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Perceived Men's Feminization and Attitudes Toward Homosexuality: Heterosexual Men's Reactions to the Decline of the Anti-Femininity Norm of Masculinity

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Abstract

One of the central dimensions of traditional masculinity is men's renunciation of the feminine (i.e., the anti-femininity norm), and men's endorsement of this norm constitutes one of the strongest predictors of negative attitudes toward homosexuality. However, egalitarian societies are undergoing a significant change: Gendered roles, stereotypes, and norms are evolving. Accordingly, many believe that men are becoming more feminine than before, and this change might have consequential effects. Across two studies conducted in Western countries, we investigated heterosexual men's reaction to the perceived decline of the anti-femininity norm of masculinity on their attitudes toward homosexuality. The results consistently showed that perceived men's feminization increased negative attitudes toward homosexuality (Study 1, $n = 220$), specifically among those participants who most strongly endorsed the anti-femininity norm (Study 2, $n = 156$). Furthermore, this pattern was driven by participants' discomfort with homosexuality rather than by their motivation to reinstate the challenged gender dichotomy. We discuss the relevance of these findings for both the gender and sexual prejudice literatures.

Keywords Masculinity · Gender roles · Gender norms · Anti-gay prejudice · Homosexuality · Ingroup distinctiveness

One of the central dimensions of traditional masculinity is men's renunciation of the feminine (the *anti-femininity norm*; e.g., Kimmel 2012; Plummer 2005). Indeed, there is a consistent body of research showing that men often affirm their masculinity by avoiding traditional and stereotyped feminine traits, roles, and behaviors (Bosson and Michniewicz 2013; Branon 1976; Thompson and Pleck 1986). Men's endorsement of the anti-femininity norm also constitutes one of the strongest predictors of negative attitudes toward homosexuality, in particular prejudice toward gay men (Wilkinson 2004).

This association is because gay men are perceived as having traditionally feminine traits, and thus they violate the anti-femininity norm (Kite and Deaux 1987). The link among masculinity, anti-femininity, and anti-gay prejudice is so strong among heterosexual men that many scholars consider homosexuality as another central dimension of traditional and hegemonic masculinity (Herek 1986; Kimmel 1997). Thus, in order to prove their masculinity, men have to avoid feminine behaviors *and* assert their heterosexuality, which can be achieved by distancing themselves from gay men and showing negative attitudes toward homosexuality.

Although there have been many social changes in Western societies regarding gender norms and behaviors, it is worth highlighting that the anti-femininity norm is still very strong (even in countries with higher gender equality). For instance, people still perceive strong differences between women and men (in line with gender stereotypes; Haines et al. 2016; see also Lueptow et al. 1995). Moreover, a recent cross-temporal meta-analysis revealed that, whereas women's self-ratings of typically feminine characteristics have decreased during the last decades, no significant changes have been observed for men (Donnelly and Twenge 2017). In addition, over time,

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men have demonstrated relatively low rates of entry into traditionally female-dominated occupations, modest increases in household work and childcare, and more limited propensities to endorse progressive gender ideologies than their female counterparts (Bianchi 2011; Cotter et al. 2011; England 2010; see Thébaud and Pedulla 2016).

That said, the rise of feminism and gender egalitarianism in the 1960s has challenged traditional gendered roles, and traditional masculinity has since entered a “crisis” (Beynon 2002; Edwards 2006; Shen-Miller and Smiler 2015). On the one hand, several studies suggest that gender roles and inequality are less strong than before: Overall trends show a general increase in women’s and men’s parity in employment, education, health, and politics (World Economic Forum 2017), as well as a rise in support for gender equality as a part of a broader cultural change (Kenny and Patel 2017; Levitov et al. 2014; Zainulbhai 2016). Surveys also show a substantial decrease both in men’s sexism (Huang et al. 2018) and in positive attitudes toward traditionally gendered roles (Galinsky et al. 2011).

On the other hand, some studies suggest that men are becoming more feminine than before, or are at least perceived to be so (Diekmann and Eagly 2000). For instance, people believe that stereotypically feminine characteristics have increased in men over the past decades (Lopez-Zafra and Garcia-Retamero 2011, 2012). These perceptions are supported by a small yet significant increase in the presence of men in traditionally feminine domains (Champagne et al. 2015; Dotti Sani 2014; Galinsky et al. 2011; Parker and Wang 2013; Ricroch 2012; Scambor et al. 2014). Men also take greater care of their body and physical appearance (behaviors which are traditionally associated with femininity; see Rosenmann et al. 2018). These changes are also apparent in the increase in the sale of beauty products for men’s body, clothing, and fashion magazines for men (Dano et al. 2003). Finally, typically feminine characteristics (i.e., a greater latitude for communality and less demand for agency) are increasingly considered as positive characteristics in traditionally masculine roles, such as management and leadership (Gerzema and D’Antonio 2013; see also Eagly and Sczesny 2009; Edwards 2006).

Even if they appear relatively small and sometimes go unnoticed, these social changes could be considered as a crisis of traditional masculinity in that the anti-femininity norm of masculinity is losing of its importance. Put in other words, this could mean that being a “real man” does not require avoiding typically feminine behaviors anymore, or at least it does not require avoiding them as strongly as previously. Surprisingly, most of the research examining the potential consequences of social changes surrounding gender norms has mostly focused on women (Diekmann and Eagly 2000; Eagly and Karau 2002; Rudman and Glick 2001), and only sparse research has investigated the potential consequences of these changes among men. Furthermore, the research focusing on men often

examines men’s reactions to threats to one’s (and/or other men’s) prototypicality as group members (Bosson et al. 2005; Croft et al. 2015; Glick et al. 2007; Moss-Racusin 2015; Shen-Miller and Smiler 2015). Thus, there is a lack of research on the consequences of the societal changes regarding gendered roles and stereotypes on men’s attitudes and behaviors (Croft et al. 2015). In the present paper, we consider the potential consequences of perceived social changes in the anti-femininity norm of masculinity and the ways in which these changes might influence heterosexual men’s attitudes toward homosexuality.

Masculinity and Anti-Gay Prejudice

A great deal of research has repeatedly shown that men have more negative attitudes toward sexual minorities than do women, as well as toward gay men in particular (Herek and McLemore 2013; Kite and Whitley Jr. 1996). Different factors may account for this robust gender difference, but they are often explained as a function of gender identity (Herek 1986; Kimmel 2012).

In agreement with anthropological and sociological research (Gilmore 1990; Kimmel 2012), Vandello and Bosson (2013) suggested that people tend to consider femininity as resulting from a natural, biological, and permanent developmental transition, whereas masculinity is seen as a precarious social status which must be earned and is easy to lose. As a consequence, masculinity requires continual social proof and validation so that men need to constantly affirm their gender identity (Herek 1986; Kimmel 2012; Vandello and Bosson 2013). Men can prove their manhood to themselves and to others by endorsing various traditionally masculine norms (such as toughness, self-reliance; Branon 1976; Levant et al. 2007b; Mahalik et al. 2003). However, some scholars argue that masculinity is mainly developed by opposing femininity (see Freud 1966–1931) and consider that a core component of masculinity is the avoidance of (or an aversion to) feminine characteristics (Bem 1981; Bosson and Michniewicz 2013; Herek 1986; Kilianski 2003; Kimmel 2012). Indeed, men perceive the difference between masculine and feminine traits to be more important than women do, and this greater “gender dichotomization” is notably driven by a need to eschew femininity from male gender identity (Bosson and Michniewicz 2013). Moreover, gender-role violations are perceived more negatively when committed by a man rather than by a woman (McCreary 1994; Moss-Racusin and Johnson 2016; Phoenix et al. 2003; Rudman and Fairchild 2004). Thus, despite knowledge that gender identity is not necessarily binary (Schweizer et al. 2014), empirical research suggests that conceptualizing gender as dichotomous is more important to men than to women, as well as that “being a man” basically means “not being feminine.”

Research also suggests that avoidance of femininity is strongly related to avoidance of homosexuality and that being heterosexual and/or expressing negative attitudes toward homosexuality even constitute an additional dimension central to masculinity (Herek 1986; Pleck 1981; Levant et al. 2007a, b; Mahalik et al. 2003; Pascoe 2007). Indeed, gay men are overall perceived to be more feminine (and less masculine) than heterosexual men are (Kite and Deaux 1987; Lehavot and Lambert 2007; McCreary 1994). Moreover, the endorsement of the anti-femininity norm constitutes one of the best predictors of heterosexual men's anti-gay prejudice (Branon 1976; Herek 1988; Parrott et al. 2002, 2011; Thompson and Pleck 1986; Wilkinson 2004), and the distance that heterosexual men perceive to be between themselves and gay men mediates this link (Martínez et al. 2014).

Furthermore, heterosexual men's motivation to avoid female stereotypic behaviors seems to be driven by the specific desire to avoid being misclassified as gay (Bosson et al. 2005, 2006; Rudman and Fairchild 2004; Sirin et al. 2004). For instance, heterosexual men whose gender prototypicality is threatened—that is, who are informed they are feminine (as opposed to masculine)—show greater anti-gay responses (Bosson et al. 2012; Talley and Bettencourt 2008), in particular against effeminate gay men (Glick et al. 2007; see also Schmitt and Branscombe 2001). Finally, sexual prejudice is greater among heterosexual men who perceive a greater distance between themselves and gay men (Herek 1986), but this tendency diminishes when differentiation needs are satisfied by means other than expressing sexual prejudice (Falomir-Pichastor and Mugny 2009; Falomir-Pichastor et al. 2017). Thus, empirical research suggests a second important component of traditional masculinity is to avoid homosexuality and that “being a man” also means “being straight” (see also Buck et al. 2013; Plant et al. 2014).

Perceived Men's Feminization

If being a “real” man means being neither feminine nor gay, what could be the consequences of men's feminization on heterosexual men's sexual prejudice? Whereas past research has investigated the consequences of threats to heterosexual men's gender prototypicality on sexual prejudice (Bosson et al. 2012; Glick et al. 2007; Talley and Bettencourt 2008), no known research has yet examined the consequences of threats to masculinity such as the perceived increase of men's feminization on heterosexual men's attitudes toward homosexuality.

That said, some studies are of relevance for the present research. On the one hand, Bosson and Michniewicz (2013, Study 5) informed male participants that men in society displayed either more (or fewer) feminine traits over time. Subsequently, they asked their participants to imagine a

situation in which they would do something that could lead other people question their status as “a real man” and to indicate how they would act thereafter on a list of stereotypically masculine versus feminine behaviors. Results showed that believing that men as a group were (allegedly) becoming more feminine increased participants' motivation to engage in manhood-restoring behaviors.

On the other hand, a study by Kosakowska-Berezecka et al. (2016, Study 3) showed an opposite pattern of findings. Participants read a text emphasizing either differences between men's and women's self-descriptions on the communality dimension (gender-differences condition) or similarities between men's and women's self-descriptions on the agency dimension (gender-similarities condition). (We should note here that despite that this condition does not imply a feminization of men, it contributes to the weakening of the gender dichotomy.) Participants then completed a scale assessing the justification (and maintenance) of gender inequalities and traditional gender roles, and they indicated their willingness to engage in nontraditional parental duties. Compared to the gender-differences condition, men in the gender-similarities condition justified fewer gender inequalities and were more willing to engage in parental roles.

These apparently inconsistent findings we presented could be reconciled as a function of the extent to which men endorse the anti-femininity norm. Indeed, Babl (1979) initially categorized male participants as androgynous (i.e., those who strongly described themselves with both typically feminine and masculine characteristics) or gender-typed (i.e., those who described themselves more strongly through masculine than feminine characteristics). He then provided them with the results of a bogus survey showing either an unchanged or a decreased level of men's masculinity in society over the past years. Following this manipulation, participants again had to describe themselves using typically masculine and feminine traits. Results showed that when masculinity was threatened, androgynous participants tended to report lower levels of masculinity, whereas sex-typed men reported higher levels of masculinity. Overall, these findings suggest that men can react to evidence illustrating the “feminization of men” over time in two different ways: either (a) by *increasing* their personal conformity to the challenged anti-femininity norm (i.e., a masculinity compensation effect), which seems to be specific to those who mostly describe themselves according to the anti-femininity norm or (b) by *decreasing* such a conformity, which seems to be specific to less gender-typical men.

In the present research, we argue that heterosexual men, and in particular those who more strongly endorse the anti-femininity norm (e.g., gender-typical men), may react defensively to the perceived decline of the anti-femininity norm. They may do so not only by re-affirming their conformity to this norm, but also by affirming their conformity to alternative norms of traditional masculinity such as heterosexuality.

Indeed, and as suggested by social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1986; see Jetten and Spears 2003), individuals are motivated to maintain a positive and distinctive social identity, and highly identified group members react to distinctiveness threats by restating intergroup boundaries. Furthermore, this can be achieved not only by restating the threatened distinctiveness (e.g., men's conformity to the anti-femininity norm) but also by affirming an alternative dimension of their social identity (Spencer-Rodger, Major, Forster, & Peng, 2016; see Steele 1988). Accordingly, to the extent that heterosexuality constitutes a relevant masculinity norm (Herek 1986; Lehavot and Lambert 2007; McCreary 1994), heterosexual men may react to men's feminization by psychologically distancing themselves from gay men in order to affirm their heterosexuality.

Thus, in the present research, we hypothesized that the perceived feminization of men in society might result in an *increase* in heterosexual men's negative attitudes toward homosexuality (Hypothesis 1). Moreover, perceived men's feminization should constitute a threat to ingroup distinctiveness as a function of the importance one attributes to the anti-femininity norm (Babl 1979). Therefore, we also contend that heterosexual men's conformity to the anti-femininity norm should moderate the effect of perceived men's feminization on attitudes toward homosexuality (Hypothesis 2). More specifically, we expected perceived men's feminization to increase prejudice specifically among heterosexual men who adhere most strongly to the anti-femininity norm. This pattern should disappear, or even be reversed, among heterosexual men who are the least conforming to this norm.

At this point, an open question remains regarding the specific mechanism behind the predicted effects given that two non-exclusive predictions can be advanced. First, and according to our rationale, men who adhere most strongly to the anti-femininity norm might report more prejudiced attitudes as a response to men's feminization in an attempt to restore masculinity through the affirmation of their own heterosexuality. Indeed, past research showed that heterosexual men affirm their masculinity by increasing the psychological distance between themselves and gay men (Herek 1986; Martínez et al. 2014) and by avoiding being misclassified as gay (Bosson et al. 2005; Buck et al. 2013; Plant et al. 2014). Accordingly, we would expect that heterosexual men's discomfort with homosexuality would mediate the effect of the perceived feminization of men on attitudes toward homosexuality (Hypothesis 3).

Second, there are also reasons to believe that perceived men's feminization can result in an increase of negative attitudes toward homosexuality merely—or additionally—because gay men are perceived as deviating from the traditional anti-femininity norm (i.e., because they are typically perceived as feminine; Kite and Deaux 1987; Lehavot and Lambert 2007). Indeed, anti-gay prejudice often results from the perception that gay men are effeminate and, therefore,

threaten the important distinction between men and women (Glick et al. 2007). Accordingly, to the extent that men's feminization threatens the distinction between men and women, it might be that the perception of men's feminization will lead heterosexual men who adhere most strongly to the anti-femininity norm to report prejudiced attitudes because of an attempt to reinstate the gender dichotomy (Hypothesis 4). In testing these mechanisms, we provide a more circumstantiated understanding of the processes through which perceived men's feminization might impact on heterosexual men's prejudice.

The Present Studies

We designed two experimental studies to test these hypotheses and to investigate the mechanism(s) through which social changes related to men's feminization influence heterosexual men's attitudes toward homosexuality. In both studies, we manipulated the anti-femininity norm through fictitious research so that the results would indicate that men's gender identity and behaviors are currently undergoing a "feminization" (i.e., men have adopted more communal traits and behaviors compared to traditional gender arrangements) or not. Study 1 tested our first hypothesis that the perception of men's feminization can increase heterosexual men's negative attitudes toward homosexuality. Study 2 tested our second hypothesis that this pattern should be observed in particular among those men who conform the most to the anti-femininity norm. Finally, we investigated the processes underlying these effects (Study 2). In particular, we focused on the relative importance of discomfort with homosexuality (Hypothesis 3) and/or reinstating a strong gender dichotomy (Hypothesis 4). Both studies have been conducted in a manner consistent with ethical standards for the treatment of human subjects, and the ethical committee of the first author's home university has approved our research.

Study 1

In Study 1, we sought to determine whether perceptions of men's feminization influence heterosexual men's attitudes toward homosexuality. To do so, we manipulated participants' perceptions regarding the evolution of men's gender norms across three conditions (masculine vs. control vs. feminization). Subsequently, we measured participants' degree of agreement or disagreement with normative statements about masculinity through Levant and colleagues' (2007b) revised Male Role Norms Inventory scale (MRNI-R), which measures their endorsement of various masculinity sub-dimensions including attitudes toward homosexuality (i.e., the Fear and Hatred of Homosexuals subscale).

In line with Hypothesis 1, we anticipated that the perception of men's feminization would increase participants' negative attitudes toward homosexuality. No specific predictions were advanced regarding the remaining norms of masculinity. However, and in agreement with past research (Babl 1979; Bosson and Michniewicz 2013), one could also expect that perceived men's feminization would increase participants' endorsement of masculinity norms in general and, in particular, the anti-femininity norm (as assessed by the Avoidance of Femininity subscale).

Method

Participants

Male participants were recruited through Prolific Academic's online platform (www.prolific.ac). They were remunerated 1£ to participate anonymously in a study about masculinity, with an average duration of about 15 min. For a design including three experimental groups and an error probability of .05, a power analysis indicated a required sample of 244 participants in order to detect a low-to-moderate effect size ($f = .20$) with power of 80%. Because we expected high rates of participant exclusion, we initially recruited a sample of 330 male participants. Among them, participants were removed from the final analyses because (in the following order) they declared they were female ($n = 2$), they were underage ($n = 2$), they failed an attention check ($n = 59$), or they completed the questionnaire in an unreasonable amount of time (less than half or more than twice the average time of 15 min; $n = 23$). Finally, 24 participants were additionally excluded because they could not confidently be classified as heterosexual. The final sample comprised 220 heterosexual men (71 students; 73 with British nationality, 43 with a nationality from another European country, 32 from the United States, and 6 from Canada; $M_{\text{age}} = 31.89$ years, $SD = 10.82$, $mdn = 29$, range = 18–64).

Procedure, Manipulation, and Measures

Participation consisted of filling in an online questionnaire comprising the experimental manipulation of men's gender norms, the related manipulation checks, the MNRI-R, and demographic information including sexual orientation.

Men's Gender Norm Participants were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions (see [online supplement](#)). In the *control condition*, no information about men's gender norms was provided. In the masculine and feminization conditions, participants read a one-page text (ostensibly published in a scientific journal of sociology) summarizing the results of an international study about the evolution of gender identity in society. Participants were told that this study was conducted between 1990 and 2010 on a representative sample of the

population in Western countries and that it assessed all relevant criteria that are traditionally recognized as distinguishing masculinity from femininity (such as physical appearance concerns, emotionality, sensitivity, investment in housework, romantic relationships and family, childcare, and the importance of one's career).

These fictitious results were summarized in a figure representing the evolution of men's gender norms on a continuum ranging from masculinity to femininity endpoints. In the *masculine norm condition*, the results stated that "men's masculinity is stable: men remain clearly masculine and distinct from women. The distinction between masculinity ('being a man') and femininity ('being a woman') remains fundamental." In the *feminization norm condition*, the results stated that "men's masculinity is changing: there is a real 'feminization of men.' The distinction between masculinity ('being a man') and femininity ('being a woman') tends to disappear." In order to reinforce the effect of the experimental manipulation, in the masculine and feminization conditions participants next were asked in an open question to provide an everyday example that would corroborate the findings of the study.

Manipulation Check After the experimental induction, participants in the masculine and feminization conditions (but not in the control condition) indicated the extent to which the study's conclusions were that: "Men's behavior seems to have changed in recent years," "Men's masculinity has changed in recent years," "What it means to be a man has changed in recent years," and "There is an evolution changing men from being masculine to being feminine," rated from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*absolutely*). An overall score was computed by averaging the response to these four items, wherein higher scores reflect acknowledgement of men's feminization ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 2.10$, $\alpha = .95$). Because this score could only be indicative of participants' opinion in the two experimental conditions (but not in the control condition), participants in all three conditions were additionally asked to indicate their personal agreement with these four items at the conclusion of the study ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 1.52$, $\alpha = .90$), using a rating scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). This additional measure allowed us to compare participants' beliefs regarding the evolution of masculine norms across all experimental conditions.

Endorsement of Masculinity Traditional Norms Participants' endorsement of masculinity norms was assessed through the MRNI-R scale (Levant et al. 2007b). Answers were collected on scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). This 53-item scale includes seven masculinity subscales: Avoidance of Femininity (8 items; e.g., "Men should not wear make-up, cover-up or bronzer"; $\alpha = .92$), Extreme Self-Reliance (7 items; e.g., "Men should not borrow money from friends or family members"; $\alpha = .85$), Aggression (7 items; "Boys should be encouraged to find a means of

demonstrating physical prowess”; $\alpha = .89$), Dominance (7 items; e.g., “Men should be the leaders in any group”; $\alpha = .93$), Non-Relational Attitudes Toward Sexuality (6 items; e.g., “Men should always like to have sex”; $\alpha = .91$), Restrictive Emotionality (8 items; e.g., “A man should never admit when others hurt his feelings”; $\alpha = .92$), and Fear and Hatred of Homosexuals (10 items; e.g., “Homosexuals should never marry”; $\alpha = .92$). This last subscale constitutes the main dependent variable. Seven subscales were computed by averaging the response to the relevant items. For all subscales, higher scores reflect higher endorsement of the relevant traditional masculinity norm.

Sexual Orientation Sexual orientation was measured at the end of the questionnaire, along with other demographic characteristics. Participants were included in the analyses if they defined themselves as heterosexual, reported that they had never had sexual intercourse with a person of the same sex, and indicated that they were not frequently attracted to individuals of the same-sex (see Falomir-Pichastor and Hegarty 2014).

Results

Manipulation Checks

A one-way ANOVA comparing the two experimental conditions which manipulated gender norm (masculine vs. feminization) was conducted on the acknowledgement of the fictitious study’s results. We observed a significant main effect of the manipulation, $F(1,134) = 121.89$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .47$. Participants acknowledged that the results of the study indicated that men were more feminine in the feminization condition ($M = 5.68$, $SD = 1.08$) than in the masculinity condition ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 1.87$).

A one-way ANOVA comparing all three conditions (masculine vs. control vs. feminization) was conducted on the measure of participants’ personal agreement with men’s gender norm. Results also revealed a significant main effect of the manipulation, $F(2,217) = 7.54$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$. Participants perceived a greater feminization of men in the feminization condition ($M = 5.16$, $SD = 1.42$) compared to the masculine condition ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 1.67$), $t(217) = 3.88$, $p < .001$, $d = .63$, and to the control condition ($M = 4.64$, $SD = 1.36$), $t(217) = 2.15$, $p = .032$, $d = .37$. The masculine condition did not differ from the control condition, $t(217) = 1.92$, $p = .056$. Thus, the perception of men’s feminization in the control condition is closer to the masculine condition than to the men’s feminization condition.

Endorsement of Traditional Masculinity Norms

We conducted a one-way ANOVA on each of the seven subscales of masculinity as a function of the three experimental conditions, applying a Bonferroni correction ($\alpha = .05 / 7 = .007$). As predicted, the effect of the manipulation was significant on the Fear and Hatred of Homosexuals subscale (see Table 1). Post-hoc comparisons indicated scores in the feminization condition were higher than both scores in the masculine, $t(217) = 3.40$, $p = .001$, $d = .57$, and the control conditions, $t(217) = 2.36$, $p = .019$, $d = .36$, whereas the latter two did not differ; $t(217) = 1.21$, $p = .22$, $d = .21$. None of the remaining six subscales were different across conditions.

Discussion

Compared to the masculine condition (but not the control condition), perceived men’s feminization increased participants’ levels of avoidance of femininity (along with other

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and correlations for subscale scores on male roles norms inventory, Study 1

Subscales	Men’s gender norm conditions				<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η_p^2
	All men <i>M (SD)</i>	Masculine <i>M (SD)</i>	Control <i>M (SD)</i>	Feminization <i>M (SD)</i>			
HOMO	2.31 (1.41)	1.95 (1.13)	2.22 (1.36)	2.75 (1.60)	6.02	.003 ^a	.053
AVFEM	3.08 (1.56)	2.75 (1.33)	3.08 (1.54)	3.41 (1.72)	3.14	.045	.028
SELF	3.79 (1.32)	3.56 (1.25)	3.85 (1.31)	3.94 (1.39)	1.48	.230	.013
AGGR	3.59 (1.47)	3.24 (1.32)	3.63 (1.42)	3.87 (1.60)	3.28	.039	.029
DOM	2.74 (1.52)	2.42 (1.12)	2.71 (1.53)	3.08 (1.77)	3.27	.040	.029
ATTSEX	2.58 (1.47)	2.27 (1.24)	2.57 (1.53)	2.89 (1.57)	2.99	.052	.027
RESTEM	2.83 (1.41)	2.67 (1.32)	2.79 (1.33)	3.02 (1.57)	1.05	.350	.010

HOMO, Fear and Hatred of Homosexuals; *AVFEM*, Avoidance of Femininity; *SELF*, Extreme Self-Reliance; *AGGR*, Aggression; *DOM*, Dominance; *ATTSEX*, Non-Relational Attitudes Toward Sexuality; *RESTEM*, Restrictive emotionality

^a After applying a Bonferroni correction across seven tests ($p < .007$), the only difference was for the HOMO subscale such that the Feminization condition differed from the other two conditions

dimensions of traditional masculinity), which is consistent with past research (Babl 1979; Bosson and Michniewicz 2013). More importantly, our first study showed that participants react to the perception that men are becoming more feminine by increasing their endorsement of one of seven masculinity norms—their fear and hatred of homosexuals. This singular finding provides support for Hypothesis 1 as well as focuses the effects of masculinity threats to fear and hatred of homosexuals (presumably gay men). As such, our study constitutes the first known empirical demonstration of the potential effects of the perception of men’s feminization in society, not only on heterosexual men’s reaffirmation of the anti-femininity norm, but also on their increase of negative attitudes toward homosexuality.

Although these results are encouraging and aligned with our hypothesis, two questions nevertheless remain open and need further investigation. First, according to our second hypothesis, this defensive reaction in the face of men’s feminization should be moderated by heterosexual men’s initial conformity to the anti-femininity norm (Hypothesis 2). Second, the observed effect of perceived men’s feminization on prejudice might reflect a motivation to affirm one’s heterosexuality by showing discomfort with homosexuality and psychologically distancing from gay men (Hypothesis 3) and/or a motivation to affirm the gender dichotomy (Hypothesis 4). Therefore, we designed Study 2 in order to investigate these hypotheses.

Study 2

In our second study, we measured participants’ conformity to the anti-femininity norm, manipulated men’s gender norm, and then assessed participants’ attitudes toward homosexuality. In order to make sure the effects under study were due to perceived men’s feminization rather than the affirmation of men’s masculinity in society, we compared the critical feminization condition to a control condition similar to that used in Study 1 (in which no information about men’s gender identity was provided to participants). We expected participants’ conformity to the anti-femininity norm to moderate the effect of perceived men’s feminization on prejudice (Hypothesis 2). More specifically, perceived men’s feminization should increase sexual prejudice specifically among participants who conform the most to the anti-femininity norm, but decrease sexual prejudice among those who conform the least to this norm.

Finally, after assessing attitudes toward homosexuality, we measured participants’ discomfort with homosexuality and endorsement of traditional beliefs about gender. We reasoned that if the effect of perceived men’s feminization on prejudice is driven by participants’ motivation to affirm their heterosexuality, then the predicted pattern should be mediated by

participants’ discomfort with homosexuality (Hypothesis 3). However, if the effect of perceived feminization on prejudice is driven by a motivation to reinstate the challenged gender dichotomy and anti-femininity norm, the predicted pattern should be mediated by participants’ endorsement of traditional beliefs about gender (Hypothesis 4).

Method

Participants and Procedure

Graduate students in research seminars working in small groups recruited participants to volunteer to complete a paper-and-pencil questionnaire. Whereas each sub-group had specific research goals and materials related to their seminar work, all sub-groups shared the materials described in the present study. From the 174 male participants initially recruited, some were excluded for self-identifying as female ($n = 1$), being underage ($n = 1$), or for not identifying as heterosexual ($n = 16$). The final sample comprised 156 heterosexual men (114 students; $M_{\text{age}} = 25.97$ years, $SD = 8.67$, $mdn = 23$, range = 18–63).

Conformity to the Anti-Femininity Norm

Participants’ endorsement of the anti-femininity norm was assessed through the seven-item Anti-Femininity subscale included in the Male Role Norms Scale (MRNS; Thompson and Pleck 1986). Items refer to the norm requiring men not to show feminine behaviors expected for women (e.g., “I might find it a bit silly or embarrassing if a male friend of mine cried over a sad love scene in a movie”; $M = 3.11$, $SD = 1.29$; $\alpha = .84$). Accordingly, higher averaged scores reflect a stronger adherence to the anti-femininity norm. The MRNS includes two additional subscales: Status ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.21$; $\alpha = .89$) and Toughness ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 1.21$; $\alpha = .85$); the three subscales were strongly correlated ($r_s > .64$). Because the present research focuses specifically on the independent effect of conformity to the anti-femininity norm, we report the analyses which control for conformity to the other two subscales (these were introduced as covariates in the analyses), but also refer to the analyses in which these subscales were not included.

Men’s Gender Norm

As in Study 1, some participants did not receive any information about the gender norm in the control condition. The feminization condition was a French version similar to those used in Study 1 but, in this study, we provided more detailed information about the results indicating the feminization of men (see [online supplement](#)). Participants were randomly assigned to conditions.

Attitudes toward Homosexuality We used a 16-item scale measuring participants' attitudes toward homosexuality. A sample item is: "Gay couples should have the right to marry," rated from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*; Anderson et al. 2018). An overall score measuring positive attitudes was computed by averaging the answers to all items after reverse-coding appropriate items ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 1.34$, $\alpha = .93$).

Discomfort with Homosexuality and Relevance of the Gender Dichotomy In order to assess participants' discomfort with homosexuality and the importance attributed to the gender dichotomy, we used Dasgupta and Rivera (2006) 15-item scale of conscious beliefs about gendered roles and gender identity scale. This scale comprises two subscales that were particularly appropriate to test our hypotheses. The seven-item Traditional Beliefs about Gender subscale "focuses on the degree to which people endorse traditional prescriptive gender norms in various life domains" (Dasgupta and Rivera 2006, p. 271) and therefore constitutes an appropriate tool to assess the importance of the gender dichotomy. A sample item is: "It's important that men appear masculine and that women appear feminine." The eight-item Traditional Gender Identity subscale "focuses on the degree to which people are invested in emphasizing their heterosexual identity to other and to themselves" (Dasgupta and Rivera 2006, p. 271). However, the subscale items more accurately assess discomfort with homosexuality. A sample item is: "I would feel nervous being in a group of homosexuals of my own sex." Thus, we refer to this subscale as a measure of Discomfort with Homosexuality rather than heterosexuality affirmation. Two averaged scores were computed accordingly so that higher scores reflect endorsement of the subscales assessing Gender Dichotomy ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.25$, $\alpha = .82$) and Discomfort with Homosexuality ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.09$, $\alpha = .76$). These two scores were positively correlated, $r(156) = .54$, $p < .001$. Positive attitudes toward homosexuality were negatively correlated with discomfort, $r(156) = -.76$, $p < .001$, and with gender dichotomy, $r(156) = -.65$, $p < .001$.

Manipulation Check Finally, as a manipulation check, participants had to indicate at the end of the study their personal agreement with four items regarding the feminization of men in society (see Study 1): "Men's behavior seems to have changed in recent years," "Men's masculinity has changed in recent years," "What it means to be a man has changed in recent years," and "There is an evolution changing men from being masculine to being feminine," rated from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). An overall score was computed by averaging the response to these four items ($M = 4.56$, $SD = 1.40$, $\alpha = .90$).

Results

We regressed all dependent variables on participants' conformity to the anti-femininity norm (standardized scores), men's gender

norm (control = -1, feminization = 1), and their interaction (the other two masculinity subscales were included as covariates).

Manipulation Check

The regression analysis only revealed a significant main effect of the experimental manipulation ($B = .31$, $SE = .10$), $t(150) = 2.87$, $p = .005$, 95% CI = [.09, .52], $d = .46$. Men were perceived as becoming more feminine in the feminization condition ($M = 4.86$, $SD = 1.50$) than in the control condition ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 1.24$).

Attitudes toward Homosexuality

The analysis showed that participants' conformity to the anti-femininity norm was related to their attitudes toward homosexuality: Greater endorsement of the anti-femininity norm was related to less positive attitudes toward homosexuality ($B = -.60$, $SE = .12$), $t(150) = 4.81$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [-.85, -.35], $d = .78$. Further, the gender norm x participant's conformity to the anti-femininity norm interaction effect was significant ($B = -.24$, $SE = .08$), $t(150) = 2.94$, $p = .004$, 95% CI = [-.41, -.08], $d = .48$. This interaction effect remained significant when the analysis did not include the other two subscales (toughness and status) as covariates, $t(152) = 2.99$, $p = .003$, $d = .048$. This interaction is illustrated in Fig. 1. As compared to the control condition, the men's feminization condition reduced participants' positive attitudes toward homosexuality among participants who most strongly endorsed the anti-femininity norm (+1 SD), $B = -.26$, $SE = .12$, $t(150) = 2.17$, $p = .031$, 95% CI = [-.49, -.02], $d = .35$. The gender norm manipulation did not significantly influence prejudice among participants who endorsed the anti-femininity norm to a lesser extent (-1 SD), $B = .23$, $SE = .12$, $t(150) = 1.88$, $p = .061$, 95% CI = [-.01, .47], $d = .30$.

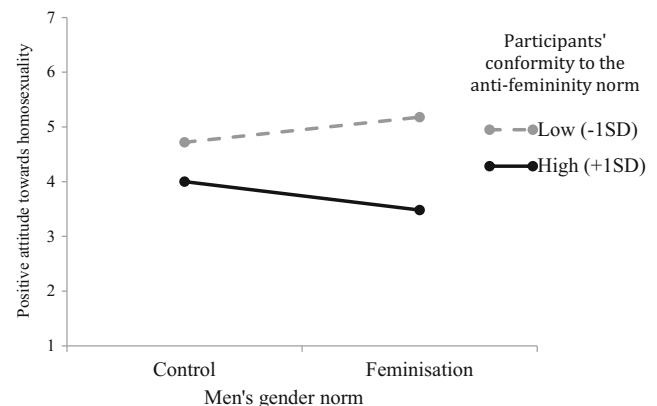


Fig. 1 Estimated means for positive attitude toward homosexuality as a function of men's gender norm manipulation and participants' conformity to the anti-femininity norm (± 1 SD), study 2

Relevance of Discomfort with Homosexuality and Gender Dichotomy

Regarding discomfort with homosexuality, the analysis showed that greater endorsement of the anti-femininity norm was related to a greater discomfort, $B = .51$, $SE = .10$, $t(150) = 4.84$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [.30, .72], $d = .79$. The gender norm \times norm conformity interaction was also significant, $B = .22$, $SE = .07$, $t(150) = 3.20$, $p < .002$, 95% CI = [.08, .36], $d = .52$. This interaction remained significant when the analysis did not include the other two masculinity subscales, $t(152) = 3.24$, $p = .001$, $d = .52$. This interaction is illustrated in Fig. 2. As compared to the control condition, the men's feminization condition increased discomfort with homosexuality among participants who most endorsed the anti-femininity norm (+1 SD), $B = .21$, $SE = .10$, $t(150) = 2.15$, $p = .032$, 95% CI = [.01, .41], $d = .35$. In turn, compared to the control condition, the men's feminization condition reduced discomfort among participants who less strongly endorsed the anti-femininity norm (-1 SD), $B = -.23$, $SE = .10$, $t(150) = 2.26$, $p = .025$, 95% CI = [-.44, -.03], $d = .36$.

Regarding the gender dichotomy affirmation, the analysis showed a participants' conformity to the anti-femininity norm main effect: Greater endorsement of the anti-femininity norm was related to a greater importance attributed to the gender dichotomy, $B = .44$, $SE = .10$, $t(150) = 4.05$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [.22, .65], $d = .66$. Neither the effect of the gender norm manipulation, $t(150) = .99$, $p = .32$, nor the interaction, $t(150) = .40$, $p = .68$, was significant. The interaction effect remained non-significant when the analysis did not include the other two masculinity subscales as covariates, $t(152) = .58$, $p = .55$.

Moderated Mediation Analyses

In order to test whether discomfort with homosexuality (Hypothesis 3) or relevance of the gender dichotomy (Hypothesis 4) mediates the observed interaction effect on

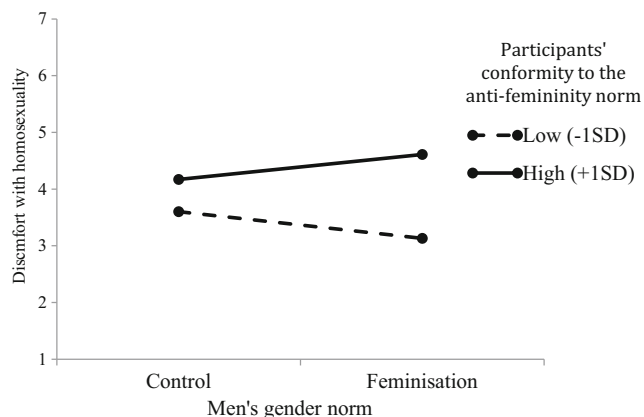


Fig. 2 Estimated means for discomfort with homosexuality as a function of men's gender norm manipulation and participants' conformity to the anti-femininity norm (± 1 SD), study 2

positive attitudes towards homosexuality, we conducted two separate bootstrapping tests using Model 8 of the PROCESS SPSS macro (5000 bootstrap resamples; level of confidence: 95%; Hayes 2013). In both analyses, the experimental condition was the independent variable, attitude was the dependent variable, and participant's conformity to the anti-femininity norm was the moderator.

The first moderated mediated analysis included discomfort with homosexuality as the mediator. Results showed a significant indirect effect of the moderation on attitudes, given that the confidence interval does not include zero, $IE = -.175$, 95% CI [-.29, -.06]. In contrast to the indirect effect, the direct effect in this analysis was not significant, $t = 1.07$, $p = .28$, CI [-.19, .05] (see Fig. 3). Finally, the indirect effect of the experimental condition on positive attitudes was significant both at low ($IE = .198$, 95% CI [.03, .36]) and high ($IE = -.224$, 95% CI [-.42, -.04]) conditional levels of participants' endorsement of the anti-femininity norm.

The second moderated mediated analysis included relevance of the gender dichotomy as the mediator. Results showed that the indirect effect of the moderation on attitudes was not significant, given that the confidence interval include the zero, $IE = -.015$, 95% CI [-.09, .05]. Indeed, the direct effect of the moderation remained significant, $t = 3.08$, $p < .003$, CI [-.37, -.08], which means that the relevance of the gender dichotomy did not mediate the observed moderation effect on positive attitudes.

Discussion

Results of Study 2 provide evidence that supports Hypothesis 2, according to which participants' conformity to the anti-femininity norm moderates the effect of gender norm on attitudes toward homosexuality. More specifically, the perception that men overall become more feminine increased prejudice among participants who more strongly endorsed the anti-femininity mandate of masculinity. However, this pattern of findings was not significant for those participants who endorsed anti-femininity less. These findings indicate that perceived men's feminization only poses a threat to those heterosexual men who most strongly endorse the anti-femininity norm of masculinity.

Further, a closer consideration of the processes at play gave consistent credence to Hypothesis 3, according to which perceived men's feminization increases the relevance of alternative means to affirm masculinity such as heterosexuality affirmation (as assessed through participants' discomfort with homosexuality). More specifically, perceived men's feminization increased discomfort with homosexuality among heterosexual men who more strongly endorsed the anti-femininity norm. However, perceived men's feminization decreased discomfort with homosexuality among heterosexual men who endorse the anti-femininity norm less. Finally, the moderated mediation analysis showed that discomfort with

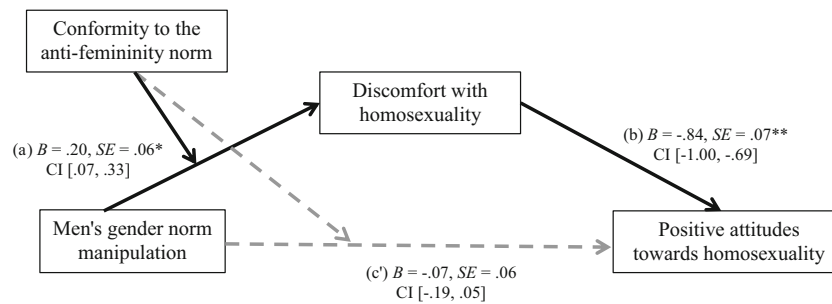


Fig. 3 Mediated moderation model in which the effect of men's gender norm (control = -1, feminization = 1) on positive attitudes is moderated by participants' conformity to the anti-femininity norm. The mediator is

discomfort with homosexuality (study 2). Solid, black arrows represent significant effects; grey, dashed arrows, non-significant effects. * $p < .01$, ** $p < .001$

homosexuality mediated the effect of the gender norm x norm conformity interaction on prejudice. More specifically, among heterosexual men who more strongly endorse the anti-femininity norm, the indirect effect of men's feminization on prejudice through an increase of discomfort with homosexuality was significant. Moreover, among heterosexual men who endorse the anti-femininity norm less, the indirect effect of men's feminization on prejudice through a decrease of discomfort with homosexuality was also significant. Finally, the present study did not provide evidence in support of Hypothesis 4, according to which perceived men's feminization increases prejudice as a result of a heightened motivation to reinstate the challenged gender dichotomy. Overall these findings suggest that gender dichotomy affirmation does not drive the predicted effects of perceived men's feminization on heterosexual men's attitudes toward homosexuality, whereas discomfort with homosexuality does.

General Discussion

The present research aimed to investigate for the first time known whether or not important societal shifts in what it means to be a man (i.e., the perceived feminization of men) can influence heterosexual men's attitudes toward homosexuality. Across two studies, we observed that information portraying men as becoming more feminine increased heterosexual men's negative attitudes toward homosexuality (Study 1), and this effect was specifically among those who most conformed to (and endorsed) the anti-femininity norm (Study 2). Furthermore, this effect was mediated by participants' discomfort with homosexuality, but not by participants' endorsement of the gender dichotomy (Study 2).

Taken together, our findings are consistent with past research showing that men react to masculinity threats by affirming their masculinity. Moreover, they extend these past findings in two important ways. First, past research showed that heterosexual men typically react to personal masculinity threats by increasing anti-gay prejudice (Bosson et al. 2012; Glick et al. 2007). The present studies go one step further by showing

that heterosexual men can also increase sexual prejudice when the very meaning of masculinity (rather than their personal gender identity) is threatened by social changes. Second, past research also showed that men react to threats to the anti-femininity norm (e.g., perceived men's feminization) by restating their conformity to this norm (Babl 1979; Bosson and Michniewicz 2013). However, in our Study 1, we did not find a significant effect of perceived men's feminization on participants' endorsement of the avoidance of femininity subscale. Furthermore, in Study 2 we observed that men's conformity to the anti-femininity norm moderated the relationship between perceived men's feminization and attitudes toward homosexuality, but this effect was not mediated by gender dichotomy affirmation. Thus, these findings suggest that our participants did not react to the perceived men's feminization by restating their conformity to this norm. Instead, and given that homosexuality constitutes an alternative and central way to affirm one's masculinity (Herek 1986; Kimmel 1997), the present research suggests that perceived men's feminization increases heterosexual men's negative attitudes toward homosexuality in order to emphasize their own heterosexuality by psychologically distancing themselves from gay men (i.e., as also shown by the increased discomfort with homosexuality).

According to traditional views of masculinity, one of the most important dimensions through which men affirm their personal gender identity is by conforming to an anti-femininity norm. Thus, perceived men's feminization can jeopardize this important identity affirmation process, which may force men to employ a variety of strategies in order to renegotiate their masculine identity. Therefore, the present findings are consistent with social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1986) because they show that group members can deal with a threat to ingroup distinctiveness by choosing alternative outgroups with which to compare (e.g., gay men), or alternative dimensions of comparison that may help maintaining a positive and distinctive ingroup identity (e.g., heterosexuality instead of anti-femininity). They are also consistent with past research showing that people can respond to specific threats to social identity by affirming alternative dimensions of such a social identity (Spencer-Rodgers et al. 2016; see Steele 1988).

Interestingly, the present research suggests that perceived men's feminization may be consequential at different levels. First, perceived men's feminization can increase men's motivation to restate the heterosexuality norm (i.e., by increasing sexual prejudice). Therefore, there are reasons to think that men can also react to men's feminization by strengthening other potential dimensions of masculinity that may appear relevant in a specific context (e.g., aggression, dominance). These *compensation effects* are consistent with research showing that men in traditionally feminine domains feel anxious about their gender status, and they tend to employ different strategies in order to restore a sense of self as masculine such as becoming overly careerist (Alvesson 1998; Lupton 2000; Morgan 1992; Shen-Miller and Smiler 2015). They are also consistent with research showing increased sexual violence in such contexts in which the gender dichotomy and masculinity's higher status have been eroded by gender equality (Gracia and Merlo 2016; Pérez et al. 2005). Finally, they are also consistent with research showing that sexist men essentialize gender differences to a greater extent when gender-based inequality is threatened by social changes (Morton et al. 2009). Thus, masculinity threats such as perceived men's feminization might increase men's motivation to affirm masculinity through multiple (and alternate) means, and further research is needed to better understand these compensation effects.

The present research provides no evidence in support of the possibility that perceived men's feminization increases negative attitudes toward homosexuality through the (re)affirmation of the gender dichotomy (Hypothesis 4; Study 2), which is not consistent with previous findings (Babl 1979; Bosson and Michniewicz 2013). Several reasons could be advanced in order to explain this finding. First, men's feminization may appear as more concrete, unavoidable, and socially valued in our contemporary society than during Babl's (1979) study period (i.e., in the late 70's). As a consequence, the strength of direct (as compared to indirect or alternative) defensive responses to men's feminization may decrease over time. Second, direct defensive responses such as re-stating the challenged anti-femininity norm may also be stronger when heterosexual men find themselves in a situation threatening their personal manhood, as was the case in Bosson and Michniewicz's (2013) Study 5 in which all participants had to imagine they performed a counter-stereotypical behavior. Accordingly, it seems reasonable to think that heterosexual men may react to perceived men's feminization either directly (by conforming to the anti-femininity norm) or indirectly (by adapting themselves to this social change and, therefore, affirming their masculinity by other means). However, further research is needed in order to investigate dispositional and contextual factors moderating the use of such direct versus indirect (or alternate) defensive responses to men's feminization.

Study 2 further showed that perceived men's feminization increased discomfort with (and negative attitudes toward)

homosexuality among those participants who more strongly and explicitly adhered to this norm. This finding is consistent with the idea that only men who perceive a threat to their own masculinity (Bosson and Michniewicz 2013; Study 5), or who strongly conform to the anti-femininity norm of masculinity (Babl 1979), react defensively to men's feminization. Among heterosexual men who conformed less to the anti-femininity norm, the effect of perceived men's feminization on sexual prejudice was not significant. However, our moderated mediation analysis showed that, among these participants, men's feminization indirectly reduced prejudice through a decrease of their discomfort with homosexuality. This finding is consistent with a social influence account of the consequences of changes in gender norms, as well as with Kosakowska-Berezecka et al.'s (2016; Study 3) findings. Therefore, these findings suggest the existence of complex and likely conflictive processes underlying the investigated effects of perceived men's feminization. Further research is needed in order to identify additional conditions under which perceived men's feminization can result either in an increase or a decrease of sexual prejudice.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite the theoretical relevance of the present findings, several limitations of our research need to be considered. To begin, although our participants were not just university students, it is worth noting that our samples were limited in size and we did not collect detailed information about participants' characteristics. Future research should confirm the present findings using different samples.

Another limitation regards the fact that the operationalization of the main variables was kept constant across studies. Although our manipulation of men's gender norm is in line with past research on the topic (Babl 1979; Bosson and Michniewicz 2013), further research should use different operationalizations of men's feminization (e.g., comparing changes in the descriptive versus prescriptive normativity of the anti-femininity mandate, or by framing men's feminization in a more positive or negative way). Moreover, across our two studies, we assessed attitudes toward homosexuality in general (Anderson et al. 2018; Levant et al. 2007b), not specifically toward gay men. However, in Study 2, the items of the discomfort with homosexuality scale focused specifically on sexual minority persons of participants' own sex (i.e., gay men). Therefore, although future research should focus specifically on attitudes toward gay men rather than homosexuality in general, the present research provides evidence consistent with our speculation regarding heterosexual men's reactions specifically toward gay men.

Although the results of Study 2 are informative of the processes at play, a few limitations should also be highlighted. First, in the present research, we used Dasgupta and Rivera's (2006) scale in order to examine whether the effect of

perceived men's feminization on prejudice was driven by the motivation to restate the challenged gender dichotomy or by discomfort with homosexuality. However, these subscales may appear limited for this purpose. On the one hand, and according to Dasgupta and Rivera themselves, the subscale tapping into traditional gender identity focuses on the extent to which people are invested in emphasizing their heterosexual identity. Although this is consistent with the theoretical purpose of the present research, the items of the subscale actually assess individuals' discomfort in situations of contact with gay men. On the other hand, the scale assessing the relevance of the gender dichotomy (Dasgupta & Rivera's traditional beliefs about gender subscale) focuses on intergroup differences between men and women instead of individuals' gender-typical self-stereotyping. Accordingly, further research should test Hypotheses 3 and 4 by using different measures of the extent to which heterosexual men affirm their masculinity through these two alternative but complementary masculinity norms (heterosexuality versus anti-femininity).

Finally, it is worth noting that we only investigated the consequences of perceived men's feminization for heterosexual male participants. Whereas the aim of our paper was to demonstrate the effects of such feminization on men's attitudes, recent changes in gender roles might have important consequences for other social groups as well. In particular, one might wonder if (and how) women's potential masculinization might impact heterosexual female participants. It is worth noting that women tend to show lower levels of gender dichotomization (Bosson and Michniewicz 2013) and sexual prejudice (Herek 1986) and that femininity does not seem to be characterized by an anti-masculinity norm (Levant et al. 2007a; Mahalik et al. 2005). Consequently, we might expect the effects of social changes in gendered roles to impact men's attitudes toward homosexuality to a greater extent than women's attitudes. However, future research warrants the examination of the specific consequences of the perceived masculinization of women.

Practice Implications

Gender inequalities remain one of the most pressing social and political issues in Western countries, and efforts being made to reduce these inequalities will likely also reduce perceived gender differences. Given that gender differences accomplish important identity-related functions for some men, efforts to reduce gender inequalities might be met by some men with defensive reactions that aim to affirm their masculinity by other means. For instance, the perception that gender differences in general, or in a specific context (e.g., group or work setting), are becoming less relevant might lead traditional men to highlight their masculinity in other ways. The findings of our research suggest that one way this might take place is by increasing their anti-gay reactions, which has the obvious

negative impact on gay-identifying individuals and overall creates less harmonious environments. Accordingly, practice professionals (e.g., policymakers, therapists, counselors, teachers, activists) may need to couple efforts to reduce gender inequalities with a greater understanding of men's need to affirm their masculinity. For instance, despite the strength of traditional views of gender identities, these efforts might help traditional men to construct masculinity in general, and their own masculinity in particular, in a beneficial alternative way—one that is associated with the maintenance and even reinforcement of positive intergroup relations. This could also be accomplished through strategies that compensate either at the individual or collective level for the insecure traditional masculinity that might result from the reduced perception of gender differences.

Conclusion

Both endorsement of gender dichotomy and conformity to the anti-femininity norm of masculinity have important consequences for men on a personal level (i.e., regarding men's own behaviors and life choices), an intragroup level (i.e., regarding heterosexual men's attitudes and behaviors toward culturally non-prototypical men), and on an intergroup level (i.e., regarding men's attitudes toward women). However, current social changes in Western egalitarian societies might lead to the perception that men's opposition to femininity is weakening and that men are becoming more and more feminine (i.e., that the anti-femininity mandate is becoming less normative). Whereas one could expect that these social changes will contribute to reducing gender inequalities and improve intergroup attitudes, the present findings suggest that these changes can motivate some men to affirm their masculinity through other relevant dimensions such as emphasizing one's heterosexuality and rejecting gay men.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

We confirm that this manuscript has been approved by all co-authors, is original, has not been previously published and is not under concurrent consideration for publication elsewhere else. We are in compliance with the guidelines of the 6th edition Publication Manual of the APA, including the provisions under the heading 'Alerting the Editor'. There is no published work or unpublished manuscript using the same data (in whole or in part). There is no conflict of interest in the undertaking of this research. We also confirm that these studies have been conducted in a manner consistent with ethical standards for the treatment of human subjects, and that the ethical committee of the first author's home university has approved this research.

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