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YOU CALLED ME WHAT?: THREATENED MASCULINITY, SOCIAL
DOMINANCE, AND ATTITUDES TOWARD LGB LAWS

by

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Abstract

The lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) community continues to be impacted by rapidly changing legislative bills and decisions that restrict the rights of the members within the community. This leads to the importance of understanding the variables that might contribute to supporting the policy decisions of legislative representatives. The current study originated from a desire to explore relationships among factors that have been previously related to non-affirming attitudes to LGB individuals in general and restrictive LGB laws in particular. Numerous studies have linked adherence to traditional masculinity ideology and social dominance orientation (SDO) to negative attitudes toward LGB individuals and, by extension, support for restrictive LGB laws. Using the precarious manhood framework that suggests that men whose sense of masculinity is threatened react in ways to re-establish that masculinity, this study filled a gap in the existing literature by examining the role that SDO has in explaining the relationship between precarious manhood beliefs and attitudes toward LGB laws. The study also contributed to the literature by expanding the typical masculinity threat paradigm to include sexual orientation. The study hypothesized stronger endorsement of precarious masculinity would be related to restrictive LGB policies through the mechanism of social dominance attitudes and that this indirect relationship would be conditional on a challenge to masculinity. Analysis of a sample of 182 heterosexual men in the United States suggested that social dominance orientation carries some, but not all, of the effect of precarious manhood beliefs on support for restrictive LGB laws. The threat paradigm did not moderate the mediated relationship or the direct relationship between precarious manhood beliefs and attitudes toward restrictive LGB laws, although there was a

suggestion of a small conditional direct effect that did not reach statistical significance.

Future research should continue exploring social dominance as a cognitive pathway and its influence on decision-making.

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Introduction

Throughout the past several decades, policies and laws supporting the lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB¹) population's access to a range of human rights (e.g., employment protection, marriage, adoption) have been granted or dismissed via political decisions (ACLU, 2021; Morris, 2016). There is also a lack of widespread federal protection regarding potential discrimination (i.e., laws protecting employment, housing, or access to services) toward LGB individuals has left political decisions up to state legislators and by extension, the voting public that elects them. Because the voting public has influence over who is elected, and by extension, content of enacted policies, it becomes vital to understand what factors are related to individuals' attitudes toward or against restrictive LGB laws.

Traditional masculinity ideology is one factor that has been related to restrictive LGB laws and increased heterosexism. Traditional masculinity ideology is based on hierarchical gender relations and the affirmation of masculinity through the performance of socially expected attitudes and behaviors (Parrott et al., 2002; Pratto et al., 2012). Because masculinity is seen as socially determined, Bosson and Vandello (2011) investigated the status and vulnerability of manhood in instances where masculinity is not affirmed by others. They developed a model of precarious manhood beliefs, positing that manhood is tenuous, elusive, and must be repeatedly confirmed through public action (Bosson & Vandello, 2011). Bosson and Vandello's (2011) model suggests that men who view their manhood as tenuous feel they must engage in behaviors that demonstrate or

¹This study specifically looks at laws that impact the LGB population, rather than the larger LGBTQ+ community because recent legislation efforts impact the Transgender and Gender Non-Binary population differently. However, it is important to note that many current policies and laws do impact the larger community as a whole.

confirm their masculinity, often via public displays of masculine behavior (Vandello et al., 2008) and that this is particularly true when they perceive their manhood has been threatened.

Previous literature has tested various methods for threatening masculinity and exploring the subsequent behavior and attitude changes, as well as attempts from men to reaffirm their masculinity. The existing literature has primarily used gender as a threat paradigm, as hierarchical gender relations are a key component of masculinity ideology (Dahl et al., 2015; Fugitt, 2018; Himmelstein et al., 2019). However, fear of femininity and being perceived as effeminate or gay is equally pertinent to the definition of masculinity (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Eguchi, 2009; Kaplan et al., 2017) and many men consider being seen as gay as being seen as ‘womanly,’ but studies have not incorporated this focus on the avoidance of perceived homosexuality into the threatened masculinity literature. The current study addressed this gap in the literature by delivering a threat paradigm on the basis of sexual orientation rather than the more commonly used gender threat.

Bosson et al. (2009) reported that when manhood is challenged or threatened, men often display defensive, aggressive behaviors in an effort to restore their manhood status. Under threat, men who more highly prescribe to precarious manhood beliefs are more likely to act in discriminatory ways toward the LGB population and are less likely to confront sexual prejudice (Kroeper et al., 2013; O’Conner, 2017). The cognitive pathway that accounts for the increased negative response to the LGB population when masculinity is threatened has not been accounted for, but extending the hierarchical view

of masculinity to a broader perspective of socially dominant group positions suggests a potential path.

Social dominance orientation (SDO) is the degree to which individuals prefer that their ingroup be dominant over outgroups (Pratto et al., 1994). SDO has been shown to be a predictor of behaviors and attitudes toward groups seen as ‘other,’ which includes endorsement of policies or laws that address those groups (Lee et al., 2011; Metin-Orta, 2019; Whitley, 1999). Poteat and Mereish (2012) found that stronger endorsements of a social dominance orientation were related to greater support for restrictive laws against LGB individuals and organizations. Likewise, Jones et al. (2014) found that SDO negatively correlated with allyship for the LGB community. Research has shown that when masculinity is threatened, men subsequently display greater ideological dominance (Dahl et al., 2015), but studies have not examined whether the known associations between threatened masculinity and anti-LGB beliefs and actions work through the endorsement of social dominance attitudes. The current study examined whether SDO mediates the relationship between endorsement of precarious manhood beliefs and attitudes toward restrictive LGB laws. Additionally, the current study utilized a masculinity threat condition and examined whether the mediated relationship is conditional on being threatened with false feedback (moderated mediation).

LGB Laws and Policies

The Pew Research Center (Poushter & Kent, 2020) has assessed “acceptance of homosexuality” for the past two decades, reporting that the United States has seen a gradual increase in acceptance. The most recent data from the spring of 2019 indicated

that 72% of U.S. respondents reported that homosexuality² should be accepted. Although clearly positive for the LGB community, it is important to look at the demographics of the individuals who are not accepting (Poushter & Kent, 2020). According to the study, those who identify with a religion or religious group, those who identify with the political right, older generations, men, and those with less education are less likely to be accepting of homosexuality. In the U.S., 85% of Democrats said homosexuality should be accepted, while only 58% of Republicans agreed. It is also noteworthy that in comparison to the Western European countries surveyed, the U.S. has one of the lowest acceptance rates of homosexuality (Poushter & Kent, 2020).

Legislative decisions regarding the LGB community have impacted many aspects, including, but not limited to, ability to marry same-sex partners, adopt children, serve in the military, donate blood, be protected from workplace discrimination, and extend workplace benefits (including access to healthcare) to partners (Poteat & Mereish, 2012). According to Hatzenbuehler et al. (2011), institutional discrimination, such as a state ban on same-sex marriage, correlated with an increase in mood disorders, anxiety, alcohol use, and psychiatric comorbidity. Likewise, Everett et al. (2016) found that, after civil union legislation recognizing same-sex marriage passed, sexual minority women experienced lower levels of stigma, depression, and hazardous drinking. Additionally, Pereira and Moteiro (2017) found that following the legalization of same-sex marriage and adoption in Portugal, LGB individuals reported stronger familial ties to their partners, finding it easier to come out as LGB, overcoming barriers to accessing formal health care, and feeling happier.

² While this term is considered outdated in the LGB community, it is used in the document to be consistent with the wording of the polls and literature from which the information was taken.

Individuals who identify as LGB have been vulnerable to legislative discrimination in the United States for many years (Morris, 2016). While the Stonewall Riots and gay rights demonstrations led to the American Psychiatric Association removing homosexuality as an illness from its diagnostic standards, rights such as marriage equality were still withheld. In the late 80s and early 90s, massive marches on Washington occurred, with the goal of gaining more rights for the LGB population, such as ending the expulsion of LGB members in the military (Morris, 2016).

The LGB population saw improvement in these laws during the Obama administration when the Supreme Court made the decision to recognize same-sex marriage (Morris, 2016). However, during the Trump administration, there were increased efforts to create or maintain laws that discriminated against the LGB community (GLAAD, 2021). The current Biden administration is working to reverse some of those laws and offer support to individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or identify as other sexual identities (LGBTQ+) (ACLU, 2021); however, many states are working to enact bills that limit local protection for LGBTQ+ individuals.

For example, in 2021, eight states (Arkansas, Iowa, Indiana, Montana, New Hampshire, South Dakota, West Virginia, and Wyoming) introduced bills for Religious Freedom Restoration Acts (RFRA). RFRA were originally introduced to protect religious liberty, but today are being used as a method of allowing businesses to refuse to provide services to same-sex couples under the guise of religious freedom (ACLU, 2021). In a similar vein, several states have introduced bills for religious exemptions in healthcare, religious exemptions in adoption and foster care, and religious exemptions in

schools and student organizations (ACLU, 2021). In spring of 2023, the ACLU is tracking 471 anti-LGBTQ+ bills in the U.S. Finally, several states have introduced bills that prevent cities and other local government entities from passing nondiscrimination protections (ACLU, 2021). The changes in laws in the U.S. reflect the instability of laws protecting the LGB community and the presence of policy makers who are open to establishing or enforcing discriminatory policies against the population.

The literature identifies several ideologies that are predictive of intolerance of the LGB community, exhibited by support for restrictive LGB laws (e.g., marriage equality, adoption rights, military service, hate-crimes, etc.) (Poteat & Mereish, 2012). Examples of predictive ideologies include right-wing authoritarianism, social dominance orientation (SDO), conservatism, and religiosity (Barringer et al., 2013; Costa & Salinas-Quiroz, 2018; Kreitzer et al., 2014; Poteat & Mereish, 2012; Wood & Bartowski, 2004). Among the findings, men, especially men who score higher in masculine gender identity, were consistently cited as less likely than women, or men who are lower in traditional masculinity ideology, to be accepting or tolerant of LGB individuals or be supportive of affirming policies that impact them (Atteberry-Ash et al., 2018; Barringer et al., 2013; Costa & Salinas-Quiroz; 2018; Harbaugh & Lindsey, 2015).

Hegemonic Masculinity Ideology

Masculinity ideology is a socially constructed set of beliefs about how men should think or behave (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Kimmel, 2017). Although views of masculinity might differ by culture or in individual men, those personal definitions of masculinity stand in relation to a hegemonic masculinity specifying the cultural ideal of manhood based in unequal gender relations and access to power over

women and other men who are seen as exhibiting subordinate forms of masculinity (e.g., gay or bisexual men, men of color, men with less economic privilege) (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Gilmore, 1991; Jewkes et al., 2015). Hegemonic masculinity in the United States is characterized by gaining social status through engaging in competition, maintaining emotional restraint and self-reliance, taking risks and displaying aggression, avoiding femininity and effeminacy, engaging in homophobia, and maintaining objectified attitudes toward sexuality (Kaplan et al., 2017; Levant et al., 2007; Mahalik et al., 2003; Thompson & Pleck, 1986).

All men, even those with alternate masculinities, are subject to evaluation by the hegemonic masculinity standard. For instance, although gay men may adhere to some aspects of masculinity, they are never fully allowed to be viewed as attaining the standard of masculinity since identifying as gay is viewed as approximating femininity or effeminacy (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Eguchi, 2009; Hunt et al., 2015; Kaplan et al., 2017). The fear of being seen as unmanly or a ‘sissy’ dominates the cultural definition of manhood (Kimmel, 2017). Therefore, those engaging in hegemonic masculinity would assert their heterosexuality, which can often result in heteronormative behavior in both straight and gay men (Eguchi, 2009).

Precarious Manhood Beliefs

Although numerous studies identified connections between masculinity ideologies and subsequent attitudes and interpersonal behaviors, Vandello et al. (2008) expanded on this work by developing a paradigm that conceptualized masculinity restoring behaviors through the lens of the fragile nature of masculinity. Vandello et al. (2008) introduced the concept of precarious manhood, which is the view that manhood status is tenuous and

must be repeatedly confirmed through public action. This means that the status of manhood is difficult to earn and just as difficult to maintain, and that a man must continually prove he is worthy of the status by public displays of masculine behavior (Bosson & Vandello, 2011; Vandello et al., 2008; Vandello & Bosson, 2013). Because the status of manhood is easy to lose, it is vulnerable to being threatened by critiques that one has not behaved as a man 'should' (Bosson & Vandello, 2011).

Kroeper et al. (2013) reported that subscription to precarious manhood beliefs predicted a lower likelihood of confronting prejudice against a gay applicant in a hiring decision, and the male participants reported that confronting the prejudice may lead to their being viewed as gay. In a study specifically investigating the effects of threats to masculinity, O'Connor et al. (2017) found that men higher in precarious manhood beliefs who experienced a masculine threat were more likely to act in discriminatory ways toward the LGB population because they believed the acts reaffirmed their masculinity. Additionally, Weaver and Vescio (2015) found that when masculinity was threatened, men who prioritized their gender identities highly (not assessed by precarious manhood beliefs) endorsed Social Dominance Orientation more than men who did not deem gender identity as important to them.

While masculinity ideology literature shows a relationship between masculinity and attitudes toward restrictive LGB laws (Levant et al., 2013), the relationship between Vandello et al.'s (2008) definition of precarious manhood beliefs and attitudes toward restrictive LGB laws has not been tested. Yet, the work in precarious manhood strongly suggests that men who perceive their masculinity as more tenuous are likely to hold attitudes confirming hegemonic masculinity as a way of asserting their masculinity to

others. In contrast to the previous literature that has assessed either general agreement with male role norms or simple threats to masculinity with no knowledge of participants' beliefs about their own masculinity, this study extended the literature by testing the relationship between precarious manhood beliefs and attitudes toward restrictive LGB laws via social dominance. Further, since precarious manhood beliefs posit vulnerability to threat, the study included an experimental manipulation of threatened masculinity that extends previously used threat paradigms.

Threats to Masculinity

Because many men's sense of their masculinity may be precarious and open to threat, there is a growing body of literature that experimentally 'threatens' participants' masculinity and assesses subsequent attitudes and behaviors hypothesized to be related to traditional male role norms (Himmelstein et al., 2019). These threat paradigms have been based upon gender, as power over women is an important component of hegemonic masculinity ideology (Dahl et al., 2015). Some researchers induce the threat by administering a multiple-choice gender knowledge test, then providing false feedback to the participants that their responses were similar to those of women (Dahl et al., 2015; Fugitt, 2018; Harrison & Michelson, 2018). Other researchers also threaten masculinity based on gender, using a variety of techniques, such as providing false feedback on personality tests, testing feminine or masculine products, or delivering false feedback in person in a lab setting (Glick et al. 2007; Konopka et al. 2021; Weaver et al., 2013).

Antipathy toward sexual minorities and fear of 'being seen as gay' is highly characteristic of the precarious hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Kimmel, 2017). Providing false feedback based on comparison to sexual minority men

should create a threat equal to a comparison to women. Indeed, Glick et al. (2007) suggested that threatening masculinity on the basis of sexual orientation would be ideal if the outcome variable was related to sexual orientation. However, no studies were identified that threatened masculinity by leading men to believe that they responded in ways that were similar to how gay or bisexual men responded. Although Carnaghi et al. (2011) did not have a manipulation that threatened masculinity by suggesting similarity to gay men, they primed participants with heterosexist epithets and found that participants stressed their heterosexual identities in an effort to restore their masculinity. This suggests that masculinity could be threatened by the appearance of being non-heterosexual. The current study implemented a threat condition that gives false feedback equating heterosexual men's responses on a measure to that of a man who is gay or bisexual.

Regardless of the method of threat tested in the existing literature, studies have found that when masculinity is threatened, men altered their behavior (i.e., displayed defensive, aggressive acts or behaviors) or shifted their attitudes in a way that reinforced the traditional definition of masculinity (Bosson et al., 2009). Threatened masculinity has been associated with increased risky behaviors, such as alcohol consumption or poor financial decisions (Fugitt, 2018; Weaver et al., 2013). O'Conner et al. (2017) found that men who scored higher in precarious manhood beliefs and who received a masculinity threat expressed amusement at sexist and anti-gay humor, reporting they did so because they believed it restored an accurate (i.e., heterosexual and masculine) impression of them.

Social Dominance Orientation

Many of the observed behaviors and attitudes following a masculinity threat suggest that men attempt to regain an elevated position in the hegemonic social hierarchy by distancing themselves from subordinate groups. They may do this by endorsing greater SDO over outgroups (Dahl et al., 2015; Weaver & Vescio, 2015) or by stressing their heterosexuality or showing greater discrimination or hostility toward LGB individuals (Carnaghie et al., 2011; Glick et al., 2007; Konopka et al., 2021). SDO refers to a general attitude or mindset one has about group relations, in which there is a preference toward hierarchical rather than egalitarian relations and a preference that one's own group be dominant over members of outgroups (Pratto et al., 1994).

Individuals who strongly endorse SDO exhibit negative attitudes toward laws regulating group rights or access to societal benefits, especially for groups that are viewed as subordinate (Lee et al., 2011; Levin & Sidanius, 1999; Pratto et al., 1994). Specifically, men with stronger SDO endorsement are more likely to have negative attitudes toward the LGB population as well as the laws that affirm them (Metin-Orta, 2019; Poteat & Mereish, 2012; Whitley, 1999). Additionally, Bahns and Crandall (2013) found that when men perceived more outgroup threat, they were more likely to discriminate against that group. Although research has reported associations between masculinity ideology and attitudes toward LGB individuals and laws affecting them, it is likely that relationship is mediated by general social dominance attitudes that reinforce the gender hierarchy that is core to hegemonic masculinity. However, that mediated relationship has not been tested. The literature also shows that individuals with precarious manhood beliefs whose masculinity is threatened tend to increase their SDO (Dahl et al., 2015; Weaver & Vescio, 2015) suggesting that the mediated relationship between

precarious manhood beliefs and LGB policy attitudes might be conditional on masculinity threat.

Purpose of Study

The study contributes to the literature in two ways. First, the study examined the role that SDO has in explaining the relationship between precarious manhood beliefs and attitudes toward LGB laws, testing whether it serves as a cognitive pathway between those variables. Second, the study extends the typical threat paradigm by providing feedback based on sexual orientation rather than gender. Specifically, the study examined whether SDO mediates the relationship between endorsement of precarious manhood beliefs and attitudes toward LGB laws and then whether that mediated relationship is conditional on heterosexual men being threatened with false feedback that compared their responses to those of sexual minority men (moderated mediation). The hypothesized relationships are shown in Figure 1.

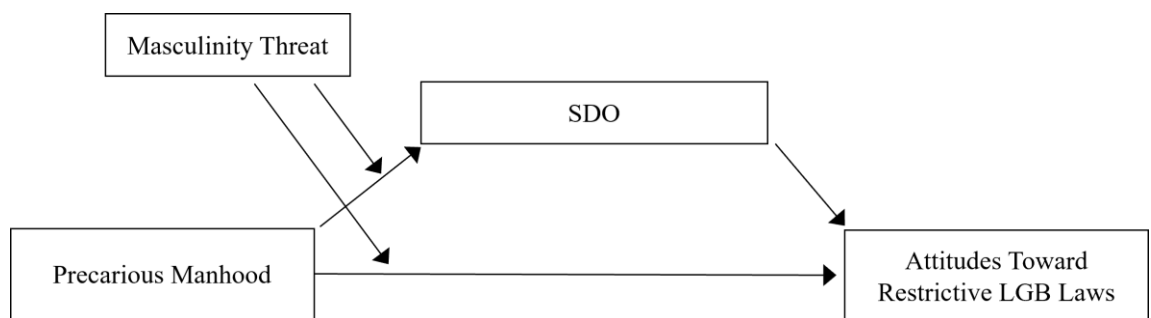
Research Questions/hypotheses

1. SDO will mediate the relationship between precarious manhood beliefs and attitudes toward restrictive LGB laws. Greater endorsement of precarious manhood beliefs will be related to higher SDO, which will be related to high levels of non-affirming attitudes toward LGB laws.
2. The mediated relationship will be conditional on the threat condition. Men in the threat condition will experience stronger endorsement of SDO attitudes and, subsequently, more support for restrictive LGB laws as compared to men in the non-threatened condition.

- The direct (non-mediated) relationship between precarious manhood beliefs and attitudes toward restrictive LGB laws will be conditional on masculinity threat condition. Men in the threat condition will experience more support for restrictive LGB laws as compared to men in the non-threatened condition.

Figure 1

Model of Moderated Mediation



Method

Participants

Participants consisted of 182 adults who identified as cisgender heterosexual men recruited through CloudResearch using the MTurk Toolkit. Participants' ages ranged from 20-79 ($M = 39.6$, $SD = 12.3$). The majority of the sample identified as White/Caucasian ($n = 130$, 71.4%); 8.8% identified as Hispanic/LatinX ($n = 16$), 8.8% identified as Asian/Asian American ($n = 16$), 6% identified as Black/African American ($n = 11$), 1.6% identified as Biracial/Multiracial ($n = 3$), 1.1% identified as American Indian/Alaska Native ($n = 2$), and 2.2% preferred not to answer ($n = 4$). Participants rated subjective socioeconomic status on a figure of a ladder, where the highest rung (10) was "best off" and the lowest rung (1) was "worst off." The responses yielded a mean of 4.90 and a mode of 5, with the range of responses being 1-9. More than a third of the sample had completed some college or an associate's degree (38.5%) and an additional 48.9% had a bachelor's degree or graduate level training.

Instruments

Participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire that included age, gender, sexual orientation, race, socioeconomic status, and education. They were asked to complete the following measures: Precarious Manhood Beliefs scale (PMB; Bosson et al., 2021), Social Dominance Orientation 7 short scale (SDO7(s); Ho et al., 2015), and Policy Attitudes Scale (PAS; Poteat & Mereish, 2012), and Male Role Norms Inventory-Short Form (MRNI-SF; Levant et al., 2013).

Precarious Manhood Beliefs

Precarious manhood beliefs were measured by the 4-item Precarious Manhood Beliefs scale (PMB; Bosson et al., 2021). Items are rated on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Example items include, “It is fairly easy for a man to lose his status as a man” and “Some boys do not become men, no matter how old they get.” Scores on the items were averaged, with higher scores indicating a stronger adherence to precarious manhood ideology. Scores on the PMB were internally consistent, with a Cronbach’s omega of .74 among 786 U.S. men and women (Bosson et al, 2021). Bosson et al. (2021) established equivalent construct meaning across levels of analysis (samples from 62 countries), by performing multilevel analyses and creating an isomorphic model to assess fit. Based on this data, the authors concluded that the one-factor model assessing precarious manhood beliefs demonstrated a good fit. These items were embedded into the MRNI-SF, which served as a distractor measure.

Social Dominance Orientation (SDO)

SDO was measured by the Social Dominance Orientation 7 short scale (SDO7(s); Ho et al., 2015) that assesses preferences for intergroup inequality. The scale consists of 8 items that are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly oppose) to 7 (strongly favor) and assesses dominance in four areas: pro-trait dominance, con-trait dominance, pro-trait anti-egalitarianism, and con-trait anti-egalitarianism. The SDO7(s) captures the degree to which respondents believe that one group should dominate society as well as their attitudes toward group equality. Responses to items are averaged, with half of them being reverse-scored, so that higher scores always indicate a higher social dominance orientation. Some example items include “An ideal society requires some

groups to be on top and others to be on the bottom” and “Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups.” In confirmatory factor analysis, Ho et al. (2015) reported the model demonstrated a good fit to the data (χ^2/df ratio = 1.43, RMSEA = .03, CFI = 1.00). The scale was strongly correlated with SDO6 ($r = .92$) and correlated with all of the criterion variables to a similar magnitude to that of the full scale. Ho et al. (2015) established appropriate construct validity and utilized predictive validity analyses to establish criterion validity, finding the short scale aligned with previous construct expectations. The internal reliability of the scale scores in a mixed-race sample was acceptable with a Cronbach’s alpha of .81 (Ho et al., 2015).

Attitudes Toward Restrictive LGB Laws

Attitudes toward restrictive LGB laws were measured by the 8-item Policy Attitudes Scale (PAS; Poteat & Mereish, 2012) that assesses attitudes toward sexual minority social laws. It has a 9-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree). The scale captures the degree to which one agrees with laws associated with rights and privileges of the LGB community, such as marriage and hate-crime legislation. Scores are averaged, with some items being reverse scored, and higher scores indicate more support for restrictive LGB laws. Some sample items include “Openly gay men and lesbian women should not be allowed to serve in the military” and “Gay men should be prohibited from donating blood.” PAS scores evinced a Cronbach’s alpha of .86 among 491 heterosexual (predominantly White and female) students at a large Midwestern university (Poteat & Mereish, 2012).

Distractor items

The study used the Male Role Norms Inventory-Short Form (MRNI-SF; Levant et al., 2013) as distractor items. Distractor items were included to provide participants with a set of questions to complete prior to receiving false feedback about their ‘scores as part of a study to establish scoring norms on a measure of masculinity.’ Distractor items were not part of the analysis. Items are responded on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Two attention check items, as well as the PMB (Bosson et al., 2021) were embedded in the MRNI-SF.

Attention and Manipulation Checks

There were some items included that require participants to respond in a certain way to ensure participants were thoroughly attending to the questions on the survey. An example of such a question includes “On this question, you should answer by clicking on the response to the equation: $5-2 = ?$ ” If these attention check items were not accurately completed, data from respondents were removed from the analyses. To determine participants’ attention to the feedback they received, they were asked to report whether their feedback was above, below, or within the range of the average score for heterosexual men, which was consistent with the language used in the feedback they received. Individuals who did not accurately respond that they had been in the ‘threatened’ condition were removed from the data set. Participants were also asked if they suspected that their feedback was not based on their actual answers (i.e., there was deception). If they responded affirmatively to the question about deceptions, they were asked to state what they thought the study was about.

Procedure

Following review and approval by the Institutional Review Board for research with human subjects, participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) via CloudResearch and directed to the survey in Qualtrics. All participants who completed the study with accurate data received \$2.00 of compensation through the CloudResearch system. An *a priori* power analysis was conducted using an online application (https://schoemanna.shinyapps.io/mc_power_med/), which provides power and sample size estimates for mediated relationships. Konopka et al. (2021) reported medium effect sizes ($\eta^2p = .056$), showing a subsequent higher modern homonegativity score after receiving a gender threat. Sugiura et al. (2017) reported large effect sizes when comparing men and women's endorsement of SDO following the cue of outgroup threat, showing that men reported higher SDO than women ($\eta^2p = .16$). Metin-Orta (2019) found medium effect sizes ($R^2 = .20$) suggesting that participants with higher SDO scores have more prejudiced attitudes toward LGB individuals. Using these medium effect sizes, the *a priori* analysis reported a target of 68 participants. Since this analysis does not account for the moderating effect of two threat conditions, the target sample size was doubled to approximately 150 participants.

Once consent was obtained, the participants completed demographic items, and the distractor items including the Precarious Manhood Beliefs scale. Then participants were randomly assigned to either the threat or control (no-threat) condition via a Qualtrics function and received false feedback related to their scores on the masculinity measure. Feedback consisted of a figure purporting to compare their scores with scores that were average for heterosexual men (no threat/masculinity affirming condition) or

below average for heterosexual men and equivalent to that of gay and bisexual men (threat condition). The procedure for administering false feedback was in accordance with previous literature (Dahl et al., 2015). In order to make the social proof of masculinity component of precarious manhood beliefs more explicit, participants were asked to imagine their feedback being posted to their social media and respond to several questions about their emotional reaction to having that information posted. These questions were not part of the current study. Participants were then presented with the SDO7(s) (Ho et al., 2015) and the PAS (Poteat & Mereish, 2012). To reduce potential order effects, the presentation of these questionnaires was randomized. After they completed these measures and the manipulation questions, the participants were debriefed and informed that the feedback on their responses to the masculinity measure was false.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Prior to conducting the main analyses, data were checked for normality, outliers, and meeting statistical assumptions. The researcher deleted 12 cases from the initial 223 who did not report their gender as male and an additional 26 cases that missed manipulation checks or multiple attention checks. Three cases were identified as univariate outliers, as the standardized values exceeded 3.29 standard deviations from the mean. Those three cases were deleted from the data set. The researcher ran a Cook's distance analysis to identify multivariate outliers and the data set did not have cases with a value greater than 1 (Field, 2013). The data set did not contain cases with missing data.

As the analysis is based on a linear model, the dataset requires the following assumptions to be tested: normality of residuals, linearity, independent errors, homoscedasticity, normally distributed errors, and lack of multicollinearity (Field, 2013). To assess normality of residuals, the researcher examined the distributions graphically and reviewed skewness and kurtosis. Graphically, normal Q-Q plots revealed that the data did not appear to have a non-linear pattern. Skewness and kurtosis values for all distributions fell between -2 and 2. Based on these findings, sample size, the assumption of normality is satisfied (Field, 2013).

Linearity was tested by examining a scatterplot of the standardized predictor versus standardized residual graph. Linearity for the data set was achieved, as it did not appear that the data set funneled or curved. The scatterplot of standardized predicted values versus standardized residuals and normal P-P plot of standardized residuals indicated the data met assumptions of homogeneity of variance and normally distributed errors. A Durbin-Watson test met the assumption of independent errors to ensure that the adjacent residuals were correlated (Durbin-Watson value = 2.054; Field, 2013). To test for lack of multicollinearity, the researcher examined the variance inflation factor to ensure the predictor variables did not correlate too highly (tolerance = .807; VIF = 1.239). Table 1 presents the correlations, means, and standard deviations for study variables.

Table 1*Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Variables*

Variables	1	2	3	α
1. Precarious Manhood Beliefs		0.45**	0.42**	0.76
2. SDO			0.66**	0.92
3. Attitudes Toward Restrictive LGB Laws				0.91
Means	4.06	2.80	3.22	
SD	1.36	1.48	2.10	

Note. $N = 182$. ** $p < .01$ (2-tailed).

Primary Analyses

A moderated mediation model was utilized to test whether there were significant direct and indirect (mediated) effects of precarious manhood beliefs on support for restrictive LGB laws and if the indirect and direct effects were conditional on the moderating variable of threat condition. The hypothesized moderated mediation model (shown in Figure 1) was tested in a single model using Hayes' (2018) PROCESS macro (model 8). PROCESS is an observed variable Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) and logistic regression path analysis modeling tool. Significance of the indirect effect is based on a sample of 5000 bootstrapped estimates.

Hypothesis 1 posited that the indirect effect of precarious manhood beliefs on attitudes toward restrictive LGB laws would be mediated through social dominance orientation. The direct relationship between precarious manhood beliefs and social dominance orientation yielded significant results ($b = 0.49, p < 0.001$), indicating that greater endorsement of precarious manhood beliefs was related to higher endorsement of social dominance orientation. Likewise, the direct relationship between SDO and attitudes toward restrictive LGB laws was significant ($b = 0.84, p < 0.001$). Using the bootstrapped test of the indirect effect, Hypothesis 1 was supported ($b = .26, 95\% \text{ CI} = [0.15, 0.37]$).

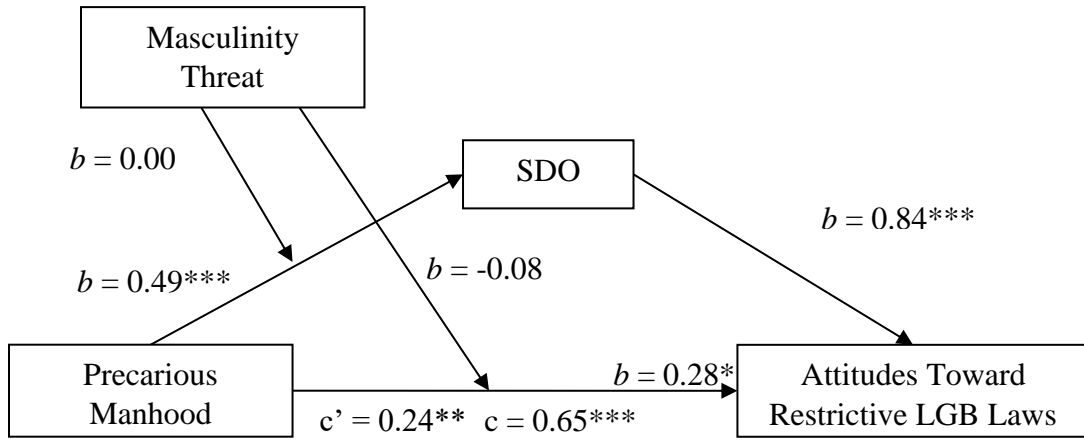
Hypothesis 2 stated that the indirect effect of precarious manhood beliefs on attitudes toward restrictive LGB laws through social dominance orientation would be moderated by the masculinity threat condition. Hypothesis 2 was not supported, as the index of moderated mediation was not significant (index = 0.00, 95% CI = [-0.27, 0.25]).

Hypothesis 3 suggested that the direct relationship between precarious manhood beliefs and attitudes toward restrictive LGB laws would be moderated by the masculinity threat condition. Although the direct relationship from precarious manhood beliefs to attitudes toward restrictive LGB laws was significant, ($b = 0.28, p < 0.05$), the interaction between threat condition and precarious manhood beliefs was not significant ($b = -0.08, p = 0.65$) indicating that threat condition did not moderate the direct effect between precarious manhood beliefs and restrictive LGB laws. Hypothesis 3 was not supported. Results of the analyses are shown on Figure 2.

However, while the interaction effect between threat and precarious manhood beliefs was not significant, it is worth mentioning that the conditional direct relationship between precarious manhood beliefs and attitudes toward restrictive LGB laws in the no threat condition yielded significant results ($b = 0.28, p < 0.05$). This indicates that when compared to the individuals who received the threat manipulation ($b = 0.20, p = 0.14$), individuals who did not receive the threat were more likely to have a significant relationship between precarious manhood beliefs and attitudes toward restrictive LGB laws, but the effect was only evident for individuals with low levels of precarious manhood beliefs. Threat had no effect on support for restrictive LGB policies for men who more strongly endorsed precarious manhood beliefs. Because this effect was found in combination with the nonsignificant interaction, it is possible that it is such a small effect that it did not reach statistical significance. Thus, it is presented here for interest and for the need for additional research.

Figure 2

Moderated Mediation Model



Note. b values represent unstandardized coefficients.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

The lack of federal protections for the LGB community continues to mean that many decisions regarding policies that impact the LGB community are decided in state legislatures. This in turn, leaves the public's endorsement of bills proposed by legislators increasingly impactful and it is important to identify variables that relate to support for restrictive laws. Some have posited the recent increase in the number and intensity of anti-LGB laws can be viewed from the perspective of a 'backlash' in which those who perceive the changes as losing previously held dominance or status try to re-establish dominance through legislation (Costa, 2021; Crawford et al., 2013). In particular, precarious manhood is predicated on the assumption that men who feel that masculinity is tenuous and easily threatened will respond to information that challenges perceived masculinity with attempts to re-establish that masculinity through displays of dominance (Bosson et al., 2009; Sugiura et al., 2017; Vandello et al., 2008).

Previous research provided evidence that endorsement of precarious manhood beliefs (Bosson et al., 2009; Kroeper et al., 2013; O'Conner, 2017) and SDO (Potrat & Mereish, 2012) were separately related to greater support for restrictive laws against LGB individuals and organizations. This study filled a gap in the existing literature by identifying the role that SDO has in explaining the relationship between precarious manhood beliefs and attitudes toward LGB laws. The study also contributed to the literature by introducing a novel threat paradigm based on sexual orientation, rather than the more commonly used gender threat. The study hypothesized stronger endorsement of precarious masculinity would be related to restrictive LGB policies through the

mechanism of holding a social dominance orientation (indirect effect) and that this relationship would be conditional on a challenge to masculinity.

As hypothesized, endorsement of precarious manhood beliefs was related to stronger support for LGB restrictive laws directly and indirectly via a social dominance orientation. While there was previous evidence to support separate relationships linking masculinity ideologies and social dominance (Dickents & Sergeant, 2008; Sugiura et al., 2017; Whitley, 1999) and social dominance with attitudes toward restrictive LGB laws (Metin-Orta, 2019; Poteat & Mereish, 2012), earlier studies had not assessed the role of a social dominance orientation in connecting beliefs that one's masculinity and corresponding dominance in the gender hierarchy is tenuous and antipathy for laws that let the non-dominant group of LGB individuals get ahead. This study highlights the role of social dominance as one mechanism that accounts for this relationship.

While social dominance orientation as a mediator explained a lot of the variance, there was still a direct relationship between precarious manhood beliefs and attitudes toward restrictive LGB laws even when accounting for social dominance orientation. The existing literature on masculinity ideologies has consistently found a relationship between masculinity and heterosexism (Atteberry-Ash et al., 2018; Eguchi, 2009; Harbaugh & Lindsey, 2015; Kaplan et al., 2017; Levant et al., 2013). However, the specific relationship between precarious manhood beliefs and attitudes toward restrictive LGB laws had not been tested, and the study adds to the literature by confirming the direct relationship's significance but leaves the door open to considering cognitive paths other than social dominance beliefs that also mediate the effect of precarious manhood beliefs.

The second hypothesis stated that men who received a threat to their masculinity would experience stronger endorsement of SDO attitudes and, subsequently, more support for restrictive LGB laws as compared to men in the non-threatened condition (i.e., moderated mediation). Hypothesis 2 was not supported as the strength of the mediated relationship did not significantly differ for men who received the masculinity threat, when compared to men who did not receive the threat.

It is interesting that Hypothesis 2 was not supported, given that the mediation yielded significant results and that the literature shows consistent support for stronger attitudes reaffirming masculinity following a threat (Dahl et al., 2015; Glick et al., 2007; Konopka et al., 2021; O’Conner et al., 2017; Weaver & Vescio, 2015). It is possible that the measure of social dominance assesses a relatively stable set of beliefs that were not susceptible to a manipulation that is likely to enhance emotional reactions and situational behaviors that might restore a sense of masculinity. Additionally, although the masculinity threat paradigm is common in the literature, this study is the first to threaten with comparisons to gay or bisexual men rather than women. Further research is needed to ascertain whether this threat is as evocative and whether the effect of the threat is primarily emotional or cognitive.

The third hypothesis stated that the direct relationship between endorsement of precarious manhood beliefs and restrictive LGB laws would be stronger for men who received the masculinity threat would endorse more support for restrictive LGB laws, compared to the men who did not receive the threat. There was no significant interaction between threat condition and precarious manhood beliefs suggesting that Hypothesis 3 was not supported by the study’s results. However, examination of the simple slopes

indicated that the direct relationship between endorsement of precarious manhood beliefs and support for restrictive laws was significant only in the control (no threat) condition. Examination of the interaction suggests that men who strongly endorse precarious manhood beliefs exhibit strong support for restrictive LGB laws regardless of threat condition. However, men who do not strongly endorse precarious manhood beliefs, but receive a threat to their masculinity show stronger support for restrictive laws than low precarious manhood belief participants who were not threatened. The discrepancy between the two findings is suggestive that the threat to masculinity had some impact for men on the lower end of precarious manhood beliefs, an interesting possibility since intuitively it seems that men high on precarious manhood beliefs would be more susceptible. Future research should explore this further.

Limitations

As noted earlier, this study is the first to use comparisons to responses from gay and bisexual men rather than women as the threat. It is possible that this threat or the mode of presentation was not convincing. As this possibility of skepticism regarding the threat was anticipated, participants were asked at the end of the survey if they believed there was deception. In the threat condition, 74% responded yes, that they believed there was deception. For comparison, only 52% of the no threat condition suspected deception. At the end of the study, the participants were also asked an open-ended regarding what they thought the study was about. In this section, many participants included notes about their skepticism, such as “Seeing how artificially changing someone’s masculinity score impacted their answers to the rest of the test;” “I think the study looked at how men responded to an affirmation to their masculinity or a denial of their masculinity;” and “To

get me upset by a fake score I didn't fall for it." MTurk respondents complete numerous online research projects and probably should not be considered as naïve participants.

The skepticism of the feedback in the threat condition could potentially explain why there was no significant moderation findings. The manipulation might not have been strong enough or believable enough to overcome an expectation that the feedback was not true. Since this was the first study to use a comparison to responses of gay and bisexual men rather than women, it is possible that this comparison was not as threatening, although that would be inconsistent with literature identifying fear and avoidance of homosexuality as a primary component of traditional masculinity. Another possibility is the figure conveying the threat was not believable, although it was similar to those used in previous threat studies. Additionally, one of the tenets of precarious masculinity is that masculinity is proven through public action. The study was an anonymous online survey and even though participants were instructed to consider their scores being made public, participants may not have been as impacted by the threat.

Additionally, the SDO scale (SDO7(s); Ho et al., 2015) yielded a consistently low mean. While SDO as a mediator was significant, the restricted range of variance could be a limitation in explaining how much of the variance in the measure of LGB policies SDO is responsible for as well as the lack of the moderation effect. For example, if the study's participants were more attitudinally diverse in terms of the SDO scale, the findings might have been even stronger.

Another limitation to the study is that all measures were self-report. Scores on self-report measures may not accurately reflect one's thoughts, values, or beliefs. Participants may have wanted to present themselves in a way that is favorable or free

from bias. Alternately, Konopka et al. (2021) identified that modern homonegativity is more subtle and includes individuals positing that discrimination no longer exists toward the population.

There was also a limitation in the diversity of the sample. The utilization of CloudResearch allowed the study to achieve a more diverse sample in age, geographical location, education, and income. However, there was still lack of racial diversity as the majority of the sample identified as White. Thus, the results might not generalize to a more racially diverse sample. This would be important to assess in future research since men of color are also seen as possessing a subordinate masculinity in relation to the hegemonic masculinity. A racially diverse sample might not have the same relations between precarious manhood beliefs, social dominance, and attitudes toward another marginalized group.

Future Research

While this study did confirm SDO as a mediator, the relationship was only partially mediated. This raises the question of what other variables or cognitive paths may contribute to the relationship. Existing literature has identified several factors that could contribute to prejudice toward LGB families, including demographic characteristics, beliefs and values, and intergroup relations (Costa, 2021). Among these factors, gender, age, education, and race have all been shown to correlate with levels of prejudice toward LGB individuals. While those factors are interesting, it may be difficult to identify how those characteristics contribute to a cognitive pathway.

However, Costa (2021) also identified high SDO, infrequent contact with LGB individuals, high religiosity, and conservative political views as factors related to high

levels of prejudice. It is possible that religious and political values could contribute to the relationship this study found with SDO. Additionally, it is possible that SDO is less susceptible to threat than a value that would elicit a more affective response, such as religion and political affiliation. For example, Crawford et al. (2013) found that right-wing authoritarianism and SDO differentially predicted support for right-wing candidates depending on how the candidate framed the message. In their study, two right-wing ‘candidates’ each opposed same-sex marriage, but one framed the message related to social cohesion (i.e., same-sex marriage erodes American family, destroys moral fabric of society, etc.) and one framed the message related to status threat (i.e., legalizing same-sex marriage benefits same-sex couples at expense of heterosexual couples). In the study, individuals who were high in right-wing authoritarianism were more likely to support the candidate with the cohesion message, whereas individuals who were high in SDO were more likely to support the candidate with the status threat message. This information could be useful in future studies both for looking at additional cognitive pathways, but also in looking at the nature of the threat paradigm.

Future research could also investigate how to apply the findings of the mediation in efforts to develop interventions that can combat the cognitive pathway from precarious manhood beliefs to endorsement of restrictive LGB laws through SDO. Shook et al. (2016) found that individuals who were exposed to intergroup contact had decreased SDO scores and developed more positive attitudes toward the secondary group in general (rather than just the individual they were exposed to). Additionally, findings have shown that education, specifically a sexuality course, predicted positive change in high-SDO participants (Mansoori-Rostam & Tate, 2017). Future research could also explore the

generalizability toward laws and policies that impact other minority out-groups, to ascertain if the cognitive pathway remains the same.

Conclusions

Due to the increasing importance of understanding the cognitive pathways that contribute to voting decisions, the current study originated from a desire to explore relationships among factors that have been related to restrictive LGB laws and increased heterosexism. The study also sought to introduce a novel threat paradigm based on sexual orientation, rather than gender. The findings of this study suggest that social dominance orientation carries much, but not all, of the effect of precarious manhood beliefs on support for restrictive LGB laws. The threat paradigm, which challenged masculinity on a basis of sexual orientation rather than gender, did not moderate the mediated relationship, but there was a suggestion that it might moderate the direct relationship between precarious manhood beliefs and attitudes toward restrictive LGB laws. As the findings suggested endorsement of precarious manhood beliefs and SDO could impact potential voting decisions, it is important that future research continues exploring this pathway and its influence on decision-making.

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