceptable male gender roles. Stereotypes identified included personality traits, behaviors, and physical characteristics, including talkative, gentle, fashionable, open about their feelings, artsy looking, and not macho. Madon’s experiment also evaluated the strength of these stereotypes—that is, how characteristic an attribute was of gay males. The results showed that “people associated behaviors with gay males more strongly than they associated personality traits and physical characteristics with gay males” (Madon, 1997, pp. 682). Therefore, the strongest component of the gay male stereotype seems to be perceptions of male behaviors that are similar to female behaviors and that violate traditional male roles.

Attitudes Toward Men Based on Masculinity and Femininity

Storms (1978) specifically addressed attitudes toward masculine and feminine characteristics in gay and straight men. Because sex-role violation is one of the main reasons for negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians (MacDonald & Games, 1974), Storms
hypothesized that men with feminine attributes would be viewed negatively regardless of target sexual orientation. Participants read narratives about men with various attributes and sexual experiences, including a short description about a college man, John, who was described as having stereotypic feminine interests, attitudes, and appearance. On half of these questionnaires, John was described as having primarily same-sex relations whereas on the other half John was described as having primarily other-sex relations. The other two questionnaires contained a short description about a college man, John, who was described as having stereotypic masculine interests, attitudes, and appearance. These questionnaires also were divided by type of sexual experiences. After reading the narratives about John, participants reported their liking for John and rated their own masculinity and femininity.

Storms’ results did not entirely support his hypothesis. He found that negative attitudes about femininity were far less evident than were negative attitudes about homosexuality. In addition, Storms’ research suggested that “the masculine heterosexual man was liked more than the feminine heterosexual man, but that the masculine homosexual man was liked less than the feminine homosexual man” (pp. 260). These findings suggest that attitudes are linked to whether a member of a group adheres to or violates his/ her group’s stereotypes. Indeed, Storms proposed that feminine men who turn out to be straight and masculine men who turn out to be gay are both disliked more profoundly than either feminine men who turn out to be gay or masculine men who turn out to be straight because they violate the male stereotype. Even though the violation of sex roles leads to negative evaluation of gay males, the violation of the femininity attached to their group produces even more negative attitudes. Storms suggested that the “feminine homosexual male” stereotype is powerful, and therefore, people resent having this stereotype disconfirmed (pp. 261).
Sex Differences in Attitudes Toward Gay Men

Many studies about gay men and lesbians have found a disconnect between men’s and women’s attitudes toward homosexuals; these studies show that heterosexual men display higher levels of sexual prejudice than do heterosexual women (Herek, 2000; Herek & Capitanio, 1999; Whitley & Kite, 1995, Kite and Whitley, 1998; Yang, 1998). Herek (2002), for example, assessed men’s and women’s attitudes toward gay men using a feeling thermometer technique. Although gay men were rated more negatively than lesbians, heterosexual women gave warmer ratings than heterosexual men to gay men (Herek, 2002). In addition, other attitude measures supported these findings linking heterosexual men to more negative attitudes toward gay men than heterosexual women’s attitudes toward gay men (Herek, 2002).

A meta analysis performed by Whitley and Kite (1995) also supported the claim that heterosexual men have more negative attitudes toward gay men than heterosexual women do. Whitley and Kite (1995) asserted that heterosexual men’s negative attitudes toward gay men may be caused by the greater need for men not to violate traditional gender roles than for women not to violate traditional gender roles. Heterosexual men, while holding negative attitudes toward gay men, do not hold equivalent prejudices against lesbians perhaps because lesbians are not violating traditional male gender roles (see Gentry, 1987; Herek, 1988; Kite, 1994; Whitley & Kite, 1995; Whitley, 1987).

One possible explanation for the difference between men’s and women’s attitudes toward gay men is men’s aversion to femininity in the self (Kilianski, 2003). Many researchers have observed the difference between stereotypes associated with gay men and those associated with heterosexual men, where gay men stereotypes are more feminine in interests, activities, traits, and preferences (Kilianski, 2003; Herek, 1984; Madon, 1997; Storms, 1978; Taylor, 1983).
Because targets that are perceived to possess gender-inconsistent roles and traits are thought to be more likely to be homosexual (Deaux & Lewis, 1984), heterosexual men may be rejecting feminine qualities internally in order to not be mistaken as gay, especially if not appearing to be gay is related to heterosexual masculinity (Maccoby, 1987). Thus, heterosexual men’s negative attitudes toward gay men could be due to their own concern for appearing masculine. Whatever the reason for the difference in attitudes, it is interesting that such a distinction exists in regards to attitudes toward gay men.

Current Study

The current experiment uses various components of past research to study attitudes toward homosexual and heterosexual men in terms of stereotype congruence. This experiment addresses both stereotype content and strength. The purpose of this study was to discover whether Role Congruity Theory applies to other populations who violate gender roles. Specifically, could Role Congruity Theory apply to perceptions of gay and straight men? Of interest is whether gay men who violate homosexual male stereotypes are liked less than gay men who adhere to homosexual male stereotypes. Also of interest is whether straight men who violate heterosexual male stereotypes are liked less than straight men who adhere to heterosexual male stereotypes.

In order to address concerns of previous research involving stereotypes and attitudes, this study took into consideration the multi-dimensionality of gender stereotypes. Although agentic and communal personality traits served as the basis for many of the items in the four vignettes, I also incorporated masculine and feminine roles, physical characteristics, and cognitive abilities. Inclusion of the various gender roles targets the behaviors that have been found to be so influential in previous research, as noted earlier.
The independent variables of this study were sexual orientation, target stereotype congruity, and participant gender. Because both questionnaires addressed sexual orientation in different ways, there are two variables under the heading of sexual orientation. Therefore, the first variable indicating the sexual orientation of the individual being rated will be labeled as target sexual orientation. The second variable indicating the groups, gay men and straight men, will be labeled sexual orientation. The dependent variables were likeability and stereotype strength, which was measured by the degree to which a stereotype was characteristic of a population. In this study, stereotype strength is composed of two parts, a feminine measure and a masculine measure. The main effects of target sexual orientation and participant gender on likeability were not of particular consequence in the current experiment. Likewise, the main effects of target sexual orientation and stereotype congruity—where stereotype congruity is the extent to which a target adheres to the stereotypes assigned to his group—on likeability as well as the main effects of sexual orientation and stereotype congruity on stereotype strength were not of interest. What was of value, however, were the expected interactions between target sexual orientation and participant gender on likeability, target sexual orientation and stereotype congruity on likeability, and sexual orientation and stereotype congruity on stereotype strength. Specifically, there were three hypotheses of the current study.

- **Hypothesis 1:** Likeability of the target depends on the interaction between target sexual orientation and participant gender, such that female participants will not prefer one target or another, whereas male participants will prefer straight targets to gay targets.

- **Hypothesis 2:** Likeability of the target depends on the interaction between target sexual orientation and stereotype congruity, such that the most likeable targets will be the straight man with masculine stereotypes and the gay man with feminine stereotypes. The
least likeable targets will be the straight man with feminine stereotypes and the gay man with masculine stereotypes.

- Hypothesis 3: Stereotype strength depends on the interaction between sexual orientation and stereotype congruity, where the strongest characterization will occur for straight men with masculine stereotypes and for gay men with feminine stereotypes. The weakest characterization will occur for straight men with feminine stereotypes and for gay men with masculine stereotypes.

Method

The experimental design was a 2 (Target Sexual Orientation) x 2 (Stereotype Congruity) x 2 (Participant Gender) factorial design. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions. All participants rated the likeability of the target in their assigned condition and reported their perceptions of stereotype strength.

Participants

Three hundred forty-six students (266 women, 80 men) from an introductory psychology course at a Midwestern state university participated in the experiment. Age of participants ranged from 18 to 37; however, 98.3% of students were between the ages of 18-22. Participants reported their ethnicity as follows: 91.9% White, 4.3% Black, 1.2% Hispanic, 0.3% Asian, and 2.3% Other. Participants received research credit for their participation, which fulfilled part of a course requirement.

Procedure

Participants completed the experiment in groups of 28 participants or fewer. Upon entering the room, participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions and were given the first survey. After providing anonymous demographic information, participants read a
vignette about their assigned target and answered questions about the target's perceived likeability. Participants then received the stereotype strength questionnaire. Upon completion of both surveys, participants received the debriefing form.

**Vignettes**

Each vignette described a man who had either female- or male-associated characteristics (see Appendix A). The female-associated characteristics included occupation (speech coach), personality characteristics (emotional), hobbies (visits to museums and art galleries), and roles (cooking and household decoration). The male-associated characteristics included occupation (accountant), personality characteristics (aggressive), hobbies (playing football and basketball), and roles (financial provider and household repairs). The vignettes also contained indications of the target's sexual orientation, established through the explanation of a long-term romantic relationship with either someone of the same or other sex.

**Dependent Measures**

Likeability was assessed through six questions commonly used in attitude research (see Winer, Bonner, Blaney, & Murray, 1981). Questions included general likeability of the target, willingness to meet the target, willingness to work on a job with the target, willingness to be the target's neighbor, willingness to ask advice of the target, and likelihood of becoming close friends with the target. Responses were reported on a 7-point rating scale ranging from 0 completely unlikable, definitely no, or very unlikely to 6 completely likeable, definitely yes, or very likely. Ratings were summed to create a total score with higher numbers indicating greater likeability.

Perceptions of stereotype strength were assessed for both the feminine and masculine stereotypes, using a 4-point rating scale ranging from 1 not at all characteristic to 4 very
characteristic. Participants rated the extent to which stereotypes were characteristic of both gay men and straight men. The feminine measure included the following stereotypes: emotional, cooking, creative, artsy, and verbally skilled, whereas the masculine measure included the following stereotypes: good at numbers/mathematics, athletic, handy at repairing household items, financial provider, and aggressive. Responses to the feminine stereotype measure were summed to create the feminine measure and responses to the masculine stereotype measure were summed to create the masculine measure.

**Results**

**Reliability Testing**

Reliability tests were performed on the likeability measure and both the feminine and masculine stereotype strength measures. Cronbach’s alpha for likeability items was 0.87. Cronbach’s alpha for the stereotype strength measures were as follows: gay men-feminine, alpha = 0.73; gay men-masculine, alpha = 0.70; straight men-feminine, alpha = 0.69; straight men-masculine, alpha = 0.71.

**Likeability**

Likeability was examined using a 2 (Target Sexual Orientation) by 2 (Stereotype Congruity) by 2 (Participant Gender) analysis of variance. Results showed a main effect of participant gender, $M$ for males = 24.74, $SD = 6.58$; $M$ for females = 27.23, $SD = 6.04$, $F(1, 329) = 9.89, p<.01$. Women liked all targets more than men did. This main effect was qualified by a significant interaction between target sexual orientation and participant gender, $F(1, 329) = 8.58, p<.01$. Simple effects tests showed that women and men rated the likeability of the straight man similarly, $M$ for males = 26.68, $SD = 5.36$; $M$ for females = 26.78, $SD = 5.68$. However, men, $M = 22.91$, $SD = 6.99$; $F(1, 329) = 7.40, p<.05$, liked the gay target less than did women,
$M = 27.70, SD = 6.41$. Supporting Hypothesis 1, likeability of the target depended on the interaction between target sexual orientation and participant gender.

Although not hypothesized, results revealed a significant interaction between stereotype congruity and participant gender, $F(1, 329) = 4.93, p < .05$. Simple effects tests showed that women’s liking for the stereotype congruent target, $M = 26.72, SD = 6.27$, was similar to their liking of the stereotype incongruent target, $M = 26.69, SD = 5.80$, $F(1, 329) = 1.61, n.s.$ On the other hand, men liked the stereotype congruent target, $M = 25.78, SD = 6.42$, more than they liked the stereotype incongruent target, $M = 23.18, SD = 6.55$, $F(1, 329) = 3.58, p < .10.$
It was expected that likeability of the target would depend on the interaction between target sexual orientation and stereotype congruity (Hypothesis 2). However, the interaction between these two factors was non-significant, $F(1, 329) < 1, n.s.$ Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

**Stereotype Strength**

Stereotype strength was examined by a 2 (Target Sexual Orientation) X 2 (Stereotype Congruity) X 2 (Participant Gender) mixed model analysis of variance with sexual orientation and stereotype congruity as within subjects factors and participant gender as a between subjects factor. Because stereotype congruity was divided into two components, feminine and masculine, interactions were expected to occur between these two measures and sexual orientation. There was a significant interaction between sexual orientation and stereotype congruity, $F(1, 341) = 804.36, p < .001$. Results of the masculine stereotype congruity measure differed for gay males, $M = 11.84, SD = 2.32$, and straight males, $M = 16.00, SD = 2.09$. Therefore, gay males were rated as less masculine than were straight males. Results of the feminine stereotype congruity measure also differed for gay males, $M = 16.29, SD = 2.22$, and straight males, $M = 11.27, SD = 1.91$. Gay males were rated as more feminine than were straight males.
Discussion

Expected vs. Obtained

This study examined whether likeability of gay and straight targets was affected by target stereotype congruity and the gender of the rater. Results of this study supported the hypothesis that the likeability of gay and straight targets was affected by participant gender. Female participants perceived the targets to be more likeable than men did. In addition, female participants did not prefer gay male targets or straight male targets; however, male participants preferred straight male targets over gay male targets. Therefore, results indicate a prejudice in the way men perceive gay men compared to straight men.

Results of this study did not support the hypothesis that likeability of gay and straight targets was affected by stereotype congruity. The feminine gay target was not liked any more or less than the feminine straight target and the masculine gay target was not liked any more or less
than the masculine straight target. These results suggest that gender role conformity is not a particularly strong component in the evaluation of gay and straight men.

In addition, this study examined the strength of stereotypes associated with gay and straight men. Stereotype strength was expected to be affected by sexual orientation and stereotype congruity. Results of this study supported this hypothesis because masculine stereotypes were perceived to be more characteristic of straight men and feminine stereotypes were perceived to be more characteristic of gay men.

The Role of Participant Gender on the Likeability of Gay Male and Straight Male Targets

As stated earlier, a significant interaction did occur between target sexual orientation and participant gender on the likeability of the targets. Such an effect has been noted in many other sources (see for example, Herek, 2000; Herek & Capitanio, 1999; Kite & Whitley, 1998; Whitley & Kite, 1995; Yang, 1998). In response to questions about personal discomfort, Herek (2000) found differences between male and female participants. Specifically, men reported significantly more discomfort around gay males than did women. Although a reverse trend was significant for discomfort around lesbians—that is, women felt more discomfort than did men—the discrepancy was greater for gay men than it was for lesbians. As mentioned earlier in this paper, Herek also used feeling thermometers to rate reactions to gay men and lesbians from male and female participants; he found that women’s mean thermometer ratings were warmer than men’s mean thermometer ratings for both gay men and lesbians. Although women’s ratings of gay men were slightly higher than their ratings of lesbians, men’s ratings of lesbians were higher than their ratings of gay men. Overall, however, the discrepancy between women’s ratings and men’s ratings of gay men was greatest. This means that men’s ratings of gay men were significantly lower than were the ratings of any other group.
Herek’s (2000) research further validates the main effect I found in regards to participant gender and likeability. As noted above, women reported warmer ratings of gay men and lesbians than men did (Herek, 2000). The same trend was discovered in my results except involving different target groups. In the current study, male and female participants rated only men, but overall, women’s ratings of both straight male targets and gay male targets were higher than men’s ratings of either target.

Whitley and Kite (1995) also found significant support for sex differences in ratings of gay men. These authors reviewed the literature as it related to sex differences in attitudes toward homosexuality. Although Oliver and Hyde’s (1993) review of this literature found a near-zero mean effect size for sex differences in attitudes toward homosexuality (as cited in Whitley & Kite, 1995), Whitley and Kite (1995) drew the opposite conclusion. Whitley and Kite’s analysis showed that men do have more negative attitudes toward homosexuality than do women.

**The Role of Stereotype Congruity on the Likeability of Gay Male and Straight Male Targets**

Results from this study did not support the expected interaction between target sexual orientation and stereotype congruity. This research contradicts the findings of Storms (1978), who found that feminine heterosexual men were disliked more than masculine heterosexual men and masculine gay men were disliked more than feminine gay men. My results indicated no such effect. In this study, masculine heterosexual men were liked no more than masculine gay men and feminine gay men were liked no more than feminine straight men. Storms (1978) surmised that femininity may be a strongly disapproved characteristic of heterosexual men, which could have contributed to the significant differences in ratings of masculine and feminine heterosexual men. Such a discrepancy was not found in this experiment, suggesting perhaps that people are not as strongly opposed to femininity in heterosexual men as they were when Storms’
experiment was conducted. In addition he proposed that instead of gay males being disliked because they did not exhibit traditional gender roles, gay men were disliked more profoundly when they exhibited masculine characteristics as opposed to feminine characteristics because this violated the gay-feminine stereotype (Storms, 1978). Support for this idea was not found in this experiment, suggesting perhaps that the gay-feminine stereotype is not as powerful as Storms proposed.

Due to a lack of evidence supporting the expected interaction between target sexual orientation and stereotype congruity, this researcher wonders whether Eagly and Karau’s (2002) Role Congruity Theory can adequately apply to the stereotypes associated with gay men and straight men. Recall that Role Congruity Theory presupposes that two groups, namely females and leaders, are incongruous, and female leaders would be disliked because successful fulfillment of the leadership role indicates violation of the female gender role (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Because communal traits are commonly associated with women and agentic traits are commonly associated with men and leaders, women leaders are disliked more than men leaders because the stereotypes associated with women and leaders are incongruous to each other.

What I really wanted to discover was whether the gay male targets with masculine characteristics would be disliked more than the gay male targets with feminine characteristics, which would have supported the implications of Role Congruity Theory. However, results of this experiment did not support such an expectation, suggesting that the gay-feminine stereotype is not inherently powerful and furthermore, that it does not contain the same potency as gender roles and some social roles.
The Role of Sexual Orientation and Stereotype Congruity on Stereotype Strength

Results from this experiment indicated that there was a significant interaction between sexual orientation and stereotype congruity on stereotype strength. Madon's (1997) study on the content and strength of gay male stereotypes found that there are two subtypes that combine to form the gay male characterization. Madon's (1997) factor analysis found that gay males are characterized by female sex-typed qualities and are also perceived to violate acceptable male gender roles. These results further support the current findings that female stereotypes are perceived to be more characteristic of gay men than they are of straight men. Also, these findings showed that the masculine stereotypes were more strongly associated with straight men than they were for gay men, giving further support for Madon's (1997) study because they show that it is important for males to adhere to gender roles and that there may be something about gay males that goes against these gender roles.

Whitley and Kite (1995) found that violating gender roles is more serious for men than for women. This research suggests that men violating gender stereotypes is less accepted than women violating gender stereotypes. Thus perhaps the male gender role is stronger for straight men, particularly because of the general misconception that what is not masculine is feminine (see Deaux & Lewis, 1984; Foushee, Helmreich, & Spence, 1979, cited in Kite & Deaux, 1987). Another link ties in the belief that gay males are more like heterosexual women than heterosexual men (Kite & Deaux, 1987). Gay men are more feminine and feminine is not masculine; therefore, gay men are not masculine.

Limitations and Closing

Several limiting factors could have contributed to the outcomes reported in this study. First, it is important to note that, like much of the research conducted academically, the sample
for this experiment consisted of college students and may not generalize to the entire population (Sears, 1986). In addition, this study failed to take into account the sexual orientation of the participants, which could have had an effect on the results. Also, there may have been limitations in the way descriptors in the vignettes were worded. Madon (1997) found support for the idea that behaviors are more strongly associated with gay men than are personality characteristics. A more extensive description of behaviors instead of the mixture of occupation, personality traits, hobbies, and roles, could have produced differences with respect to the likeability of gay and straight men.

In addition, although the descriptors used in the vignettes for gay and straight men with feminine and masculine stereotypes were a composite of terms from various academic sources, (see for example, Kite, 2001; Madon, 1997), there is not yet a standardized way to characterize feminine and masculine stereotypes in order to extract corresponding attitudes. Although the terms used did affect the ratings of participants on the stereotype strength measure, there is hardly any indication that the terms used were those that produce prejudice towards gay and straight men. In other words, research does not adequately indicate which stereotypes associated with gay and straight men produce prejudice from raters of these two groups.

The results of this experiment suggest that there is a difference in the way people view gay and straight men. The content of gender stereotypes has been studied extensively and has generally provided some consensus as to which characteristics are associated with each group (see Kite, 2001). Even though there has been considerable research conducted on the groups defined by sexual orientation, results from these studies are less conclusive in regards to definite characteristics associated with gay males and lesbians (see Kilianski, 2003; Kite & Deaux, 1987; Madon, 1997; Storms, 1978). Thus, assessing the strength of the gay male stereotypes is a
difficult process because of the multi-dimensionality of these stereotypes. Within the gay male stereotypes that include the gender component, two subtypes continually arise. As was previously mentioned, Madon (1997) found that gay men are perceived to both exhibit feminine characteristics and to violate traditional male gender roles. Although belief in the bipolarity of gender stereotypes (see Deaux & Lewis, 1984; Foushee, Helmreich, & Spence, 1979, cited in Kite & Deaux, 1987) would lead us to the conclusion that the adherence to one gender’s roles equates the violation of the other gender’s roles, such equivalence is not necessarily true. Moreover, an inability to test the strongest components of gender-related gay male stereotypes could have resulted from this distinction between the subtypes.

This research provides insight into the way gay men and straight men are viewed in our society. As previous research dictates, sexual prejudice is still a concern in regard to the way people interact with members of groups defined by sexual orientation (Herek, 2001). The results of this study provide further insight into the components and strength of gay male and straight male stereotypes and attitudes. From the results, I may speculate that although gay male stereotypes are comprised of feminine stereotypes, people’s prejudice against gay males may not stem from whether gay men adhere to these stereotypes. Because there was no difference in the likeability of masculine gay men and feminine gay men, it may be that prejudice toward gay males is more a function of the gender of the rater than the content of the target’s characteristics.

Academics and researchers often work to attain knowledge about social systems that influence behavior. Stereotypes and prejudice are two areas of interest that spark research in various fields. With all the interest accumulating, there is a significant body of research on the nature of stereotypes and prejudice. However, there also needs to be a consensus between what is known and what is unknown. Only with the knowledge of what has been ascertained and what
needs further study can researchers adequately affect social change. It is with knowledge of past research, and inquiries into future studies that academics can begin to dispel the "kernels of truth" and foster the acceptance that comes from eradication of ignorance.

References


Appendix A: Vignettes

1) Straight man with female-associated characteristics:

   Joe grew up in Columbus, Ohio and has lived there ever since. He has been working as a high school speech coach for several years. Although sometimes he is very emotional around the other speech instructors, Joe generally gets along with his coworkers. On weekends, Joe and his friends frequently visit museums and art galleries together. Joe has been in a long-term romantic relationship with his girlfriend, Michelle, for five years. Joe does most of the cooking for their household and is also responsible for keeping the house decorated nicely. Joe and Michelle have a strong, stable relationship.

2) Straight man with male-associated characteristics:

   Jake grew up in Columbus, Ohio and has lived there ever since. He has been working at an accounting firm for several years. Although sometimes he is very aggressive at the office, Jake generally gets along with his coworkers. On weekends, Jake and his friends often play football and basketball together. Jake has been in a long-term romantic relationship with his girlfriend, Megan, for five years. Jake provides the primary income for their household and is also responsible for repairs around the house. Jake and Megan have a strong, stable relationship.

3) Gay man with female-associated characteristics:

   Bob grew up in Columbus, Ohio and has lived there ever since. He has been working as a high school speech coach for several years. Although sometimes he is very emotional around the other speech instructors, Bob generally gets along with his coworkers. On weekends, Bob and his friends frequently visit museums and art galleries together. Bob has been in a long-term romantic relationship with his boyfriend, David, for five years. Bob does most of the cooking for
their household and is also responsible for keeping the house decorated nicely. Bob and David have a strong, stable relationship.

4) Gay man with male-associated characteristics:

Bill grew up in Columbus, Ohio and has lived there ever since. He has been working at an accounting firm for several years. Although sometimes he is very aggressive at the office, Bill generally gets along with his coworkers. On weekends, Bill and his friends often play football and basketball together. Bill has been in a long-term relationship with his boyfriend, Dennis, for five years. Bill provides the primary income for their household and is also responsible for repairs around their house. Bill and Dennis have a strong, stable relationship.