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Sexistential Crisis: An Intersectional Analysis of Gender Expression and Sexual Orientation in Masculine Overcompensation

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ABSTRACT

Masculine overcompensation—a phenomenon where men react to masculinity threats by endorsing hypermasculine ideals—has been demonstrated among straight men but has yet to be examined among gay men. The current study therefore proposed to examine whether gay men overcompensate similarly to their straight counterparts by providing participants with randomized feedback that threatened their masculinity. Overcompensation was measured in 867 online respondents by administering a series of questionnaires regarding views of pornography, rape, sex roles, and political orientation. Although our hypothesis was not confirmed, results revealed the intersectionality of both sexual orientation and self-reported gender expression regarding the formation of different views and beliefs. Specifically, masculinity was differentially related to homophobic attitudes, more callous views toward victims of sexual assault, and various components of attitudes toward pornography in gay and straight men. Masculine gay males held stereotypically masculine views less strongly than their masculine straight counterparts, providing evidence that gay males adopt a different type of masculinity than straight males—something of a "masculinity lite." Such findings point to the converging influence of sexual orientation and gender expression as contributors relevant to the attitudes of gay and straight men. This information adds to a growing body of literature on differences between gay and straight men and can be used to inform theory, education, and clinical practice, particularly in settings where men grapple with the implications of their masculinity.

Masculine overcompensation is a phenomenon wherein males whose masculinity is called into question react by endorsing or exhibiting exaggerated displays of stereotypically masculine characteristics (Willer, Rogalin, Conlon, & Wojonowicz, 2013). The rhetoric of males overcompensating in reaction to having their performance of masculinity questioned is common throughout society. Although the term *masculinity* is derived from a cultural construct

legitimized by historical ideologies, it remains an abstract concept open to change (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Despite its amorphousness, there are a few salient and stereotypical characteristics of masculinity presented throughout popular culture. Men with large trucks and small penises, mid-life crisis affairs, purchases of convertibles sports cars, endorsement of female-hostile pornography, and exaggerated stories of conquests or manly pursuits are tropes found in movies, television, and at times even in the real world. Willer et al. (2013) demonstrated experimental evidence of masculine overcompensation by exposing males to threats to their gender expression. These men reacted to being told that their gender expression was "somewhat feminine" by endorsing hypermasculine ideals, such as showing support for war, endorsing homophobic statements, and exhibiting a willingness to purchase a large vehicle (Willer et al., 2013).

The purpose of the present study is to partially replicate the findings of Willer et al. (2013) by comparing masculine overcompensation in straight males to that in gay males and, further, to determine whether masculine overcompensation influences endorsement of rape myth and attitudes toward pornography in both gay and straight men. Masculine overcompensation is premised on the notion that, while masculinity is a varied and complex phenomenon shaped by a gender binary, it is generally unified by several distinct characteristics (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; O'Neil, 1981b; Willer et al., 2013). Power, aggression, competition, independence, social status, and anti-femininity are a few of the constructs central to masculinity (O'Neil, 1981b; Smith, Parrott, & Swartout, 2015). Research has indicated that the policing of masculinity, and aversions toward men who violate the masculine norm, are exhibited even from very early childhood. Although this phenomenon is subject to change through development, masculinity remains strongly policed during the lives of boys and men (Pomerleau, Bolduc, Malcuit, & Cossette, 1990; Sandfort, Melendez, & Diaz, 2007)—through childhood (Blakemore, 2003; Lamb, Easterbrooks, & Holden, 1980), adolescence (Young & Sweeting, 2004), and into adulthood (Davies, 2004; Martin, 1990). This policing occurs through many avenues, including peers (Anderson, 2005; McCann, Plummer, & Minichiello, 2010), parents and caretakers (Ben-Zeev & Dennehy, 2014; Pomerleau et al., 1990), and the media (Ricciardelli, Clow, & White, 2010; Vokey, Tefft, & Tysiaczny, 2013). Men who feel they are failing to meet the standard of traditional masculine norms face stress, impaired cognitive functioning, and other negative psychological outcomes (Funk & Werhun, 2011; Simonsen, Blazina, & Watkins, 2000; Taylor, 2014).

By the account of Willer et al. (2013), men who attempt to attain and maintain the appearance of masculinity react to a perceived decrease in their masculine status by overcompensating and by presenting a façade of

even greater masculinity (Willer et al., 2013). To exemplify, in their experimental research Adams, Wright, and Lohr (1999) used a penile plethysmograph to measure blood flow to the genitals of men exposed to gay erotica. They found that participants who expressed more homophobic attitudes had increased blood flow to their genitals, indicating greater sexual arousal. In this, the espousal of homophobic views is a compensating attempt to prevent others from noticing same-sex attraction, which is considered highly unmasculine. As these results suggest dissonant public homophobia and hidden homosexual arousal, it could be that men who prize masculinity also try to distance themselves from, or fail to empathize with, actions and behaviors considered feminine. While research on masculine overcompensation in gay males has yet to be researched, this phenomenon has been elicited among straight males in some studies. Babl (1979) found that straight males who identify as masculine responded to an audio recording that American college-aged males have become less masculine by displaying higher levels of anxiety and reporting their masculinity as higher than their unthreatened counterparts. Bosson, Vandello, Burnaford, Weaver, and Wasti (2009) noted that straight men who had their gender status questioned by being asked to perform a videotaped hairstyling activity subsequently chose to engage in more physically aggressive activities than those who were assigned to a less emasculating task. Other studies have shown straight men to respond to threats against their performance of masculinity by reporting the possession of a greater number of masculine characteristics (Funk & Werhun, 2011), increased homophobia (Glick, Gangl, Gibb, Klumpner, & Weinberg, 2007; Willer et al., 2013), and impulsive or risk-taking behaviors (Weaver, Vandello, & Bosson, 2013) than their unthreatened counterparts.

In a manner similar to straight men, gay men also experience a highly contentious relationship with masculinity. Indeed, most conceptualizations of masculinity maintain that intimacy between men and male homosexuality are fundamentally anti-masculine (O'Neil, 1981a, 1981b). However, for many gay men, masculinity is a highly valued trait (Bailey, Kim, Hills, & Linsenmeier, 1997; Sanchez, Greenberg, Liu, & Vilain, 2009; Sanchez & Vilain, 2012; Sanchez, Westefield, Liu, & Vilain, 2010). For instance, many gay men report or advertise a preference for partners who look and act masculine, or who appear to be performing masculinity in a manner that is culturally acceptable (Bailey et al., 1997; Phua, 2002; Sanchez & Vilain, 2012; Sanchez et al., 2010), though this preference is more pronounced in gay men who rate themselves as being masculine relative to those who rate themselves as feminine (Bailey et al., 1997; Boyden, Carroll, & Maier, 1984). Similarly, some gay men deride femininity in other gay men (Bailey et al., 1997; Clarkson, 2006).

However, some evidence has indicated that gay males have a higher incidence of gender nonconformity than do straight males. That is, they tend not to conform to the culturally lauded masculine ideals that they espouse. A meta-analysis by Lippa (2005) showed evidence that gay men more often exhibit personality traits (expressiveness, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism) that are typical of straight females. A host of other studies have suggested that gay males exhibit—and are viewed by others as exhibiting—more feminine characteristics, interests, and occupations in both self-report and personality measures than their heterosexual counterparts (Lehavot & Lambert, 2007; Lippa, 2005; Sanchez et al., 2009, 2010: Skidmore, Linsenmeier, & Bailey, 2006). As noted, failure to conform to the standard of masculinity is policed by a variety of agencies. Because gay males more often display gender-nonconforming traits, they may be more likely targets of normative sanctions in the form of bullying and maltreatment. For instance, there is some support that gay and gender variant individuals recall a higher number of incidences of bullying and maltreatment than do heterosexual individuals (Corliss, Cochran, & Mays, 2002; Young & Sweeting, 2004).

Gay males who believe masculinity to be an important trait simultaneously hold the desire to behave in a more masculine fashion than they may perceive themselves to act (Sanchez & Vilain, 2012). Unsurprisingly, studies have shown that perceived gender nonconformity—or femininity—is correlated with psychological distress in gay men (Skidmore et al., 2006). Gay men who experience such conflict report a higher incidence of anger, anxiety, and depression (Fischgrund, Halkitis, & Carroll, 2012; Simonsen et al., 2000), have more negative feelings about being gay (Sanchez & Vilain, 2012; Sanchez et al., 2010), perceive lower relationship quality (Wade & Donis, 2007), and have less positive attitudes about seeking psychological help (Simonsen et al., 2000). The desire to maintain a socially valued masculine appearance can also lead to body dissatisfaction (Kimmel & Mahalik, 2005) and risky behaviors, such as illicit drug and steroid use (Halkitis, Moeller, & DeRaleau, 2008; Hamilton & Mahalik, 2009).

Due to the plethora of negative outcomes, it is important to determine the extent to which already vulnerable individuals are affected by threats to their performance of masculinity. Results reported by Fischgrund et al. (2012) suggest that marginalized populations, specifically gay males, will adopt certain aspects of masculinity but discard others. Given that masculinity is considered highly important in the lives of many gay men—and its importance comes with risks both psychological and physical—the extent to which threats against masculinity contribute to overcompensating with potentially risky behaviors is therefore important at both practical and theoretical levels. As such, the current study expands on the work of Willer and colleagues (2013) to determine the extent to which gay men endorse the same aspects of

masculinity as straight men, and it contrasts the various attitudes that men hold about their identity. To our knowledge, no study has examined whether masculine overcompensation is demonstrated by gay males and, if so, whether they overcompensate similarly as their straight male counterparts.

Further, as noted previously, this study extends the work of Willer et al. (2013) to examine how rape-supportive attitudes and perceptions of sexually explicit material are affected by threats to masculine identity. Past research has reported a correlation between masculine ideation and reported sexual aggression (Mosher & Anderson, 1986; Smith et al., 2015), and certain aspects of masculine ideology are correlated to the endorsement of sexually explicit material and rape-supportive attitudes—specifically, those to do with status and anti-femininity (Ickes, 1993; Mikorski & Szymanski, 2016; Quackenbush, 1989; Truman, Tokar, & Fischer, 1996; Vega & Malamuth, 2007; Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2006). Given the relationship between greater adherence to cultural notions of masculinity and endorsement of sexual aggression (Malamuth, Sockloskie, Koss, & Tanaka, 1991; Mescher & Rudman, 2014; Mosher & Anderson, 1986; Quackenbush, 1989), we further hypothesized that self-identified highly masculine men—regardless of their sexual orientation—would espouse greater rape-supportive attitudes and more positive perceptions of sexually explicit material, and that this would be especially true for men who had their performance of masculinity threatened. This same endorsement would not be shown by either gay or straight men who perceive themselves as highly feminine.

Methods

Design

Unlike the large body of correlational literature that has examined constructs of sexual orientation and gender identity, this study featured a 2 (sexual orientation; gay/straight) × 5 (gender self-expression; extremely feminine, somewhat feminine, neither feminine or masculine, somewhat masculine, extremely masculine) × 2 (gender feedback; masculine/feminine) randomized quasi-experimental factorial design.

Participants

The initial sample consisted of 991 male participants recruited primarily through a university research participant pool, but also via community recruitment posters and social media. Because minor deception was employed in this study through the administration of false feedback, participants were given the opportunity to exclude their data from analyses by checking a box in the debriefing form of the survey. Participants were not required to provide any rationale or explanation for

their determination. Thirty participants denied the use of their data in analyses, and 94 more were excluded because they identified as bisexual—which we elected to exclude to avoid complicating the results, given limited expectations for any sexual orientation other than straight, bisexuality is beyond the scope of this investigation. These exclusions resulted in a final sample of 867 participants ($N = 661$ gay men) between the ages of 15 and 65 years ($M = 25.15$; $SD = 7.61$). Participants were recruited from 43 countries, representing every populated continent.[1] Table 1 illustrates the distribution of participants by sexual orientation, mean age, and demographic characteristics. Chi-square analyses indicated significant differences between gay and straight men in highest level of education, $\chi^2(5, N = 867) = 82.15$ $p < .01$, relationship status, $\chi^2(3, N = 867) = 11.04$, $p < .05$, reported level of religiosity, $\chi^2(2, N = 867) = 77.62$, $p < .01$, and political orientation, $\chi^2(6, N = 867) = 63.98$, $p < .01$.

Measures

Demographics questionnaire

Participants were asked to respond to a nine-item questionnaire regarding their age, sexual orientation, highest level of education, relationship status, religious and political convictions, and self-identified gender expression on a scale ranging from 5 (*extremely masculine*) to 1 (*extremely feminine*). It is

Table 1. Distribution of demographic characteristics by sexual orientation.

	Straight $n = 206$ $M_{age} = 25.44$ ($SD = 9.26$)	Gay $n = 661$ $M_{age} = 25.00$ ($SD = 6.94$)
(1) Education		
(a) Less than high school	5 (2.4)	15 (2.3)
(b) Completed high school	21 (10.2)	59 (8.9)
(c) Some undergraduate	147 (71.4)	259 (39.2)
(d) Completed undergraduate	15 (7.3)	208 (31.5)
(e) Graduate school or above	18 (8.8)	120 (18.2)
(2) Relationship Status		
(a) Single	111 (53.9)	424 (64.1)
(b) Dating	27 (13.1)	69 (10.4)
(c) Seriously Committed	45 (21.8)	131 (19.8)
(d) Married/Common-law	23 (11.2)	37 (5.6)
(3) Religious Beliefs		
(a) Not at all religious	105 (51)	531 (80.3)
(b) Somewhat religious	87 (42.2)	124 (18.8)
(c) Extremely religious	14 (6.8)	6 (.9)
(4) Political Orientation		
(a) Extremely liberal	18 (8.7)	86 (13)
(b) Somewhat liberal	96 (46.6)	439 (66.4)
(c) Neither	54 (26.2)	88 (13.3)
(d) Somewhat conservative	36 (17.5)	48 (7.2)
(e) Extremely conservative	2 (1)	0 (0)

Note: Percentages appear in parentheses.

from this questionnaire that participants' sexual orientation and level of self-reported masculinity were ascertained.

Political Views Survey

The Political Views Survey (Willer et al., 2013) was originally developed on an American sample to assess participants' support for the war in Iraq and their attitudes toward homosexuality. In the present study, the survey was modified slightly to be more reflective of international political issues and values. Specifically, references to American politics were changed to be more inclusive of an international audience. The question, "How much did you approve of President Bush's handling of the war in Iraq?" was changed to "How much do you approve of the handling of the war in the Middle East?" The question, "How much did you approve of President Bush's decision to invade Iraq?" was changed to "Do you support your country invading Iraq?" Questions regarding attitudes toward homosexuality included support for the banning of same-sex marriage, approval of the "gay rights movement," and whether same-sex relations were always or never wrong.

Participants rated their support for war and attitudes toward homosexuality (reverse-scaled) on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*extremely opposed*) to 5 (*extremely supportive*), where higher scores reflect greater support for war and greater negativity toward gay males. Responses ranged from 3 to 15 and were averaged to form composite scores. Previous research (Willer et al., 2013) indicated coefficient alphas of .93 and .89 on the support for war and attitudes toward gay males composites, respectively. The present study confirmed Cronbach's alpha of .77 on the support for war composite, and Cronbach's alpha of .83 on the attitudes toward gay males composite.

The Attitudes Toward Erotica Questionnaire

The 21-item Attitudes Toward Erotica Questionnaire (ATEQ; Lottes, Weinberg, & Weller, 1993) was used to assess participant views of erotica (i.e., sexually explicit material/pornography). The scale instructed respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with questions pertaining to the harmful effects of sexually explicit material (e.g., "The availability of sexually explicit material leads to a breakdown in community morals"), its positive effects (e.g., "Pornography may provide an outlet for bottled-up sexual pressures"), and its restriction and regulation (e.g., "Pornography should be publicly sold and publicly shown"). Responses to each question were rated on a Likert-scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), where higher scores reflect greater endorsement of the constructs. Nine items combine to produce a Harmful subscale (total scores ranging from 9–45), seven yield a Positive subscale (total scores ranging from 7–35), and five items produce a Restriction subscale (total scores ranging from 5–25).

Previous research (Lottes et al., 1993) has suggested coefficient alphas ranging between .84 and .90 on the Harmful subscale, between .73 and .78 on the Positive subscale, and at .85 for the Restriction subscale. In the present study, Cronbach's alphas were .85, .78, and .68 for the Harmful, Positive, and Restriction subscales respectively.

Rape-Supportive Attitudes Scale

The 20-item Rape-Supportive Attitudes Scale (RSAS; Lottes, 1991) assesses victim-callous attitudes toward rape victims, including false beliefs about rape and rapists. Seven beliefs measured by this scale include (1) women enjoy sexual violence, (2) women are responsible for rape prevention, (3) sex rather than power is the primary motive for rape, (4) rape happens to only certain kinds of women, (5) a woman is less desirable after being raped, (6) women falsely report rape, and (7) rape is justified in some situations. Responses to items were assessed via Likert-scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), which were summed to produce a composite, where higher scores reflect greater endorsement of victim-callous attitudes (i.e., rape support). Previous research reported coefficient alpha at .91 for the summed items, with strong validity indicated by significant correlations in the predicted direction to measures of nonegalitarian gender role beliefs, traditional attitudes toward female sexuality, nonacceptance of homosexuality, and hypermasculinity (Lottes, 1991). In the present study, a strong reliability coefficient was obtained at α = .88.

Bem Sex Role Inventory

In accordance with procedures adopted by Willer et al. (2013), this study involved the administration of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1974) a gender identity questionnaire that requires respondents to indicate the extent to which a series of adjectives (e.g., helpful, independent, athletic) describe their personality. Following the completion of this survey, participants were provided with immediate, randomly generated feedback indicating that they had scored in either the "masculine" or "feminine" range of gender expression, relative to extant research. Randomness to conditions was established through the online survey software, Fluidsurveys. A score ranging from 0 to 50 (standardized for all participants) and a verbal descriptor explaining their result as either one commonly found among males—or common among females—was also provided.

In reality, the scoring and use of the BSRI was entirely bogus; gender feedback provided to participants based on their responses to this measure was utterly false and was provided solely for the purposes of manipulation. As such, the results from the BSRI were not used, and the randomized feedback was in no way connected to participant actual BSRI scores—the use of the BSRI was simply a front to deceive participants into believing the

gender feedback was based on their responses to a scientifically developed measurement instrument.

The randomized feedback provided was either congruous with an individual's perceived gender expression (masculine feedback for masculine males) or incongruous with an individual's perception of their gender expression (feminine feedback for masculine males). The latter of these two is henceforth referred to as false-gender feedback. The aim of this deception was to examine whether false-gender feedback influenced participants' responses on subsequent measures of support for war, views of homosexuality, attitudes toward sexually explicit material, and endorsement of hostile rape myth. As noted by Willer et al. (2013), the concept that masculinity and femininity lie at two ends of a single spectrum of gender identity is inconsistent with the gender literature and with the actual scoring of the BSRI (Bem, 1974). Nonetheless, evidence indicates that participants generally view the gender feedback as highly credible (Willer et al.).

Procedures

This study was presented to participants as an assessment of their views about controversial topics such as war and gay marriage. Participants were recruited largely from the psychology department research participant pool at a sizeable western Canadian university. Given that this study required a substantial number of gay men, it was also necessary to seek participants from outside the research pool. Recruitment posters were advertised at local gyms, community centers, coffee shops, and grocery stores. In addition, participants were gathered using advertisements via Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit (through the subreddits r/academicpsychology, r/samplesize, r/gaybros, r/gaymers, and r/gay). All participants were directed to an online survey site (fluidsurveys.com), where informed consent was obtained and anonymity assured. Completed response rate to the survey was calculated at 87%.

All participants were presented with site content in the same order. Study information and consent were presented first, followed by demographics, the BSRI false-gender feedback, the Political Views Survey, the ATEQ, and the RSAS. A debriefing page was presented last, with an option for participants to decline the use of their data, given that deception was used in the study. As noted previously, 30 participants opted to have their data deleted from subsequent analyses. University student participants completed the survey in exchange for course credit in specified psychology classes. Non-university participants had the option to enter their name into a drawing for one of two gift certificates to Amazon.

Results

A series of 3-way ANOVAs on each dependent variable indicated no effect of the false-gender expression feedback manipulation. Specifically—and contrary to

expectations—the false-gender expression feedback did not influence either gay or straight participants' attitudes toward war, $F(1, 859) = 1.70$, $p = .19$; sexual orientation, $F(1, 859) = .20$, $p = .66$; rape support endorsement, $F(1, 859) = .60$, $p = .44$; or positive, $F(1, 859) = 1.19$, $p = .28$, harmful, $F(1, 858) = 2.09$, $p = .15$, or restrictive, $F(1, 858) = .13$, $p = .72$ views of sexually explicit material.

Several interesting findings did emerge, however. For instance, significant main effects in negative attitudes toward homosexuality were found for both sexual orientation, $F(1, 849) = 100.45$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .11$ and gender self-expression, $F(4, 849) = 5.82$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .03$, although these effects were qualified by a significant higher order sexual orientation × gender self-expression interaction, $F(3, 849) = 6.30$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .02$. Simple effects analyses indicated the most negative attitudes toward gays being reported by extremely masculine straight men ($M = 7.35$, $SD = 3.04$), following a mono-tonic downward trend for somewhat masculine straight men ($M = 5.85$, $SD = 2.88$), neither masculine or feminine straight men ($M = 5.11$, $SD = 2.96$), and somewhat feminine straight men ($M = 5.00$, $SD = 2.00$). There were no extremely feminine straight participants in this study.

The least negative attitudes toward gays were reported among extremely feminine gay men ($M = 3.00$, $SD = .00$), following a monotonic upward trend for somewhat feminine gay men ($M = 3.41$, $SD = .76$), neither masculine or feminine gay men ($M = 3.45$, $SD = .90$), somewhat masculine gay men ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.04$), and extremely masculine gay men ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.08$). In other words, men who endorsed extreme masculinity also endorsed more negative attitudes toward gays—a trend that held for both gay and straight participants. Figure 1 graphs these interactions.

Findings also revealed partial support for the hypothesis that highly masculine men would espouse greater support for sexually explicit material and greater rape-supportive attitudes, in the form of several main effects for sexual orientation and for gender self-expression. Specifically, a significant main effect of sexual orientation on the harmful effects of sexually explicit material composite was revealed, $F(1, 849) = 34.39$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$, with straight men indicating more harmful effects ($M = 24.55$, $SE = .82$, 95% CI [22.95, 26.15]) than their gay male counterparts ($M = 20.10$, $SE = .94$, 95% CI [18.25, 21.95]). There was also a significant main effect of gender self-expression on the harmful effects of sexually explicit material, $F(4, 849) = 4.04$, $p = .003$, $\eta^2 = .02$, with Bonferroni post hoc tests indicating that overall, self-identified masculine men perceive less harmful effects than self-identified feminine men (see Table 2).

Also found was a significant main effect for sexual orientation on the sexually explicit material restriction composite, $F(1, 849) = 20.01$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .02$, with straight men endorsing greater restrictions on the distribution of pornography ($M = 12.16$, $SE = .42$, 95% CI [11.35, 12.98]) than gay men ($M = 10.69$, $SE = .48$, 95% CI [9.75, 11.62]). Finally, a significant main effect of
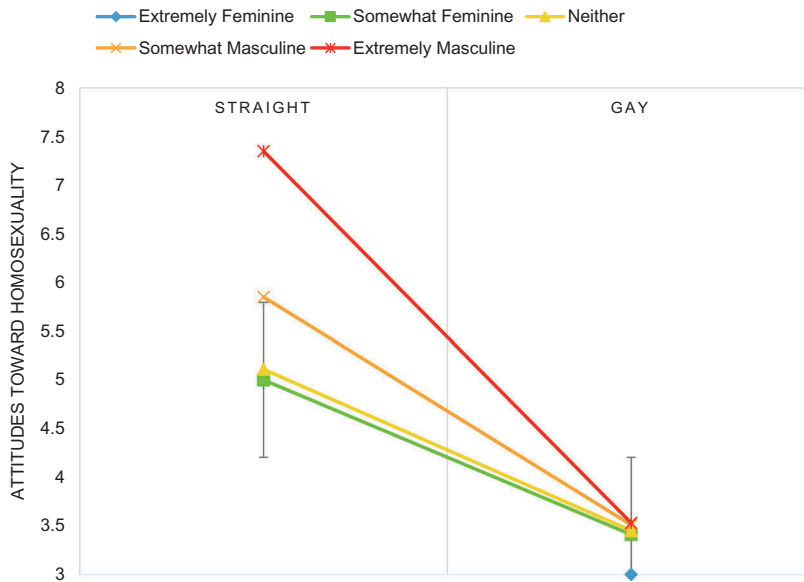
Figure 1. Sexual Orientation × Gender self-expression interaction on negative attitudes toward homosexuality.
Scale ranges from 3–15, where higher scores reflect greater negativity toward gay males. Standard error bars shown.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of dependent variables by self-identified gender expression.

	Extremely Feminine	Somewhat Feminine	Neither	Somewhat Masculine	Extremely Masculine
Attitudes Toward Erotica Scale					
Harmful[a]	23.50$_a$ (4.44)	22.28$_b$ (1.52)	23.49$_c$ (.56)	21.94 (.33)	19.89$_{abc}$ (.73)
Positive[b]	22.50 (2.78)	27.95 (.96)	26.63 (.35)	27.09 (.21)	27.73 (.46)
Restriction[c]	13.00 (2.26)	10.41 (.77)	11.37 (.29)	11.47 (.17)	11.29 (.37)
Rape Supportive Attitudes Scale[d]	28.50$_a$ (7.03)	37.33$_b$ (2.41)	35.51$_{cd}$ (.89)	37.23$_c$ (.52)	42.35$_{abcd}$ (1.16)

[a]Subscale ranges from 9–45.
[b]Subscale ranges from 7–35.
[c]Subscale ranges from 5–25.
[d]Subscale ranges from 20–100. Within rows, means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .05$. Standard errors are reported in parentheses.

sexual orientation on the positive effects of sexually explicit material composite was found, $F(1, 849) = 13.65$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .02$, with gay men indicating stronger support for the positive aspects of such material ($M = 27.22$, $SE = .59$, 95% CI [26.06, 28.38]) than did straight men ($M = 26.30$, $SE = .51$, 95% CI [25.30, 27.31]).

Finally, there were significant main effects of sexual orientation, $F(1, 849) = 22.54$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .03$ and gender self-expression, $F(4, 849) = 5.85$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .03$ on the measure of rape-supportive attitudes, with straight participants endorsing greater victim-callousness ($M = 41.50$, $SE = 1.29$, 95%

CI [38.97, 44.03]) than gay participants ($M = 33.47$, $SE = 1.49$, 95% CI [30.54, 36.40]). Table 2 highlights that, as expected, self-identified masculine men endorsed much stronger victim-callousness than their self-identified feminine counterparts.

Discussion

The results of the current study did not provide evidence in support of the masculine overcompensation hypothesis—neither gay or straight men engaged in overcompensation strategies to restore and reestablish their performance of masculinity following exposure to a stimulus designed to threaten it. Nonetheless, the findings seem to hint at larger and more complex phenomena. For instance, it was determined that males who identify as masculine hold views condemning homosexuality and—as hypothesized— endorse greater victim-callousness, though these views were lessened in the case of masculine-identified gay males. Such findings provide evidence that gay males who identify as masculine adopt stereotypically masculine characteristics in a manner different than their heterosexual counterparts. In this vein, there is a great deal of past research examining the effect of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, experience, community, and other factors on the development of attitudes (Johnson & Marini, 1998; Lien, 2008; Owen, Videras, & Wu, 2010). What is less understood is the extent to which a person's intersectionality—or the varied components that construct an individual's identity—influence attitudes, of which the current results have hinted. Studies detailing how different aspects of identity inform attitudes and opinions are scant in number, but some evidence does suggest that different aspects of identity can combine to affect one's opinions on various topics (Allison, 2011). The current study extends this knowledge by providing evidence that gender, sexual orientation, and self-reported gender expression interact to influence attitudes toward homosexuality, pornography, and rape-callousness.

For instance, the interplay of masculinity and sexual orientation garnered interesting findings in our participants' attitudes toward rape, with men who identified as both extremely masculine and straight, holding more callous views than either their feminine or gay counterparts. It could be that males who identify as masculine and straight view themselves as unlikely to become victims themselves—and are thereby less inclined to empathize with the plight of victims of sexual violence (Sundaram, Helweg-Larsen, Laursen, & Bjerregaard, 2004). Similarly, because gay males are more often targets of persecution, they more likely relate to and identify with victims of sexual assault, subsequently endorsing less callous attitudes (Corliss et al., 2002; Stephan & Finlay, 1999; Young & Sweeting, 2004; Zagefka, Noor, & Brown, 2013). A similar interplay is revealed in participants' attitudes toward

homosexuality, with masculine straight males reporting stronger negative attitudes toward gays than their masculine gay male counterparts. Surprisingly, feminine straight males also showed greater negativity toward homosexuality, but less than that of feminine gay males, suggesting greater influence of sexual orientation over gender expression in the development of attitudes toward gays.

Regarding various aspects of sexually explicit material, men who self-identified as feminine indicated more harmful aspects of such material, such as the exploitation of women, degradation, violence, and subsequent erosion of societal morality. This same trend was found among straight men —regardless of their gender expression. Although Johansson and Hammaren (2007) relayed a similar finding—that a surprising number of men hold negative attitudes toward pornography—it is nonetheless not clear why an endorsement of pornography's harmful aspects would be more readily identified among only our self-identified feminine and straight male participants. Perhaps feminine men—whose very femininity violates the traditional hegemonic masculinity norms that promote dominance over women (Smith et al., 2015)—identify more keenly with the presumed subordination of women in the pornography industry. Perhaps straight men are greater consumers of the type of pornography that does indeed degrade and exploit women. As there is relatively limited research focusing on gender expression and its relation to pornography (Garlick, 2010), these data indicate thought-provoking avenues for future investigation.

Another interesting finding was that straight men reported the necessity for greater restrictions on the distribution of sexually explicit material than did gay men, a result that may be related to the greater endorsement of harmful effects reported among straight men. Perhaps because our straight male participants believed pornography to be exploitative to women and detrimental to the morality of society, they also endorsed greater restrictions on its distribution. Due to mainstream media attention focusing on the exploitation and degradation of women in sexually explicit material—relative to the paucity of such an emphasis on the victimhood of males in the same profession (Garlick, 2010; Johansson & Hammaren, 2007)—this negative view is perhaps unsurprising. As noted, sexually explicit material consumed by straight men may indeed be more exploitative and degrading relative to that routinely viewed by gay men and, consequently, should be distributed with greater restriction. It is also possible that, regardless of whether gay and straight pornography are equally exploitive, gay men do not assign the same level of harm to their material than do straight men. Indeed, the prevalence of exploitation, violence, and degradation in gay pornography is not a topic well explored, and certainly further research is needed to contribute to a more robust understanding of the findings of this study. Interestingly, all participants—regardless of sexual orientation or gender expression—indicated relatively strong support for the positive aspects of

sexually explicit material, including identifying it as cathartic, an educational tool, and an enhancement to sexual pleasure. It is undoubtedly plausible that—while acknowledging the presumed harms of such material—participants may have wished to justify their usage of the product, or see the pleasure they gain from it as more beneficial than the harms they believe it bestows. Finally, differences between participants may simply be due to different interpretations of sexually explicit material. Although it is assumed that straight men were considering straight pornography during the completion of attitude measures in this study—and gay men were considering gay pornography—it is not actually known what kind of sexually explicit material participants were thinking about when answering questions as to its potential for harm, restriction, or benefit. Future studies should consider that varied interpretations of sexually explicit material may differentially influence attitudes and perceptions.

Limitations and future research directions

Although this study failed to replicate the masculine overcompensation hypothesis in both gay and straight men, we cannot discount the robust and yet perplexing results. Perhaps we were unable to replicate Willer et al. (2013) because masculine overcompensation is a strictly Western cultural phenomenon that was not elicited in the more global and multicultural sample recruited for this study. Given that masculinity has been shown to vary by context, this may certainly be one explanation (Phua, 2007; Rochelle, 2015; Rogers, Sperry, & Levant, 2015; Van Oudenhoven, Mechelse, & De Dreu, 1998). More likely, however, was the disparity in methodological aspects of our designs. For one, our data were collected online—plaguing us with online data collection challenges including the possibility of self-selection bias, poor quality responses, deception, and misrepresentation. While we acknowledge this as a limitation of the present study, we also argue that such challenges are not unique to online survey research—in-person and mail-in administration approaches suffer from the same basic limitations, so our findings are at no greater disadvantage with regard to quality of responses or sampling bias.

Another concern is the change of wording implemented in the support for war composite of the Political Views Survey (Willer et al., 2013) substantially reduced the size of the coefficient alpha—from .93 reported by Willer and colleagues to .77 in the present study. What we perceived as a minor change may have instead resulted in our failure to measure the same construct as that of Willer et al., contributing to replication failure. Additionally, data collection conducted by Willer et al. involved in-person administration of the false-gender feedback; in the present study, the masculinity threat was delivered via computer. Relative to a human interaction—where a scientific expert informs participants that their gender expression is "somewhat feminine"—participants in this study may not have viewed an insult to their performance

of masculinity provided by a computer program as particularly threatening; indeed, they may have disregarded it entirely or not felt the need to overcompensate in response. Perhaps Willer and colleagues were successful in provoking masculine overcompensation by providing an immediate and proximate threat in a face-to-face setting—something obviously lacking in a computer-generated study. Further, given the propensity of individuals to react differently to messages from within their ingroup relative to messages from their outgroup (Pennekamp, Doosje, Zebel, & Henriquez, 2009), there are a variety of possible threats that could be investigated. Thus a potential avenue for further investigation on masculine overcompensation could be to determine whether threats delivered via computer or human, man or woman, or other groups and agents elicit stronger over-compensatory responses in those threatened. We also strongly suggest that future researchers incorporate credibility checks to evaluate the degree to which participants find false feedback believable, regardless of the medium through which it is administered.

Despite these limitations, it is nonetheless still relevant to investigate the trends hinted at by the results of this study to determine the extent to which gender, sexual orientation, and self-reported gender expression work in harmonious or discordant manners to form attitudes toward war, gays, pornography, and rape. The current study was limited by not having this interaction at its focus, yet our findings still suggest the importance of intersectionality on attitude formation. It would be worthwhile to discover whether aspects of identity considered more central to individuals have a larger sway over their opinions than those aspects considered more peripheral. Our results seem to provide support to the line of research suggesting that attitudes are informed by numerous variables, including immutable ones such as gender, sexuality, and gender expression (Fischgrund et al., 2012). Moreover, our gay and straight participants differed on measures of education, religiosity, and political orientation—variables suggested by some as correlates of masculinity (Ferdinand, 1964; Hershey & Sullivan, 1977; Kurdek, 1988; Mahalik & Lagan, 2001)—which certainly may have influenced our findings. Future researchers should certainly investigate the role of these variables as covariates, mediators, or moderators to masculinity threat and masculine overcompensation.

Theoretical and practical implications

The results of this study illuminate an increasingly complicated area of psychological research. At a theoretical level, the results support previous investigations on the influence of masculinity constructs in straight men's attitude formation (Funk & Werhun, 2011; Glick et al., 2007; Ickes, 1993;

Mikorski & Szymanski, 2016). However, the findings elucidate a more complex, intersectional influence of masculinity in gay men, germinating interest in further research in this area—and in particular—additional studies adopting intersectional analyses.

At a practical level, educators and counselors aiding men of both gay and straight orientations can use the implications of this study to guide treatment and intervention. Special consideration should be given to the extent to which individuals hold a masculine self-identity, as it can be a strong contributing factor to interpersonal and emotional growth (see O'Neil, 1981b). In our study, straight males who identified as feminine were shown to have strong negative views of homosexuality. Therapeutic intervention and education could therefore be used to redirect these negative attitudes to alleviate emotional discomfort. In contrast, gay males who identified as masculine held somewhat incongruent views of their sexuality, suggesting difficulties due to a cognitive dissonance. The trends identified in this study serve to somewhat complicate, but also elucidate, the complexity of dealing with the intersectionality of various identities that men adopt and hold strongly.

Conclusions

To our knowledge, this study was the first to explore the masculine overcompensation hypothesis in gay males. It was established that different identities, such as masculinity and sexual orientation, work collectively to affect the attitudes and opinions of gay and straight men. Results revealed that gay males who identify as masculine adopt different aspects of masculinity than do straight males. The masculinity adopted by masculine gay males tended to be a less extreme version—somewhat of a "masculinity lite." Further research is needed to fully elucidate this phenomenon and to determine other ways in which gay males position themselves within the construct of masculinity. The results of the current research may not have confirmed that men overcompensate for perceived faults in their masculinity, but they do suggest that we should avoid making assumptions about an individual's entire set of beliefs from the presence of immutable traits, or the instance of a person holding a stance on a single issue. Rather, the results here indicate that the inclination to reach these conclusions are misguided, as individuals hold a more varied set of characteristics than such simplistic assertions allow.

Notes

1. Provinces represented in Canada included: British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia. Every U.S. state, including the District of Columbia, was represented, excluding Alaska, Idaho, and South Carolina. Globally, participants were recruited from Argentina, Australia,

Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Colombia, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, French Guyana, Germany, Guam, Honduras, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Kuwait, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Republic of Serbia, Romania, Singapore, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, and Venezuela.

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