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HOMOPHOBIA AMONG AUSTRALIAN HETEROSEXUALS: THE ROLE OF SEX, GENDER ROLE IDEOLOGY, AND GENDER ROLE TRAITS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined homophobia and gender roles in heterosexual Australian men ($n = 42$) and women ($n = 67$). No sex difference in general homophobia was found, however the men were more homophobic toward gay men than lesbians, whereas the women were more homophobic toward lesbians. Sex by Homophobia analyses revealed that both men and women in the low homophobia group held feminist gender role beliefs. Women in the high homophobia group also held feminist beliefs, however high homophobic men reported more traditional gender role beliefs, suggesting that beliefs about sexuality and gender roles are more closely linked for men than women. High and low homophobia groups reported similar levels of self-ascribed masculine traits, but differed on positive feminine traits. Both men and women in the low homophobia group reported similarly high levels of interpersonal qualities such as sensitivity to others' needs, patience, loyalty, gentleness, and emotionality. While the link between gender role beliefs and homophobia requires further clarification, the promotion of 'feminine' traits as gender-neutral, socially valued qualities may help to reduce homophobia and other forms of prejudice.

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INTRODUCTION

Prejudice against lesbians and gay men has become widely recognized as a problem in today's society (Britton, 1990). Consequently, research has focused on anti-homosexual attitudes,

popularly termed homophobia (Morin & Garfinkle, 1978; Weinberg, 1972). Smith (1971) and Weinberg (1972) originally defined homophobia as the fear of being near homosexuals. In recent years, the term has been applied more generally to a variety of negative reactions to homosexuals. Homophobia is said to be a reaction to the threat which homosexuality poses to heterosexual privilege in a male dominated society (Britton, 1990; Dunkle & Francis, 1990). Hence, homophobia may be seen as a device to keep individuals within traditionally defined roles (Dunkle & Francis, 1990; Morin & Garfinkle, 1978).

According to Herek (1988), to be a heterosexual masculine male is to be homophobic because homophobia is inherent in the traditional male identity. The traditional male identity is defined as heterosexual, masculine, capable, independent, invulnerable, emotionally controlled and competitive (Herek, 1988). In contrast, heterosexuality and homophobia are considered to be less consequential elements of the female identity (Herek, 1988). As heterosexuality is more strongly linked to the male than the female role, it has been proposed that male homosexuality is more incongruent with socially approved gender roles than is lesbianism (Logan, 1996). It has also been argued that men appear to be subjected to greater pressures for gender role conformity than women (Logan, 1996). Thus male homosexuals who violate their prescribed gender role are more susceptible to rejection than are lesbians (Morin & Garfinkle, 1978).

Research has shown that individuals who do not support equality between the sexes, believing that men and women should maintain separate and traditional gender roles, tend to be more negative toward homosexuality in comparison to individuals who possess an egalitarian attitude towards gender roles (Britton, 1990; Dunkle & Francis, 1990). These findings are not surprising since both homosexuality and feminism represents departures from, and challenges to, traditional gender roles (Dunkle & Francis, 1990).

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As homophobia operates in favor of traditional masculine heterosexual men, such men are subsequently more likely to be homophobic than women (Reiter, 1991). However, women who wish to maintain the status quo may also tend to be homophobic (Pharr, 1988). Surveys of American men and women have shown both sexes to be homophobic, however men tend to be more homophobic than women (Britton, 1990; Logan, 1996; Reiter, 1991). American studies have also suggested that men and women respond differently according to the target homosexual specified. Heterosexual men are more rejecting of gay men than lesbians, while heterosexual women are more rejecting of lesbians than gay men (Millham, San Miguel & Kellogg, 1976; Millham & Weinberger, 1977). Presumably, homosexuals who are the same sex as oneself are more threatening than homosexuals of the opposite sex, since it is one's own gender's stereotype which is violated (Herek, 1988; Logan, 1996; Weinberger & Millham, 1979). Thus, there appear to be differences in the degree of homophobia reported by heterosexual men and women, depending on whether the target homosexual is male or female. There also appear to be links between traditional male and female gender roles (including beliefs and traits) and homophobia. As these findings are largely based on US data, and few published studies have examined homophobia in Australian samples, the present study aims to explore sex differences, gender roles and homophobia among heterosexual Australian men and women.

We expanded the measurement of homophobia, defined as a personal negative emotional response to either proximal or distal contact or involvement with homosexual individuals (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980), to include three separate aspects: negative affective responses to gay men, negative affective responses to lesbians, and negative affective responses to homosexuals in general. Four specific predictions were made in relation to sex differences in homophobia. It was expected that there would be no differences in men's and women's general homophobia scores; however men would have higher homophobia scores for gay men than lesbians; women would have higher homophobia scores for lesbians than gay men; and men would be more rejecting of gay men than women were of lesbians.

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In light of Whitley's (1987) suggestion, we examined multiple aspects of gender roles to explicate the links with homophobia. Thus, gender role beliefs were assessed in terms of ideological beliefs about gender-appropriate roles for men and women, while gender role traits were assessed in terms of self-ascribed personality characteristics, which are traditionally deemed feminine or masculine. In this framework, more 'traditional' individuals are those with traditional gender role beliefs and self-reported traditional gender role traits.

Using a 2 (degree of homophobia) \times 2 (sex of participant) design, associations with gender role ideology and gender role traits were examined. It was expected that women would report more feminist (non-traditional) gender role beliefs than men. Women were also expected to report more traditional feminine traits than men. Conversely, men were expected to report higher masculine trait scores than women. In relation to Homophobia, the high homophobia group was expected to hold more traditional gender role beliefs, while the low homophobic group was expected to hold more feminist beliefs. It was also expected that high homophobic men would report higher masculine trait scores and more traditional gender role beliefs than low homophobic men. Likewise, high homophobic women were expected to report higher feminine trait scores and less feminist gender role beliefs than low homophobic women.

METHOD

Participants

There were 110 heterosexual participants in the present study, 42 males and 67 females. The average age of participants was 21.74 ($SD = 5.51$) years, ranging from 16 to 38 years. The majority of the sample (85%) consisted of undergraduate psychology students, of these 72 % were full-time and 13 % were part-time students. Equal proportions of the psychology students were from business, social science and applied science courses, and the majority of the students were from middle class backgrounds. The remaining participants were their acquaintances who worked in a variety of occupations. The majority of participants were Australians of Anglo-Saxon background (74%), 6% were Australians of Asian background, and 18% were Australians of European background.

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Materials

Demographic items were included to ascertain sex, age, ethnic background, occupation, student status and sexual orientation. For the latter, participants were asked to select the category which best described their sexuality: 'Predominantly heterosexual', 'Heterosexual', 'Bisexual', 'Homosexual' or 'I don't know'. Only those choosing heterosexual or predominantly heterosexual were included in the analyses.

Gender role beliefs were measured with the Sex-Role Ideology Scale (SRIS, Kalin & Tilby, 1978). This scale consisted of 30 statements regarding appropriate behavior for men and women. Half of the items were phrased in the feminist direction and half were phrased in the traditional direction. Items were rated on a 7-point scale, where 1 = strongly agree and 7 = strongly disagree. Total scores were obtained by reversing the ratings for traditional items and then summing all item scores. High scores indicate a more feminist ideology and low scores indicate a more traditional gender role ideology. For the purpose of the present study, two items referring to abortion and homosexuality were omitted. The 28-item SRI demonstrated high internal consistency for this sample (Cronbach's alpha = .80).

The Index of Homophobia (IHP, Hudson & Ricketts, 1980) was expanded to include specific items pertaining to gay men and lesbians in addition to general homophobia items. Items were rated on a 5-point scale, where 1 = strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree. Scores were calculated by reverse-scoring negatively worded items, then summing the relevant individual items for each subscale. Higher scores indicated higher levels of homophobia. Participants obtained three separate homophobia subscale scores: homosexuals in general (13 items, with a possible score range of 13 to 65), gay men (12 items, with a possible score range of 12 to 60), and lesbians (12 items, with a possible score range of 12 to 60). The subscales demonstrated high internal reliability, with coefficient alpha being .93 for general homophobia, .84 for homophobia toward gay men, and .81 for homophobia toward lesbians. Total Homophobia scores (as opposed to general homophobia) were computed by summing the three subscales (37 items with a possible score range of 37 to 185).

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The Australian Sex-Role Scale (ASRS, Personal Descriptive Questionnaire Form A, Antill, Cunningham, Russell & Thompson, 1981) consists of 10 positively valued masculine (M+), 10 negatively valued masculine (M-), 10 positively valued feminine (F+), 10 negatively valued feminine (F-) trait adjectives. Participants indicated the extent to which each quality was a description of themselves on a 7-point scale, where 1 = never or almost never true and 7 = always or almost always true. The range of possible scores for each of the M+, M-, F+ and F- subscales ranged from 10 to 70. The present study found high internal consistency for these trait subscales (Cronbach's alpha for the M+ = .78, M- = .79, F+ = .75, and F- = .80).

Procedure

Students in psychology lectures were given two copies of the questionnaire, asked to complete one themselves and to pass the other on to a friend. Complete anonymity was assured. Participants either returned the completed questionnaires to a box on campus or posted them back in the reply paid envelope provided. There was a 49% return rate.

RESULTS

Sex Differences in Homophobia

To examine sex differences in homophobia t-tests were conducted to compare mean scores of men's and women's negative emotional responses toward gay men and lesbians. Table 1 presents men's and women's mean homophobia scores in relation to gay men, lesbians, and homosexuals in general. A one-tailed directional t-test for independent groups showed that there was no significant difference between men's and women's homophobia scores for homosexuals in general, $t(107) = 1.24, p > .05$.

One-tailed directional t-tests for paired groups showed that male participants were significantly more homophobic towards gay men than lesbians, $t(41) = -2.98, p < .05$. Female participants reported significantly higher homophobia scores toward lesbians than gay men, $t(66) = 2.92, p < .05$. To test whether men were more anti-gay than women were anti-lesbian, a one-tailed t-test for independent groups was calculated between men's mean homophobia score toward gay men ($M = 32.50, SD = 10.01$) and women's mean homophobia score towards lesbians ($M = 29.75, SD = 8.32$). There was no significant difference, $t(107) = 1.04, p > .05$.

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Homophobia and Gender Role Ideology / Beliefs

In order to examine whether men and women who were relatively low and high in homophobia differed on gender role beliefs, two Sex by Homophobia analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were performed on the Sex-Role Ideology Scale. As there was no systematic association between sex and homophobia ($\chi^2(1) = 1.00, p > .05$), these were treated as orthogonal factors.

Table 1. Men's and Women's Mean Homophobia Scores For Gay Men and Lesbians

	Males (N=42)		Females (N=67)	
Homophobia Scores	M	SD	M	SD
Towards Homosexuals in General	41.57	9.98	39.63	9.22
Towards Gays	32.50	10.01	28.96	7.83
Towards Lesbians	30.26	8.50	29.75	8.32

Note: Homophobia scores toward homosexuals in general are measured on a scale from 13 to 65. Homophobia scores toward gays and lesbians are measured on a scale from 12 to 60. Please note these two scores are not comparable.

Homophobia groups were formed by performing a tertile split on the distribution of total homophobia scores. Those in the bottom third of the sample distribution formed the low

homophobia group ($n = 37$) and those in the top third formed the high homophobia group ($n = 37$), with the middle group omitted from these analyses.

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For gender role ideology scores, ANOVA revealed a significant main effect for Sex, $F(1,66) = 4.58, p < .05$. As predicted, women ($M = 146.19, SD = 15.92, n = 46$) reported higher gender role ideology scores, indicating a more feminist ideology than men ($M = 135.38, SD = 21.46, n = 28$), who held a more traditional gender role ideology. As expected, there was a significant main effect for Homophobia, $F(1,66) = 35.44, p < .05$. Low homophobics ($M = 154.09, SD = 13.39, n = 37$) reported higher gender role ideology scores indicating a more feminist ideology than high homophobics ($M = 132.34, SD = 18.96, n = 37$), who held more traditional gender role ideology. There was also significant interaction between Sex and Homophobia, $F(1,66) = 5.60, p < .05$. Men ($M = 154.70, SD = 19.48, n = 12$) and women ($M = 153.82, SD = 10.08, n = 25$) in the low homophobia group reported similarly high gender role ideology, indicating shared feminist beliefs; however men in the high homophobic group ($M = 122.13, SD = 18.18, n = 16$) reported significantly lower gender role ideology scores than women in the high homophobic group ($M = 139.77, SD = 16.13, n = 21$). In other words, homophobic men held more traditional gender role beliefs than homophobic women, whose beliefs were more feminist (see Figure 1).

Homophobia and Gender Role Traits

In order to examine whether men and women in the low and high homophobia groups differed on gender role traits, separate ANOVAs were performed on participants' scores on the four scales of the Australian Sex-Role Scale (that is, positive and negative masculine traits scales and positive and negative feminine traits scales). Contrary to the hypotheses, ANOVAs revealed that there were no significant interactions between Sex and Homophobia for positive masculine traits, $F(1,71) = .38, p > .05$, negative masculine traits, $F(1,70) = .77, p > .05$, positive feminine traits, $F(1,72) = 1.39, p > .05$, or negative feminine traits, $F(1,71) = .63, p > .05$.

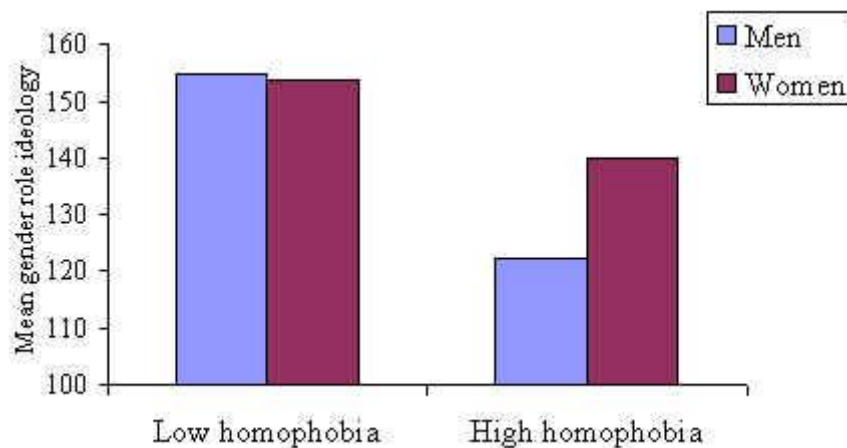


Figure 1. Interaction effect of Sex and Homophobia on gender role ideology scores

As expected, the main effect of Sex for positive masculine traits was significant, $F(1,71) = 10.75$, $p < .05$. Men ($M = 49.02$, $SD = 8.85$) reported higher positive masculine trait score than women ($M = 43.70$, $SD = 7.33$). Contrary to our prediction, however, there was no significant sex difference for negative masculine traits scores, $F(1,70) = 3.60$, $p > .05$. Both men and women reported similarly low scores for the self-ascribed M- traits which included such characteristics as aggressive, rude, bossy, noisy, boastful, and sarcastic.

In addition, the main effect of Sex was significant for positive feminine traits, $F(1,72) = 4.43$, $p < .05$. Women ($M = 55.04$, $SD = 6.12$) reported higher positive feminine trait scores than men ($M = 50.19$, $SD = 6.28$). Likewise, as hypothesized, the main effect of Sex was significant for negative feminine traits, $F(1,71) = 8.63$, $p < .05$. Women ($M = 39.49$, $SD = 9.23$) reported higher negative feminine trait scores than men ($M = 33.32$, $SD = 7.42$).

There were no significant main effects of Homophobia on positive masculine traits, $F(1,71) = 2.33$, $p > .05$; on negative masculine traits, $F(1,70) = .16$, $p > .05$; or on negative feminine traits, $F(1,71) = .22$, $p > .05$. Contrary to predictions, however, the main effect of Homophobia for positive feminine traits was significant, $F(1,72) = 4.43$, $p < .05$, with low homophobics ($M = 55.49$, $SD = 5.71$) reporting higher positive feminine trait scores than high homophobics ($M = 52.21$, $SD = 7.54$). Note, there was no interaction with sex. Both men and women in the low homophobia group reported high levels of F+ traits, which included loyal, gentle, patient, sensitive to others' needs, responsible, and emotional.

Gender Role Ideologies and Gender Role Traits

Correlations were calculated separately for males and females, between gender role ideology scores and positive and negative gender-role trait scores. Ideology was unrelated to traits for females, none of the correlations being significant. For males, there was a significant association between ideology and positive feminine gender role traits, with more feminist men expressing more positively toned psychologically feminine traits ($r = .36$, $p < .05$).

DISCUSSION

This study of heterosexual Australian men and women explored homophobia attitudes through an in-depth analysis of their association with biological sex, traditional gender-role beliefs, and expressed gender-role traits. The effect of type of homophobia (general, anti-gay or anti-lesbian) was also evaluated. Indeed, while a simple analysis of sex differences in general homophobia showed no significant trends, women were more anti-lesbian than anti-gay, and men vice versa. This is consistent with American research indicating that men and women respond differently according to the target homosexual specified (Millham et al., 1976; Millham & Weinberger, 1977; Weinberger & Millham, 1979). Participants' feelings about contact with homosexuals of their own sex may be, at least in part, a function of their fear of homosexual advances and ignorance about homosexuals and their lifestyle (Whitley, 1988). Thus, it may be beneficial for

straight men and women to be educated about gay men and lesbians, to decrease same-sex negativity. On a methodological note, the finding that men and women respond differently to gay men and lesbians justifies the separate measurement of responses to gay men and lesbians. Our expansion of Hudson and Ricketts' (1980) scale to include subscales assessing homophobia towards gay men and towards lesbians, as well as general homophobia, may prove useful in future research.

The hypothesis that straight men's homophobic responses to gay men would be more extreme than straight women's responses to lesbians was not supported, which is somewhat at odds with previous literature suggesting that men are more homophobic than women (Britton, 1990; Logan, 1996; Reiter, 1991). This previous research however largely did not differentiate between anti-gay and anti-lesbian sentiments, as in the current study. In fact, this finding of similar degrees of same-sex homophobia for male and female heterosexuals sets the scene for a more in-depth analysis of homophobia by gender-role associated traits and beliefs, rather than just by biological sex. When this type of analysis was undertaken, a more complex set of relationships was uncovered, as described below.

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With respect to gender-role beliefs, the sex by homophobia analysis showed that high homophobic men reported more traditional (less feminist) gender-stereotyped beliefs than low homophobic individuals in general and than high homophobic women. This finding suggests that the previously identified link between traditional gender roles and homophobia (Britton, 1990; Dunkle & Francis, 1990; Herek, 1988) may not apply to women. As both high and low homophobic women in the sample were supportive of equality between the sexes, homophobia in women may indicate feeling uncomfortable around homosexuals, rather than the need to maintain traditional gender roles. Importantly, as much past research has ignored homophobia in women, these findings suggest that it is vital to include both men and women in future studies, as the sexes appear to differ in the association between homophobia and gender role beliefs. Unlike the situation for women, low homophobic men reported a feminist gender role ideology, and high homophobic men reported a traditionalist gender role ideology. This finding suggests that homophobia and traditional gender role beliefs are more interconnected for men, so that homophobia may be related to the desire to maintain society's traditional gender role structure. It is interesting that these analyses partly support findings from examined data in the United States. Western male attitudes toward sexuality and gender roles may be constructed in a similar manner. Future research could examine if men and women from non-Anglo-Saxon and non-European based cultures display similar attitudes towards sexuality and gender roles compared to Western society. New Asian immigrants to Australia may have differently constructed attitudes.

With respect to sex-role traits, low homophobic men and women ascribed to themselves more positive feminine traits than high homophobics. These traits included love for children, patience, sensitivity to the needs of others, devotion to others, loyalty, and gentleness. All are traits which appear to reflect caring and interpersonal sensitivity, characteristics which need not be gender specific, but which in a more open, androgynous society can be promoted as desirable for men and women alike. Indeed, the promotion of such qualities in both men and women may work to moderate many types of discrimination, including homophobia.

Stereotypically masculine traits, on the other hand, were unrelated to homophobia for either sex. The idea that stereotypically masculine heterosexual males are more homophobic than other groups did not receive support. In this study, the use of measures which allowed for the independent assessment of psychological masculinity and femininity, enables us to conclude that it is the lack of positive feminine traits, not the manifestation of masculine traits, which is associated with homophobia.

In summary, the study indicated that low homophobia links with more egalitarian beliefs about gender-roles (as reflected in a more feminist, less traditional orientation), and higher levels of positively-toned traits which have been described as stereotypically feminine (for example, patience, sensitivity and loyalty). High and low homophobic individuals in this study were characterized by their beliefs and traits, not by their biological sex. These findings provide little support for the suggestion that homophobia is an integral aspect of being a heterosexual male, or indeed for a relationship between homophobia and stereotypic masculinity. These stereotypes may have in part arisen because homophobia measurements have not always included anti-lesbian sentiments, and in part because women are generally both more feminist and more 'feminine' than men, making them potentially less predisposed to homophobia. In this study however this predisposition was not reflected in significantly lower homophobia scores for women, possibly because in women, the influences of feminism and 'femininity' appear to work independently to influence attitudes to others. For men, the significant correlation between positive feminine gender-role traits and feminism scores suggests these variables do not act completely independently. Men with more warm and caring traits are prepared to take a more liberal view about the role of women, and also, it appears, to the expression of a range of sexualities.

Results are limited by the sample size, especially with respect to sex comparisons in ANOVAs. However, those sex differences in the dependent variables were consistent with gender stereotypes and unlikely to reflect Type 2 errors. Heiman (1996) suggests that in maximizing the power of the t-test and not committing a Type 2 error, "an N of at least 30 is needed for minimal power" (Heiman, 1996, p. 334). Therefore, the sample sizes in the t-tests were above the size needed for minimal power. In addition, in all of the analyses presented, the assumption of homogeneity of variance was not violated therefore the power of ANOVA and t-tests increases (See Heiman, 1996).

It should be noted that the present study focussed on just one aspect of homonegativism: the affective component of homophobia. Future studies may build a clearer picture of homonegativism by examining heterosexuals' affective, behavioral, and cognitive responses to gay men and lesbians. Likewise, the current findings are applicable to a well-educated young segment of the Australian population. Psychology university students may have very different, and possibly more liberal attitudes than other university students undertaking engineering, business or science-related courses, and in comparison to a broader community sample. In a less

liberal minded sample, results may be different than those in the present sample. Future research would benefit from a broader community sample which is more representative of Australian society.

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