

Heterosexual Men's Confrontation of Sexual Prejudice: The Role of Precarious Manhood

Kathryn M. Kroeper · Diana T. Sanchez ·
Mary S. Himmelstein

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Abstract Prejudice and discrimination are unfortunate common realities for sexual minorities yet people rarely confront such behavior (Dickter 2012). This is especially problematic because confronting prejudice is one of the most effective weapons against it (e.g., Czopp and Monteith 2003). The present study explores whether men who perceive manhood to be an impermanent state easily taken away by engaging in gender role violations (i.e., *precarious manhood*; Vandello et al. 2008) are less likely to react negatively to sexually prejudiced interaction partners and therefore less likely to confront sexual prejudice. In addition, we tested whether non-confrontation serves to affirm meta-perceptions of heterosexuality. To test this hypothesis, 88 heterosexual, young adult males, drawn from the undergraduate population of a university in the northeastern U.S., were randomly assigned to either pair with a confederate who expressed blatant sexual prejudice or no blatant prejudice toward a gay applicant in a hiring discussion. Consistent with predictions, precarious manhood predicted lower rates of confronting sexual prejudice, and less negative responses to their interaction partner, while confronting prejudice was associated with believing one would be viewed as gay regardless of individual differences in precarious manhood.

Keywords Sexual prejudice · Confronting prejudice · Masculinity · Gender roles

Introduction

A large body of research has accumulated in recent years aimed at identifying factors that reduce expressions of prejudice. Most

notably, research in the U.S. has shown that confronting prejudiced attitudes is an effective deterrent of future prejudicial remarks (Czopp et al. 2006; Rasinski and Czopp 2010). However, research on factors that predict confrontation and consequences of confrontation has focused primarily on racism and sexism. The current study aims to expand on the aforementioned research by focusing on sexual prejudice, or prejudice directed toward the LGBT community. Recent studies demonstrate high rates of LGBT prejudice in the U.S. (Herek 2008; Kimmel and Mahler 2003; Kosciw et al. 2010; Pilkington and D'Augelli 1995), evincing the need to find ways to curb discrimination. Based heavily on previous research of sexual prejudice (Dickter 2012), with a particular emphasis on "masculinity threat" literature in the U.S. (Glick et al. 2007) and Italy (Carnaghi et al. 2011), our study focuses on young, heterosexual men's responses to sexual prejudice. We contend that men's decision to confront sexual prejudice will be influenced by his attitudes about masculinity. We propose holding precarious manhood beliefs (i.e., the belief that manhood is an impermanent state easily taken away by engaging in gender role violations; Vandello et al. 2008) will decrease men's likelihood to confront sexual prejudice. Moreover, we will test whether confrontations of prejudice are associated with believing others may perceive oneself as gay (i.e., meta-perceptions of sexuality). To our knowledge this is the first study to examine the role of masculinity in predicting naturalistic confrontations of sexual prejudice. This study is also the first to test the relationship between sexual prejudice confrontation and meta-perceptions of sexuality.

The current study focuses on the sexual prejudice confrontation behavior of undergraduate men in the northeastern U.S. Therefore, the literature review is based largely on U.S. samples, unless otherwise noted. While we do not attempt to generalize our regional data to describe all western culture, sexual prejudice is a worldwide issue and our findings may have important implications throughout the country and abroad.

K. M. Kroeper · D. T. Sanchez (✉) · M. S. Himmelstein
Rutgers University, Tillett Hall Livingston Campus, 53 Avenue E,
Piscataway, NJ 08854-8040, USA
e-mail: disanche@rci.rutgers.edu

Within the U.S., a recent national survey on sexual minority youth revealed 80 % of LGBT students polled experienced verbal harassment in school, 40 % were physically harassed at school, and 60 % expressed feeling unsafe at school (Kosciw et al. 2010). These high rates of LGBT discrimination were confirmed from the perspective of heterosexual bystanders. Multiple studies surveying heterosexual samples find they witness high rates of discrimination, prejudice, and aggression aimed at sexual minorities (e.g., Dickter 2012; Horn et al. 2008; Poteat et al. 2009). These high levels of sexual prejudice may persist because anti-gay prejudice is one of the more publicly endorsed forms of prejudice compared with, for example, racism and sexism (Herek and Berrill 1992; Rodin et al. 1990). As a result, discrimination and prejudice are unfortunate common realities for LGBT individuals living in the U.S. (Herek 1991, 2008; Kimmel and Mahler 2003; Pilkington and D'Augelli 1995) and beyond (e.g., UK, Netherlands, Jamaica, Singapore, and Canada, see Badgett and Frank 2007).

Discrimination and prejudice take a psychological toll on LGBT individuals, increasing the likelihood of developing depression and anxiety in gay men and inciting social withdrawal among lesbian women (Poteat and Espelage 2007). U.S. regional data also indicate LGBT youth are 2 to 7 times more likely to make suicide attempts than their heterosexual counterparts. This rate jumps to nearly 9 times more likely if the youth reports high levels of familial hostility and rejection (Blake 2012). Clearly, sexual prejudice has dangerous consequences for sexual minorities, yet little is known about factors that might reduce sexual prejudice, such as confrontation of sexual prejudice.

The current study focuses on confronting sexual prejudice for two reasons. First, confronting prejudice aimed at other social groups (e.g., racial minorities) effectively reduces prejudice among those confronted (Czopp et al. 2006; Rasinski and Czopp 2010). For example, Czopp and colleagues (2006) found participants who were confronted by confederates after making stereotypical inferences about Black individuals reported less prejudiced attitudes and were less likely to make stereotypical judgments in future scenarios. Second, it would seem that people rarely confront sexual minority prejudice (Dickter 2012). Generally, sexual prejudice is openly expressed with little recourse. Commonly used homophobic epithets, such as “That’s so gay” or “He’s such a fag,” are rarely viewed as grounds for punishment in school settings within the U.S. (Kimmel and Mahler 2003; Poteat and Espelage 2005) and often abroad (Phoenix et al. 2003). Failure to confront sexual prejudice is problematic because confronting prejudice is one of the most effective weapons against it, particularly if the confrontation comes from people who are not part of the group that has been disparaged (i.e., nontargets) (Czopp and Monteith 2003; Rasinski and Czopp 2010).

While confrontations from both targets (i.e., members of the disparaged group, such as women who confront sexism) and

nontargets effectively inhibit prejudice in others (Czopp and Monteith 2003; Czopp et al. 2006), research typically finds that when an event is attributed to prejudice, observers express feeling less discomfort, irritation, and antagonism towards nontarget confronters (e.g., men who confront sexism or Whites who confront racism) than towards target confronters (Czopp and Monteith 2003). Studies also show nontarget confronters were perceived to be more persuasive and less rude than target confronters (Rasinski and Czopp 2010) while targets who confront prejudice aimed at their group are seen as complainers who are overreacting even if discrimination is blatant (Kaiser and Miller 2001). In addition, nontarget confronters were found to arouse more guilt in participants who held prejudiced attitudes, as opposed to targets who made otherwise identical confrontations (Czopp and Monteith 2003)—though this effect was only found when confrontations were presented to participants indirectly (i.e., in the form of hypothetical scenarios). Moreover, the absence of guilt coupled with feeling a certain prejudice is legitimate (i.e., homophobia) may even encourage prejudice and aggressive behaviors, such as gay bashing (Bahns and Branscombe 2011). Consequently, there seem to be added benefits afforded to nontarget confrontations, as compared to target confrontations, which may factor into their relative success.

Despite the effectiveness of nontarget confrontations, very few people actually confront prejudice even when they think they will (Dickter and Newton 2013; Shelton and Stewart 2004). As a result, more research is needed to uncover individual differences in confrontation. Due to the prevalence and severity of sexual prejudice coupled with the effectiveness of confronting prejudice, the present project aims to expose the unique obstacles preventing heterosexual men confronting sexual minority prejudice aimed at gay men. Specifically, we examine whether individual differences in masculinity predict sexual prejudice confrontation.

Precarious Manhood and Masculinity Threats

Familiar masculine ideals asserting “manhood is a process” and “not all boys become men” may be more than simple macho credos. Holding the belief that manhood is precarious may be one of the potential barriers preventing heterosexual men from confronting sexual prejudice. Described by Vandello et al. (2008), *precarious manhood* is the belief that manhood is an uncertain and fleeting state, which must be continuously reaffirmed by engaging in “masculine” behaviors. The theory posits that in order to retain one’s status as a man, men must consistently prove their masculinity (e.g. taking risks, engaging in frequent sexual activity with women, showing aggression). Further, Vandello et al. (2008) found that men (more so than women) show negative reactance to the notion that their manhood (for women, womanhood) was precarious. These findings suggest that men who endorse precarious manhood

beliefs may “maintain their manhood” by joining in with prejudicial remarks despite not actually endorsing sexual prejudice as this may reaffirm traditional beliefs about masculinity.

Research on masculinity threat in the U.S. (Glick et al. 2007) and Italy (Carnaghi et al. 2011) suggests when men experience threats to their masculinity, they may be motivated to preserve their manhood in ways that encourage sexually prejudiced behavior. These masculinity threat studies, in which researchers challenge men’s masculinity and analyze the resulting behavioral and psychological consequences, demonstrate the importance placed on retaining masculinity and reveal how far men will go to avoid being stripped of their manhood. For instance, a study conducted by Glick et al. (2007), required male participants to complete a gender knowledge test. Despite how the men actually performed, half were told they scored similar to other males and half were told they scored similar to females. The researchers found those in the experimental condition—men whose masculinity was threatened by receiving “female-typical” feedback—directed more negative affect towards effeminate gay men than those in the non-masculinity threat condition. Interestingly, these participants regained their masculinity by denigrating femininity, suggesting prejudice is used as a tool for asserting masculinity. Thus, the more men worry about their relative standing on the masculinity spectrum the more they may act as gender watchdogs, disparaging men who engage in feminine behaviors or—as the current study suggests—aligning themselves with these sorts of men as a means to affirm their manhood status.

Sexual prejudice may foster a more positive male gender identity by confirming gender normativity. For example, a study conducted in Switzerland found men who have higher gender self-esteem also hold anti-gay attitudes (Falomir-Pichastor and Mugny 2009). Similar research conducted in Italy showed that after being exposed to sexually prejudiced slurs, heterosexual men display a stronger need to express their masculinity (Carnaghi et al. 2011). Accordingly, men may align themselves with those who are sexually prejudiced because this may bolster their masculinity. Thus, men may react more positively to men who express sexual prejudice and, therefore, be less likely to confront prejudice, regardless of whether they themselves hold sexually prejudiced beliefs.

Additionally, men who endorse precarious manhood beliefs may also see sexually prejudiced men as sharing similarly held masculine attitudes. As research has already suggested, people tend to gravitate toward those with whom they perceive to share attitudes and values in common (Montoya et al. 2008). In consequence, these men may forgive sexual prejudice because they see sexually prejudiced others as consistent with themselves. Rather than finding prejudiced comments off-putting, these comments may be less likely to give rise to anger or negativity and, consequently, incite less opposition from men who are higher in precarious manhood.

The present study tests whether precarious manhood is associated with less negative responses to sexually prejudiced individuals and therefore less confrontation of sexual prejudice. In order to test this, we expose men to sexually prejudiced remarks and examine whether more positive responses towards the blatantly sexually prejudiced interaction partner mediates the relationship between precarious manhood and confrontation. While doing so, we control for overall sexual prejudice and the interactions of sexual prejudice and condition to isolate the unique effects of precarious manhood. Prior research suggests that sexual prejudice and masculinity may be positively related (e.g., Kilianski 2003). Moreover, people who are lower in prejudice and higher in egalitarian attitudes may be more likely to confront prejudice (Wellman et al. 2009). Thus, it is important to determine whether precarious manhood predicted sexual confrontation while accounting for the relationship between sexual prejudice and confrontation.

Meta-Perceptions of Heterosexuality

Masculinity threats may also lead to disparaging gay men in order to reassert meta-perceptions of heterosexuality. For example, in another masculinity threat study, Bosson et al. (2005) demonstrated that men who engaged in the exact same braiding action feel self-conscious and uncomfortable when the behavior is framed as a gender role violation (i.e., hair braiding) as opposed to a gender role confirmation (i.e., rope braiding) because they fear being misclassified as gay. In fact, the ability to assert one’s heterosexuality reduced self-consciousness during feminine tasks. These findings suggest that men’s masculinity concerns are tied to the desire for others to perceive the self as heterosexual. Because manhood is, by some, perceived to be an impermanent state, easily taken away by engaging in “feminine behaviors” or by simply not engaging in “masculine behaviors,” men may not confront sexual prejudice to preserve their manhood by assuring they are perceived as heterosexual. Though not tested in prior work, confronting prejudice may risk being perceived as aligned with gay men and perhaps, even viewed as gay themselves. Conversely, endorsing the sexually prejudiced actions of others may bolster masculinity. Thus, one consequence of sexual prejudice confrontations may be the risk of being perceived as gay and thus, gender deviant. In the present study, we hypothesized that confrontation would affect meta-perceptions of sexuality. Specifically, when men confronted sexual prejudice, they would indicate a greater likelihood of being perceived as gay by those they confronted.

Hypotheses

The goal of the current experiment is to assess the masculinity-related barriers that prevent heterosexual men from confronting sexual prejudice targeted at gay men. The present study tests

whether precarious manhood beliefs predict more favorable responses towards the sexually prejudiced interaction partner (Hypothesis 1) and less confrontation of prejudice (Hypothesis 2) while controlling for the influence of sexually prejudiced beliefs.

Specifically, we predicted that less negative reactions to their sexually prejudiced interaction partner would mediate the relationship between precarious manhood and confrontation (Hypothesis 3). In addition, we test whether one of the downstream consequences of confronting sexual prejudice is that confronters are more likely to believe that their interaction partner perceives them as gay (Hypothesis 4). Hypotheses 1–3 are tested with regression analyses. Hypothesis 4 is tested with path analyses and includes the hypothesized 1–3 paths (see Fig. 1).

Method

Participants

Ninety-five undergraduate volunteers participated for partial fulfillment of the requirements for an introductory psychology course. Participants were recruited through a university research pool website, where they had the opportunity to choose our study (described as a technology and employment study) from a list of many subject pool studies occurring throughout the semester. As part of the subject pool requirements, participants completed a large prescreen questionnaire which included their age, gender, sexual orientation, and sexually prejudiced beliefs. The present study was restricted to those whom indicated being 18 or older, male, and heterosexual in the prescreen questionnaire. Participants were unaware of our inclusion criteria. Seven (7.3 % of sample) participants were excluded from analyses for one of the following reasons: failure to complete informed consent ($n=1$), identifying as female ($n=1$), or suspicion about the nature of the study ($n=5$), specifically guessing that their interaction partner was a confederate. For fear of their responses skewing the data, these individuals were removed from all analyses. The mean age of the sample ($N=88$

heterosexual males) was 19.05 ($SD=1.6$) and ages ranged from 18 to 29-years-old. Thirty-nine (44.3 %) participants were White, 4 (4.5 %) were Black/African American, 5 (5.7 %) were Middle Eastern, 11 (12.5 %) were East Asian, 13 (14.8 %) were South Asian, 1 (1.1 %) was a Pacific Islander, (0 %) were American Indian or Alaska Native, 6 (6.8 %) were Multiracial, and 9 (10.2 %) declined to indicate their racial identity or indicated their ethnic background was not listed.

Procedures and Materials

Based on prior work examining confrontation (Czopp et al. 2006; Rattan and Dweck 2010), we provided an opportunity for confrontation through an instant-messaging program. Participants were randomly assigned to either a blatant sexual prejudice condition (i.e., heard prejudiced remarks) or a control condition (i.e., did not hear prejudiced remarks). Upon arrival to the lab, the participant was greeted by a research assistant who, after obtaining the informed consent, briefly described the format of the experiment. Participants were told the goal of the study was to evaluate the practicality of using technology to aid in making employment decisions; participants believed they would be paired with a partner (who had not yet arrived) to make a hiring decision via an online chat room. The research assistant told the participant that he and his partner would be looking over the same job posting and résumé. The job posting described a supervisory managerial position at a telecommunications corporation. The applicant's résumé described a fictional male (Mark Hodge) with experience in a similar position. Further, the résumé listed prior leadership experience as president of an on-campus computer club, secretary of a Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Alliance, and captain of a choir group. The applicant's résumé described hobbies, which included traveling, blogging, fashion, baking and music. It was stressed that the participants use the chat room time to critically evaluate the applicant, weighing the pros and cons of his credentials because it would prepare them to make a final hiring decision in-person at the end of the study. In actuality, each participant's partner was a confederate; no such hiring decision was made.

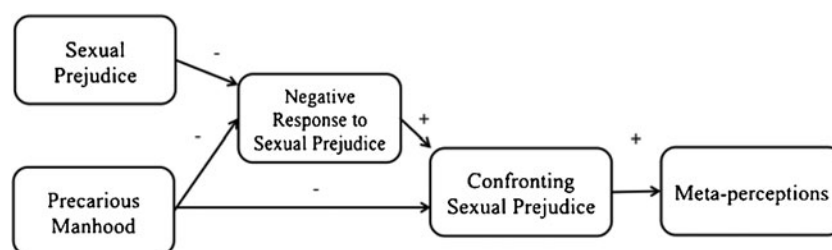


Fig. 1 Model of precarious manhood and confronting prejudice. Note: The proposed model predicts that participants who endorse precarious manhood beliefs will be less likely to respond negatively to their sexually prejudiced interaction partner and, consequently, be less likely

to confront their partner's sexually prejudiced statements. Moreover, a hypothesized downstream consequence of confronting prejudiced remarks is believing that one's interaction partner viewed them as gay (i.e., meta-perceptions)

After the initial briefing, the research assistant left the room to wait for the “other” participant. A few minutes later, the participant heard the elevator ring and was told his partner had arrived. The research assistant then loaded the instant messaging platform and instructed the participant to input his participant ID number into the program followed by a brief description of his background to his partner (i.e., name, class year, and intended major). Once finished, the research assistant instructed the participant to begin looking over the job posting and résumé while the “other” participant was briefed.

At this point, participants were randomly assigned to either the experimental condition (blatant sexual prejudice) or the control condition. Participants in both conditions received the same job posting and résumé with which to work. Notably, each résumé indicated that the applicant identified as a gay man (e.g. leadership role in a college LGBT organization). After giving the participant 3 min to look over the documents, the confederate introduced himself via the messaging program (“Hi, I’m Matt. My participant id is 10102. I’m a Finance Major at the business school. It’s my Junior Year”). The confederate then followed a script designed to convince the participant that a natural conversation was occurring. The first half of both the experimental and control condition scripts were uniform. Thus, early in the interaction, the confederate was fairly ambiguous about his feelings regarding the applicant’s credentials (e.g. “I wish I had his GPA, lol”), but mid-way through the interaction the confederate expressed his disapproval with the candidate—the reason why the confederate disapproved varied by condition.

In the experimental condition, the confederate’s disapproval was fueled by sexual prejudice and, thus, he made some sexually prejudiced remarks (i.e., “...he was the secretary in his school’s gay group...that’ll make some people uncomfortable”). Similarly, the confederate in the control condition also disapproved of the applicant, but did not comment on the applicant’s sexuality. Instead, the confederate claimed the applicant was unfit for the job due to his lack of experience (i.e., “I don’t know about him, it seems like he may not have enough experience”).

In both conditions, participants were given several opportunities to confront the confederate’s beliefs. Due to the chat room set-up, it was possible for the confederate to see when the participant was typing, but not the other way around. Therefore, confederates were given standardized waiting times for allowing participants to respond to comments. If the participant was typing, the confederate was required to wait until the message was sent before continuing on with the script. After 15 min of discussion, participants were ostensibly told the interactive portion of the experiment was over and they would complete questionnaires

designed to gain insight about their interaction until their partner was ready to meet up again to help make the final hiring decision. After completing the questionnaires, the participants were debriefed and permitted to leave. The measures are listed in the order that they appeared. Sexual prejudice was administered prior to the experiment as part of the prescreen questionnaire. Filler items were included to measure attitudes and experience with technology to bolster the cover story.

Post-Test on Sexual Identity of Applicant

As suggested by reviewers, we conducted a post-test to ensure that participants in the control and experimental condition would identify the applicant as gay based on only the résumé. A separate but similarly aged ($M=18.94$, $SD=1.17$, age range from 18 to 23) sample of heterosexual men ($N=36$) were asked to read through the identical résumé and to indicate their impressions of the applicant. Among other filler questions about the applicants’ age, gender, presumed race, technology skills, etc., participants were asked to indicate whether Mark was heterosexual or gay and to indicate on a scale from 1 (not at all likely) to 5 (highly likely), the likelihood that Mark was gay. These data revealed that the majority of participants believed that Mark was gay (29/36; 81 %). Moreover, participants indicated an average likelihood score of $M=3.86$, significantly higher than the midpoint of the scale, $t=5.75$, $p<.001$.

Measures

Sexual Prejudice Scale

Attitudes toward the gay community were assessed using the three item Attitudes toward Lesbians and Gay Men scale (ATLG; Herek 1994) administered prior to the experiment as part of a larger prescreen questionnaire to the entire Introductory Psychology subject pool. Participants rated their agreement or disagreement on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Very much). This measure consisted of three statements: “Sex between two men is just plain wrong,” “I support gay and lesbian civil rights (e.g., the right for same-sex marriage),” and “I think male homosexuals are disgusting.” The scale was found to be reliable ($\alpha=.83$).

Negative Reaction to Partner

Participants’ attitudes toward their confederate interaction partner were measured. Participants rated their agreement or disagreement on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Very Much). The measure consisted of three

questions: “Did you feel angry at your interaction partner at any point?” “Were you irritated by your interaction partner?” “Did your partner annoy you?” These three items were found to be strongly reliable ($\alpha=.97$).

Partner Bias Scale

To ensure that the blatant sexual prejudiced condition was indeed seen as more biased than our control condition for the interaction partner, we measured partner bias as a manipulation check. Participant perceptions of bias were measured using a 10-item scale. Participants rated their agreement or disagreement on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Very Much). Items asked participants to indicate to what extent they viewed their interaction partner as “biased,” “judgmental,” “insensitive,” “mean,” “offensive,” and “rude.” In addition, participants were asked to rate the extent to which they viewed their interaction partner as “open-minded,” “understanding,” “polite,” and “appropriate” (reverse-coded). The scale was found to be highly reliable ($\alpha=.92$).

Meta-Perceptions

Participants were asked multiple questions about the kind of impression they made on their interaction partner. Of focal interest was the single question, “To what extent do you think your partner views you as gay?” on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Very Much). This question was among many filler questions (e.g. To what extent do you think your partner views you as “good with technology,” “kind,” “dominant,” “competent,” “artistic,” argumentative,” etc.).

Precarious Manhood Scale

Participant beliefs regarding the instability of manhood were measured using a six-item scale at the end of the experiment. Early pilot testing showed very low reliability for the original precarious manhood scale in our intended population so items were created based on the precarious manhood scale developed by Vandello and colleagues (2008). Participants rated their agreement or disagreement on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Items were as follows: “It’s fairly easy for a man to lose his status as a man,” “A male’s status as a real man sometimes depends on how other people view him,” “A man needs to prove his masculinity,” “A boy needs to become a man; it doesn’t just happen,” “The title of ‘manhood’ needs to be reserved for those who deserve it,” and “You’re not a man if you don’t like masculine things.” We conducted a principal component factor analysis of the modified scale which loaded onto a single factor explaining 54.82 % of the variance. Both the eigenvalues and inspection of the scree plot

revealed one factor. Moreover, the scale was found to be reliable ($\alpha=.83$).

Ideally, we would have preferred to include this measure in the prescreen questionnaire but restrictions regarding the amount of questions allowed for inclusion in the prescreen prevented this possibility. Thus, precarious manhood was administered at the end of the study. Notably, no difference was found in levels of precarious manhood by condition, $t(88) = 1.27, p=.21, ns$.

Coding Confronting Prejudice

Two independent coders were trained to rate each participants’ degree of confrontation with the prejudiced remarks. Confrontation was coded using a continuous rating (i.e., “To what extent did the participant disagree with the prejudiced remark?: 1 (Not at all) to 5 (A great deal)” to get a nuanced account of participant variance in confronting behaviors. See Appendix A for detailed anchor instructions given to coders. Responses for this variable were only coded for participants in the prejudice condition because this was the only condition in which there were prejudiced remarks. Intraclass correlations (ICCs) were used to determine the reliability of codings. According to conventional interpretations (Shrout and Fleiss 1979), the interrater reliability was high for the confrontation variable, $ICC = .75, p<.001, 95\% \text{ CI } (.44, .88)$. The mean scores of both coders served as the variables for analyses.

In addition to independent coder results, participants themselves indicated whether their partner’s did anything inappropriate and if so, whether they confronted the behavior. Of all the participants in the experimental condition, only seven (16 % of experimental condition) indicated that their interaction partner did something inappropriate during the interaction task. Of those seven, only three participants (6 % of experimental condition) claimed to have talked to them about their inappropriate behavior. Because of the relatively low rates of reporting confrontation to the experimenters via the survey, we relied on independent coder ratings of confrontation over self-report measures. In retrospect, low rates of publicly reported confrontation should have been expected (see Sechrist et al. 2004; Stangor et al. 2002).

Results

Descriptives

See Table 1 for descriptives and correlations among the observed variables. Notably, on average, participants indicated precarious manhood beliefs and sexual prejudice at slightly below the midpoint of the scale suggesting that the majority of our participants were low in masculinity beliefs and sexual prejudice. In general, examining means collapsed

Table 1 Bivariate correlations and descriptive statistics for all variables

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Precarious manhood	3.59	1.23	1	6.33	–					
2. Sexual prejudice	3.68	1.76	1	7.00	.24*	–				
3. Negative partner evaluation	2.13	1.54	1	7.00	–.23*	–.07	–			
4. Partner bias	3.36	1.26	1	6.60	–.14	.12	.64***	–		
5. Confrontation	2.61	1.19	1	5.00	–.53***	–.12	.57***	.60***	–	
6. Meta-perception	1.76	1.26	1	5.00	–.10	–.11	.21*	.13	.33*	–

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Meta-perception refers to participants' belief that their interaction partner viewed them as gay. All correlations were derived from the entire sample ($N=88$) except those with confrontation, which only occurred in the prejudiced condition ($N=44$). All concepts were measured on a scale from 1 to 7 with the exception of confrontation which was on a scale from 1 to 5

across conditions, participants reported very minimal negative reactions to their interaction partners and very low biased ratings suggesting that they did not report substantial reactance to their partners. In general, the heterosexual men in the study were fairly confident that they were not perceived as gay, reporting average meta-perceptions substantially below the midpoint. Lastly, coders, on average, observed confrontation levels that reflected one or more mild disagreements with the prejudice remarks but no explicit mention of prejudice in the disagreements.

Table 1 also reveals that precarious manhood was associated with less confrontation, less negative responses to the interaction partner, and greater sexual prejudice overall. In addition, confrontation was associated with meta-perceptions such that confrontation was associated with greater beliefs that their interaction partner viewed them as gay.

Preliminary Analysis

To test whether participants perceived their interaction partner to be more prejudiced in the blatant prejudice condition compared to the control as part of a manipulation check, we conducted multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to compare the prejudice condition to the control condition for all variables. The secondary purpose of this MANOVA was to ensure that precarious manhood was not influenced by experimental condition and participants indicated similar sexual prejudice across conditions (see Table 1). To test for homogeneity of the covariance matrices (an assumption of MANOVA), the Box's M test value of 22.68 ($p=.13$) was not significant, which confirmed that the covariance matrices between the two groups were assumed to be equal (Huberty and Petoskey 2000).

A statistically significant MANOVA effect for experimental condition was found, Wilks' $\lambda=.56$, $F(5, 82) = 13.14$, $p<.001$. Univariate tests revealed that the experimental manipulation was successful such that participants viewed their interaction partner as more biased in the blatant sexual prejudice condition compared to the control. Moreover,

participants also reacted more negatively towards their interaction partner in the prejudiced condition compared to those in the control condition (see Table 1). No other significant differences were found, suggesting that participants randomly assigned to either condition did not show differences in masculinity or sexual prejudice.

Main Analysis

Testing Hypothesis 1 and 2

Recall that we hypothesized that precarious manhood would predict more favorable responses towards the sexually prejudiced interaction partner (Hypothesis 1) and less confrontation (Hypothesis 2) controlling for the effect of sexual prejudice. Because we used multiple regression analysis to test our hypotheses, a test for multicollinearity was performed. According to conventional standards, multicollinearity did not adversely affect the regression beta weights or standard errors (VIF = 1.20 for sexual prejudice, 1.00 for precarious manhood, and 1.02 for partner negative evaluations) (Belsey et al. 2004; Pedhazur 1997).

To test Hypothesis 1, all variables entered into the regression equation were first standardized and interaction terms were created by multiplying standardized variables (Aiken and West 1991). We then regressed negative reactions to the interaction partner on precarious manhood, sexual prejudice, condition, and the interactions of precarious manhood x condition and sexual prejudice x condition. These analyses revealed a significant main effect of precarious manhood ($\beta=-.23$, $p=.035$) and a significant main effect of condition ($\beta=.26$, $p=.012$), indicating people in the sexual prejudice condition and those lower in precarious manhood were more likely to react negatively toward their interaction partner but these effects were qualified by a significant interaction between precarious manhood and condition ($\beta=-.22$, $p=.036$). No other significant effects or interactions were found. Inspection of the precarious manhood x condition interaction revealed that precarious manhood was associated with less negative reactions to the interaction partner

in the prejudice condition ($\beta = -.41, p = .007$) but not in the control ($\beta = .01, p = .96, ns$).

To address Hypothesis 2, we regressed confrontation on precarious manhood and sexual prejudice (for participants in the blatant sexual prejudice condition). This analysis revealed that precarious manhood predicted less confrontation ($\beta = -.52, p < .001$) while controlling for sexual prejudice ($\beta = -.05, p = .72$).

Hypothesis 3 → Partner Negative Evaluations as Mediator

Because precarious manhood predicted less negative reactions to the prejudiced interaction partner and less confrontation, we tested Hypothesis 3 to determine whether negative reaction to the interaction partner in the sexual prejudice condition mediated the relationship between precarious manhood and confrontation following the steps developed by Baron and Kenny (1986). As Fig. 2 illustrates, the standardized regression coefficient between precarious manhood and confronting decreased significantly when controlling for the extent to which participants negatively reacted to their partner ($\beta = -.35, p = .009$). The other conditions of mediation were also met: precarious manhood was a significant predictor of confronting prejudice ($\beta = -.53, p < .001$) and of negative reactions to partner ($\beta = -.41, p = .006$), and negative reaction to the partner was a significant predictor of confronting prejudice while controlling for precarious manhood ($\beta = .57, p < .001$). Moreover, the Sobel test (1982) was significant ($Z = -2.17, p = .03$). In addition to the Sobel test which has been recently criticized

(see Fritz and MacKinnon 2007), we used the PRODCLIN program to compute asymmetric confidence intervals for the mediated effect (MacKinnon et al. 2007). This analysis also revealed a significant mediation effect, $\beta = -.35, SE = .13, p = .009, CI_{.95} = -.34, -.04$. Thus, converging evidence supports Hypothesis 3 and suggests that less negative reactions to the prejudiced interaction partner is a significant explanatory variable for the relationship between precarious manhood and confronting.

Hypothesis 4 → Meta-Perception as Downstream Consequences

Hypothesis 4 predicted that one of the downstream consequences of confronting sexual prejudice is that confronters are more likely to believe that their interaction partner perceives them as gay. Rather than just pointing to the significant correlation between confrontation and meta-perceptions in Table 1, we tested all four hypotheses simultaneously in path analysis. Specifically, using EQS 6.1 software with maximum likelihood estimation, path analyses were used to test the model shown in Fig. 1. Data were standardized and listwise deletion was specified (though no cases had missing data). According to past research on model fit (see Hu & Bentler, 1999), good fitting models have comparative fit index (CFI), normed fit indices (NFI) and nonnormed fit index (NNFI) values that exceed .95. According to set standards (Bentler & Chou, 1987), path model testing requires at least five cases per estimated model parameter. The hypothesized model includes eight parameter estimates (five paths and three error variances), necessitating a sample of 40. Thus, the data met the recommended sample size.

The model provided a good fit to the data, $\chi^2 = 1.039, df = 4, p = .90, ns$, CFI = 1.0, NNFI = 1.26, NFI = .97, RMSEA < .001 (90 % CI = .00, .09). As depicted in Fig. 3, path analyses confirmed that precarious manhood predicted less confrontation in the prejudice condition, in part, through less negative reactions towards their sexually prejudiced interaction partner. Moreover, confrontation was, in turn, associated with meta-perceptions such that the more they confronted prejudice (as rated by observers), the more they indicated that their interaction partner perceived them as gay (see Fig. 3).

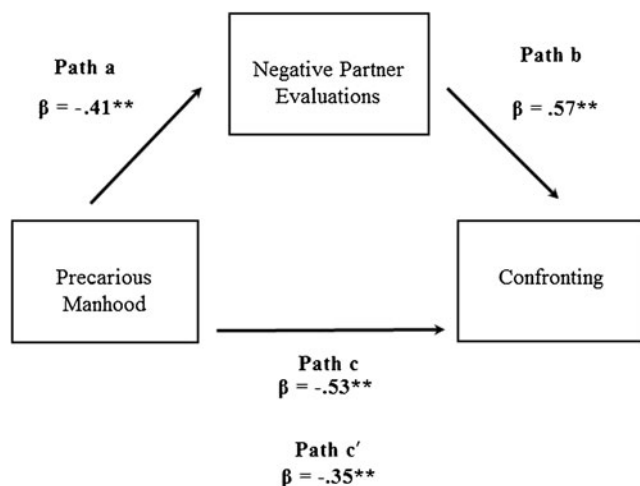


Fig. 2 Mediation of precarious manhood and confrontation relationship by negative partner evaluations. Path **a** represents the effect of the independent variable on the mediator. Path **b** represents the effect of the mediator on the dependent variable. Path **c** represents the total effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable. Path **c'** represents the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable while controlling for the mediator

Discussion

The rates of prejudice and discrimination aimed at sexual minority targets is staggering (Herek 2008; Kimmel and Mahler 2003; Pilkington and D'Augelli 1995) and the negative psychological consequences of such stigmatization (e.g. depression, anxiety, social withdrawal, self-harm behaviors, suicide) clearly indicates the necessity for intervention (Poteat and Espelage 2007). Although confrontations seem to

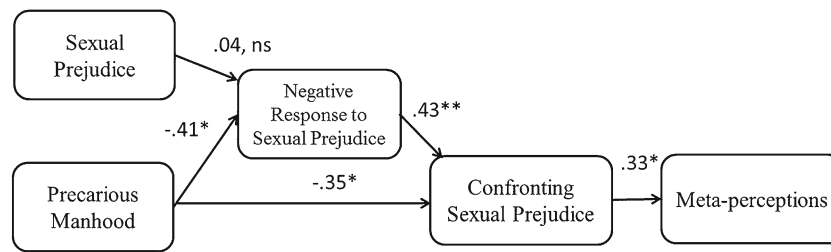


Fig. 3 Results of path model. Path analyses confirmed that participants who endorsed precarious manhood beliefs were less likely to respond negatively to their sexually prejudiced interaction partner and, consequently, less likely to confront their partner's sexually prejudiced

statements. Moreover, a downstream consequence of confronting prejudiced remarks is holding the belief that their interaction partner viewed them as gay (i.e., meta-perceptions)

be one of the more effective strategies in combating prejudice (Czopp et al. 2006; Rasinski and Czopp 2010), very few people typically confront such remarks (Dickter 2012; Dickter and Newton 2013; Shelton and Stewart 2004). Thus the present study aimed to expose the specific obstacles preventing heterosexual men from confronting sexual minority prejudice. In accordance with our hypotheses, we found that endorsing precarious manhood beliefs predicted less confrontation of sexual prejudice because precarious manhood beliefs were associated with men reacting less negatively towards sexual prejudice. In turn, reduced prejudice confrontation reinforced their perception that they were not seen as gay (see Fig. 1). These findings suggest that masculinity beliefs serve as an obstacle to confronting sexual prejudice, which is related to fostering a heterosexual self-image.

Endorsing precarious manhood emerged as an important factor preventing confrontation from occurring, but it is unclear why precarious manhood is associated with more positive reactions to the sexually prejudiced interaction partner. Given the positive association between masculinity and sexual prejudice (Kilianski 2003), one might assume the relationship between precarious manhood and less confrontation may be driven by higher sexual prejudice but the present findings suggested otherwise. As reported, sexual prejudice was controlled

for in the analyses and thus, precarious manhood and sexual prejudice, while positively correlated (see Table 2), operate independently in responses to sexually prejudiced interaction partners. Several alternative explanations exist to explain the relationship between masculinity and less negative responses to sexual prejudice. First, men higher in precarious manhood may align themselves with sexually prejudiced men because they hold similar attitudes and values about masculinity and gender deviance. This interpretation contributes to an already extensive body of research showcasing that people prefer others (e.g. potential dates, friends, strangers) with whom they perceive to share similar traits and attitudes in common (Montoya et al. 2008). Second, aligning oneself with a sexually prejudiced partner may provide an opportunity for men who are eager to affirm their masculinity to boost self-esteem (see Falomir-Pichastor and Mugny 2009), which fits with Vandello and colleagues' (2008) theory that masculinity must be consistently reaffirmed in order to be maintained. Finally, previous research suggests that affirming masculinity through engaging in certain activities assuages the anxiety some men experience when their masculinity is threatened. Such masculinity-confirming behaviors include acting aggressively, participating in a sport

Table 2 Univariate main effects from MANOVA

Variable	Prejudice		Control		Group difference			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>d</i>
Precarious manhood	3.75	1.27	3.42	1.18	1.63	.21	1,86	.26
Sexual prejudice	3.89	1.70	3.47	1.81	1.28	.26	1,86	.24
Negative partner evaluation	2.48	1.75	1.79	1.22	4.59	.03	1,86	.46
Perception of partner bias	4.12	1.21	2.61	.78	48.18	.001	1,86	1.48
Meta-perception	1.70	1.29	1.82	1.24	.18	.68	1,86	-.12

Effect sizes (Cohen's *d*) represent group differences

Positive effect sizes favor participants in the prejudiced condition; negative effect sizes favor participants in the control condition. Conventional small, medium, and large effect sizes for *d* are .2, .5, and .8, respectively (Cohen 1988). All concepts were measured on a scale from 1 to 7. Meta-perception refers to participants' belief that their interaction partner viewed them as gay

(Bosson et al. 2009; Vandello et al. 2008), and denigrating femininity (Glick et al. 2007). Because the desire to prove masculinity may become particularly salient when sexual prejudice occurs, as Carnaghi and colleagues demonstrated in an Italian sample (2011), not confronting sexual prejudice can be added to the list of *inactions* (e.g. not engaging in stereotypically feminine behaviors, such as hair braiding) that may reduce anxiety related to masculinity threat. In other words, not confronting sexual prejudice may confirm the masculinity of some men and reduce the associated anxiety. Thus, bolstering masculinity by aligning themselves with gender watchdogs may explain reactions to sexual prejudice among men higher in precarious manhood, though this remains an empirical question for future research.

Our findings regarding meta-perceptions suggest that confrontation is perceived as risking misperceptions of homosexuality and, thus, the desire to appear heterosexual may also play a role in positive reactions to sexually prejudiced interaction partners. Several masculinity threat studies demonstrate that a common response to threats to manhood involve men asserting their heterosexuality (Bosson et al. 2012). As Bosson and colleagues (2012) argued, “[H]eterosexuality is an essential component of hegemonic masculinities. Men who experience challenges to their manhood status may accordingly feel the need to distance themselves from gay men, who represent violations of the masculine, heterosexual ideal” (p. 472). These studies suggest that precarious manhood, a desire to appear heterosexual, and confronting sexual prejudice are intimately linked. Moreover, a recent study by Rudman et al. (in press) suggests male feminists are perceived as gay, so perhaps precarious manhood involves a reluctance to engage in any gender non-conforming behavior. Men scoring high in precarious manhood might see confronting sexual prejudice as threatening to their masculine status because one way to reaffirm masculinity is to denigrate femininity and feel more negatively toward gay men (Glick et al. 2007; Bosson et al. 2005).

Limitations and Future Directions

The current study found the endorsement of precarious manhood to be a barrier toward confronting sexual minority prejudice. However, this study does have its limitations. For example, our sample is geographically homogenous in that we only examined the attitudes and behaviors of college-aged men living in the northeastern U.S. Given these limitations, our analyses do not attempt to generalize about western culture. However, we contend that our findings may be relevant and interesting to other regions and countries because sexual prejudice is largely a cross-regional and international issue. Currently, 35 of 50 states in the U.S. still cling to anti-gay legislation suggesting that sexual prejudice

may persist in numerous regions of the U.S. Similarly, about 40 % of the countries that participate in the United Nations refuse to enact legislation decriminalizing same-sex sexual encounters among consenting adults (Guardian US Interactive 2012; Itaborahy 2012). Despite the limitations of our northeastern sample, sexual prejudice is a worldwide concern and research related to sexual prejudice and confrontation should appeal to both American and international communities as it has important implications for the climate surrounding the health of sexual minority populations.

A second possible limitation is that the results of this study were atypical in that we found remarkably high confrontation rates among participants. Independent coders found that 77 % of participants in the experimental condition confronted prejudiced remarks, although they varied in the strength of their confrontation. Most of the participants responded to prejudice with low-threat confrontations (e.g. “I don’t know about that...” or “His sexuality is irrelevant, he’s qualified for the job”). This is promising news because prior research has shown that low-threat confrontations elicit more positive reactions from perpetrators of prejudice (less anger and irritation) than more threatening confrontations (Czopp et al. 2006). The researchers suggest this occurs because “...most people are willing to embrace norms of egalitarianism (i.e., a low-threat confrontation) but react negatively to having their self-images impugned (i.e., a high-threat confrontation)” (p. 791). Wanting to maintain a positive interaction with their partner and believing that a hostile response will hurt the relationship may account for the numerous low-threat confrontations found in our sample. Even so, these levels of confrontation may be considered unusually high and limit the representativeness of the study. Perhaps participants were more willing to confront prejudice because they were not interacting with the confederate face-to-face, but instead through an online chat room set-up. Self-presentation concerns are salient during claims of discrimination especially when such claims occur in face-to-face interactions (Sechrist et al. 2004; Stangor et al. 2002). Thus, people may be far less willing to confront in face-to-face interactions. In the present study, participants expected to interact with their online interaction partner; thus, the design was intended to allow for self-presentation concerns. The IM procedure (based on Rattan and Dweck 2010) allowed for careful control of the confederate’s responses. Nevertheless, this is a limitation of the study and its generalizability. Lastly, perhaps the likelihood of confrontation was high in the sample because men are socialized to be more assertive than women (Diekmann and Eagly 2000; Prentice and Carranza 2002) and thus, having an all male sample led to greater confrontation.

The present study also demonstrated that participants’ intensity of confrontation was associated with greater beliefs that they may have been perceived as gay by those they confronted. Prior work suggests that heterosexual men show great discomfort when they fear being misclassified as gay

(Bosson et al. 2005; Prewitt-Freilino and Bosson 2008). Moreover, in general, individuals tend to distance themselves from stigmatized groups for fear of stigma by association, being perceived negatively because they are viewed as similar to a stigmatized group member (Neuberg et al. 1994; Swim et al. 1999). Thus, non-confrontation allows men an opportunity to distance themselves from the gay applicant and prevent misclassification. However, the present study did not directly test whether fear of being misclassified as gay prevents men from confronting. Unfortunately, we did not measure fear of misclassification. Moreover, meta-perceptions were assessed after the opportunity for confrontation was presented. Therefore, meta-perceptions were influenced by their behavior in the interaction. Future research should test whether fears of being misidentified as gay may motivate masculine men's reluctance to speak out against sexual prejudice.

Another potential limitation of our study is that we focused primarily on sexual prejudice and, thus, the extent to which the model would apply to confrontations of sexism is unclear. Specifically, it is unclear as to whether individuals who endorse precarious manhood beliefs align themselves with anyone who displays dominance over another (via prejudice) or only those who demonstrate sexual prejudice. Lastly, we would be remiss not to mention that the present study was inspired by the local event of Tyler Clementi's tragic suicide after his sexual encounter with another man was broadcast over the Internet without his consent (Foderaro 2010). Because the pre-trial publicity of the Tyler Clementi case against Dharun Ravi—the ex-Rutgers freshman accused of unlawfully streaming the video—coincided with our study, the relatively high levels of confrontation may have resulted from the salience of these events.

Conclusion

In sum, the current study found endorsements of precarious manhood predict less confronting of sexual minority prejudice in part because people who held precarious manhood beliefs more positively reacted to the sexually prejudiced interaction partner. Moreover, less confrontation of prejudice may have reassured those with precarious manhood beliefs that they would be perceived as heterosexual and thus, affirming their masculinity in the eyes of others. The present study reveals once again the ties between masculinity, heterosexuality, and sexual prejudice. Moreover, this study uniquely identifies precarious manhood as another obstacle to inequality as it prevents the confrontation of sexual prejudice.

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Appendix A

Coding levels of confrontation:

To what extent did the participant disagree with or otherwise confront the confederate's remarks.

- 1 *Not at All*: The participant did not state anything that would lead one to believe he disagreed with the target remark
- 2 The participant mentioned once that he mildly disagreed with the remark, but did not pursue the confrontation (e.g. "I don't know about that." "Eh, I'm not sure.").
- 3 The participant made 2–4 comments disagreeing with the remark, or 2–4 mild comments. Less explicit regarding sexuality (e.g. "It's irrelevant." "I disagree." "He's qualified.")
- 4 The participant made many (>4) comments disagreeing with the remark, made many mild comments, and/or one strong comment disagreeing with the remark (e.g. "That sounds like prejudice." "Who cares if he's gay?" or "We *shouldn't* discount him just because he's gay." "Who cares if he hasn't been a manager before." "We *shouldn't* discount him just because he lacks a little experience."). These comments are less committal than what is needed for a "5."
- 5 *A Great Deal*: The participant made multiple strong comments disagreeing with the remark (e.g. "It is wrong not to hire him because of his sexuality." "To say he is not qualified for a job that he is prepared for just because he's gay is discrimination." or "I *won't stand* for someone being discounted based solely on his sexuality." "To say he is not qualified for a job that he is prepared for is not true." "I *won't stand* for someone being discounted on a small technicality.") More committal comments.

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