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Heterosexual men's attitudes towards homosexuality and ingroup distinctiveness : The role of perceived men's feminisation**Iacoviello, Vincenzo, Valsecchi, Giulia, Berent, Jacques, Anderson, Joel and Falomir-Pichastor, Juan M.**

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Heterosexual Men's Attitudes toward Homosexuality and Ingroup Distinctiveness:
The Role of Perceived Men's Feminization

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Abstract

The present research tested the hypothesis that perceived men's feminization can decrease heterosexual men's positive attitudes toward homosexuality because of their increased motivation to psychologically differentiate heterosexual men from *gay men* - i.e., in order to restore ingroup distinctiveness. Study 1 ($N = 173$) manipulated perceptions of men's feminization and showed that prompting participants with bogus evidence that men are becoming feminine decreased positive attitudes toward homosexuality. Furthermore, the extent to which heterosexual men reported increased psychological differentiation from gay men (both at the interpersonal and the intergroup levels) mediated the impact of perceived men's feminization on attitudes toward homosexuality. Study 2 ($N = 178$) used a fully experimental approach and manipulated perceived biological differences between heterosexual and gay men in order to threaten or grant ingroup distinctiveness. The results revealed that perceived men's feminization decreased positive attitudes toward homosexuality in the distinctiveness threat condition (i.e., when gay men were described as biologically similar to straight men), but increased positive attitudes both when ingroup distinctiveness was granted (i.e., when gay men were described as biologically different from straight men) and when it was not relevant (i.e., when the similarity of all human beings was salient). We discuss the relevance of these findings for masculinity norms, attitudes toward homosexuality, and the ingroup distinctiveness literature.

Keywords: Masculinity, Men's feminization, Ingroup distinctiveness, Biological theory of sexual orientation, Attitudes towards homosexuality

ATTITUDE TOWARD HOMOSEXUALITY AND GROUP DISTINCTIVENESS

Heterosexual Men's Attitudes toward Homosexuality and Ingroup Distinctiveness:

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Past research consistently shows that attitudes toward homosexuality are less positive among men than among women, especially towards gay male targets (Eagly, Diekmann, Johannesen-Schmidt, & Koenig, 2004; Herek, 1988). This phenomenon is often explained by heterosexual men's motivation to affirm (and conform to) two related norms of traditional masculinity: anti-femininity and heterosexuality. Thus, in order to be a 'real' man, men should distinguish themselves from two relevant outgroups: women and gay men - i.e., men who are perceived as deviating from these norms (e.g., Herek, 1988).

However, there have been recent changes in gender norms, and a move away from these traditional norms of masculinity. Indeed, along with progress towards gender equality and a more egalitarian culture, scholars have suggested that expectations about how real men should behave are changing (e.g., Thompson & Bennett, 2015; Wade, 2015). In parallel, research has shown that people tend to perceive men as becoming more feminine than in the past (Diekmann & Eagly, 2000; Lopez Zafra, & Garcia-Retamero, 2011). As a consequence of this decline in the traditional antifemininity norm of masculinity, one could expect heterosexual men's attitudes toward homosexuality to become more positive. However, such a decline might also threaten ingroup distinctiveness, and therefore motivate heterosexual men to restore it by increasing derogation of gay men.

The present research investigated the potential consequences of perceived changes in the perception that men as a group are becoming more feminine specifically on heterosexual men's attitudes towards homosexuality. More specifically, we postulate that perceived men's feminization (i.e., the perceived evolution of masculinity norms) implies a threat to ingroup distinctiveness and, as a consequence, increases heterosexual men's motivation to restore

ingroup distinctiveness by increasing the perceived differences between heterosexual and gay men.

Masculine gender norms and attitudes toward homosexuality

Research on gender stereotypes have consistently shown that men are perceived as more agentic (e.g., autonomous, self-assertive, task-oriented) than women, while women are perceived as more communal (e.g., relational, emotional, other-oriented) than men (e.g., Bem, 1981; Eagly & Karau, 2002). This therefore contributes in maintaining intergroup boundaries. As a consequence, an increase of feminine traits in men would challenge men's ingroup distinctiveness - i.e., "the perceived difference or dissimilarity between one's own group and another group on a relevant dimension of comparison" (Jetten & Spears, 2003, p. 205). Accordingly, past research has consistently shown that men show greater levels of gender dichotomization (i.e., a tendency to distance masculine from feminine traits; Bosson & Michniewicz, 2013), and that one of the most relevant and robust norms of masculinity is the *avoidance of femininity* (i.e., the anti-femininity norm of masculinity; e.g., Bem, 1981; Bosson & Michniewicz, 2013; Herek, 1986; Kilianski, 2003; Kimmel, 2012; Levant et al., 2007; Thompson & Pleck, 1986).

As a consequence, men often react defensively towards any violation of the anti-femininity norm of masculinity committed either by themselves or by other men. For instance, heterosexual men who think about a time in their life where their behaviour had been at odds with this norm are particularly likely to endorse stereotypically masculine traits (Bosson & Michniewicz, 2013). In the same vein, men react negatively to other men who are likely to harm the ingroup stereotype of agency and masculinity. More specifically, feminine men are evaluated more negatively than masculine men (e.g., Moss-Racussin & Johnson, 2016; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004), and also more negatively than both feminine and masculine women (e.g., McCreary, 1994; Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Rudman, 2010). Finally,

ATTITUDE TOWARD HOMOSEXUALITY AND GROUP DISTINCTIVENESS

discrimination based on femininity is also observed among straight-acting gay men against feminine gay men (Hoskin, 2019; Miller, 2015).

Because gay men are often stereotyped as feminine (Kite & Deaux, 1987; Madon, 1997), they collectively are perceived not to conform to the anti-femininity norm, and by extension become a threat to traditional forms of masculinity. As a result, heterosexual men likely feel a threat to the distinctiveness of their gender-based ingroup if gay men are included in their group. Thus, they become motivated to create or enhance a psychological difference between heterosexual men and gay men, which results in less positive attitudes toward homosexuality (Falomir-Pichastor & Hegarty, 2014; Falomir-Pichastor & Mugny, 2009). Accordingly, *heterosexuality* constitutes another relevant norm of masculinity (e.g., Herek, 1986). In order to affirm their masculinity, men should provide visible evidence that they are heterosexuals, and an effective way to prove one's heterosexuality is to show prejudice against gay men (see also Levant et al., 2007; Mahalik et al., 2003). Indeed, research has shown that heterosexual men's endorsement of the anti-femininity norm of masculinity is linked to less positive attitudes toward homosexuality (e.g., Martinez, Vazquez & Falomir-Pichastor, 2015). Moreover, heterosexual men whose gender prototypicality is threatened show greater anti-gay responses (Bosson, Weaver, Caswell, & Burnaford, 2012; Talley & Bettencourt, 2008), in particular against feminine gay men (Glick et al., 2007; see also Schmitt & Branscombe, 2001).

In sum, to be considered a 'real' man, a man should be neither feminine nor gay. Indeed, the anti-femininity and the heterosexual norms of masculinity seem to be very closely intertwined, as both serve the purpose of protecting men's distinctiveness and promoting hegemony toward women (see Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2019). This understanding is overall consistent with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) according to which, group members - particularly high-status group

members - are generally motivated to maintain and protect their positively distinct social identity by strengthening intergroup differences. The present research investigates the consequences of the perceived decline in the descriptive norm of anti-femininity (i.e., the perception that men are becoming more feminine, which we call 'men's feminization') on attitudes toward homosexuality.

Perceived Men's Feminization and Attitudes toward Homosexuality

Over the past decades, traditional gender norms have been challenged in Western countries because they have been recognized as contributing to the maintenance of discrimination towards women. As a consequence, a social change towards a more egalitarian society has been unfolding. For instance, there is a weak yet significant tendency for men to be increasingly involved in traditionally feminine activities such as those involving domestic and parental tasks (e.g., Champagne, Pailhé, & Solaz, 2015; Dotti Sani, 2014), and people actually perceive an increase of stereotypically feminine traits in men (Lopez Zafra & Garcia-Retamero, 2011). Therefore, re-visiting gender norms, and in particular the perception that the traditional gender dichotomization is reduced, should lead to an increased acceptability of counter-stereotypical behaviours (see Thompson & Bennett, 2015).

While there are reasons to think that social changes in masculine norms can reduce gender inequality, they may also have unforeseen and adverse effects in terms of intergroup discrimination. Indeed, the avoidance of typically feminine behaviours is one of the most relevant norms of traditional masculinity, and the loss of clear-cut differences between men and women could constitute a threat to masculine identity (i.e., a threat to ingroup distinctiveness; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; see also Jetten & Spears, 2003). Therefore, social changes in masculinity norms such as the *feminization of men* might threaten ingroup distinctiveness and foster defensive reactions among men.

ATTITUDE TOWARD HOMOSEXUALITY AND GROUP DISTINCTIVENESS

According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), one reaction would consist of men bolstering their own masculinity in order to reinforce the challenged anti-femininity norm of masculinity. To our knowledge only two studies have examined this possibility. In Babl's (1979) research, participants were informed about the results of a bogus survey either showing a decrease or a stability in men's masculinity over the preceding years and were then asked to describe themselves on stereotypically masculine and feminine characteristics. The results showed that stereotypically masculine men (i.e., men who initially described themselves using more stereotypically masculine traits than stereotypically feminine traits) reacted to the perceived men's feminization by enhancing their prototypicality as a member of the men's group. In the same vein, Bosson and Michniewicz (2013; Study 5) examined reactions of men and women to their gender group's loss of stereotypical traits over time (i.e., men's feminization for male participants and women's masculinization for female participants). Then, participants had to imagine that they did something that made other people question their status as "a real man [woman]", and indicate the extent to which they would be motivated to engage in different typically masculine (e.g., playing video games) and feminine (e.g., planting flowers) activities in order to restore their manhood [womanhood]. Consistent with Babl's (1979) results, perceived men's feminization increased men's motivation to engage in manhood-restoring behaviours (i.e., increasing the likelihood of performing typically masculine activities, as opposed to typically feminine ones). A similar pattern was not observed among female participants.

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) also suggests another plausible way to restate the challenged masculinity norm of anti-femininity: affirming an alternative norm of masculinity, such as heterosexuality. Indeed, since heterosexuality is a feature that traditionally defines the group of men (e.g., Levant et al., 2007; Mahalik et al., 2003), increasing intergroup differentiation between heterosexual men and gay men may constitute a

strategy to maintain ingroup distinctiveness. Two studies have examined this hypothesis (Falomir-Pichastor, Berent, & Anderson, 2019) and showed that perceived men's feminization decreased heterosexual men's positive attitudes toward homosexuality (Study 1), and that this was particularly observed among participants who endorsed most strongly the anti-femininity norm of masculinity (Study 2). Furthermore, this pattern was mediated by participants' discomfort with homosexuality as assessed through the traditional gender identity subscale (Dasgupta & Rivera, 2006).

Together, these findings suggest that men can react to perceived men's feminization by either bolstering their own masculinity or showing less positive attitudes towards homosexuality. Although enlightening, these studies provided limited evidence of the processes at play. Indeed, the effect of perceived men's feminization on attitudes towards homosexuality was shown to be mediated by participants' discomfort with homosexuality, which is at best a proxy of one's motivation to dissociate oneself from gay men and affirm one's heterosexuality. Moreover, this past research did not provide experimental evidence that perceived men's feminization fosters heterosexual men's motivation to differentiate their ingroup from gay men. Therefore, further evidence is needed to support the hypothesis that perceived men's feminization decreases positive attitudes towards homosexuality specifically in order to restore the threatened ingroup distinctiveness (i.e., reactive distinctiveness; Jetten & Spears, 2003). Establishing clear-cut boundaries between heterosexual men and gay men would indeed result in psychologically excluding deviant men from the ingroup and therefore protect the ingroup prototype, which grant ingroup distinctiveness.

Current Research

In this paper, we aim to add to the relatively limited literature on the effects of perceived men's feminization. In particular, we postulate that perceived men's feminization results in a threat to heterosexual men's ingroup distinctiveness. As a consequence, we expect

that it should increase intergroup differentiation between heterosexual men and gay men, which might result in overall less positive attitudes towards homosexuality. We therefore conducted two studies aiming to show that perceived men's feminization decreases positive attitudes towards homosexuality specifically because of men's heightened motivation to dissociate heterosexual men from gay men.

Both these studies were conducted on samples of heterosexual male participants who were exposed to an experimental manipulation of social norms of masculinity (stability vs. feminization of men). In Study 1, we further measured participants' perceived differences from gay men, both at the interpersonal and the intergroup level, and used them as mediators of the effect of perceived men's feminization on attitudes towards homosexuality. Whereas our main prediction relates to the role of perceived intergroup differences as a way to restore ingroup distinctiveness, we also included a measure of interpersonal differences as in Falomir-Pichastor et al (2019) in order to show the specificity of intergroup differentiation in the investigated processes. Our first hypothesis therefore states that:

Perceived men's feminization decreases positive attitudes toward homosexuality, because of participants' motivation to psychologically differentiate heterosexual men from gay men (H1).

In Study 2, we adopted an experimental approach in order to manipulate participants' perceived differences between heterosexual men and gay men. This methodology was based on prior research showing, on the one hand, that biological explanations of sexual orientation satisfy the psychological need to maintain ingroup distinctiveness (Falomir-Pichastor & Hegarty, 2014; Falomir-Pichastor & Mugny, 2009; Falomir-Pichastor, Mugny, & Berent, 2017) and, on the other hand, that stressing people's similarities and belongingness to one

single and superordinate category can reduce the need for intergroup differentiation and the relevance of discrimination (Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, & Rust, 1993). Thus, the second hypothesis is that:

Perceived men's feminization reduces positive attitudes toward homosexuality specifically when participants' motivation to differentiate from gay men is at its highest (e.g., when ingroup distinctiveness is threatened by scientific results showing that heterosexual men are biologically similar to homosexual men), but less so when this motivation is satisfied (when participants are told they are biologically different from gay men) or less relevant (when a supraordinate category is primed; H2).

Study 1

Study 1 aimed at providing evidence in support of Hypothesis 1 according to which perceived men's feminization decreases positive attitudes toward homosexuality, namely because of heterosexual men's increased motivation to differentiate themselves from gay men. We measured participants' differentiation from gay men at both the intergroup (perceived differences between heterosexual men and gay men; Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2017) and the interpersonal level (perceived differences between participants and gay men; Falomir-Pichastor & Mugny, 2009; studies 4-5). In line with Falomir-Pichastor et al.'s (2019) results, we expected that the participants' perceived difference between gay men and themselves would mediate the effect of perceived men's feminization on attitudes toward homosexuality. Moreover, and most importantly, we expected that participants' perceived difference between gay men and heterosexual men (i.e., intergroup differentiation) mediates the effect of perceived men's feminization on attitudes toward homosexuality (H1).

Method

Participants. Heterosexual male participants were recruited from university facilities and various public places (e.g., train stations, airports) in Switzerland and France, and were invited to voluntarily fill in a questionnaire. A total of 174 self-declared heterosexual men were recruited, but one participant was removed from the analyses because he could not be classified as heterosexual at the end of the study. Indeed, in order to be considered as heterosexual, participants should indeed report defining themselves as heterosexual, never having had sexual encounter with a person of the same sex and indicating not being frequently attracted to people of the same sex (see Falomir-Pichastor & Hegarty, 2014)¹. The final sample therefore consisted in 173 heterosexual men (94 university students; $M_{\text{age}} = 31.12$ years, $SD = 9.89$). A sensitivity power analysis using G*Power suggests that this sample size provided 80% power to detect effect sizes of $\eta_p^2 = 0.044$ or greater. Considering that the effect sizes of previous research examining the impact of perceived men's feminization on attitudes toward homosexuality were greater than this threshold (i.e., Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2019; $\eta_p^2 = 0.053$ for Study 1; $\eta_p^2 = 0.055$ for Study 2), the present sample size appears well-powered.

Procedure.

Participants first read a text aiming to manipulate men's gender norms. They then answered the related manipulation checks, the scales measuring attitudes toward homosexuality, and both intergroup and interpersonal difference from gay men. At the end of the questionnaire, they provided their demographics, including information related to sexual orientation, and were fully debriefed.²

Men's gender norm manipulation. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions (see Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2019). All participants read a one-page text (ostensibly published in a scientific journal of sociology) summarizing the results of an international study in Western countries about the evolution of men's masculinity in

ATTITUDE TOWARD HOMOSEXUALITY AND GROUP DISTINCTIVENESS

society. Participants were told that this study was conducted between 1990 and 2010 on a representative sample of the population, and that it assessed all relevant criteria that are traditionally recognized as distinguishing masculinity from femininity (such as physical appearance, emotionality, sensitivity, household tasks, couple and family relationships, children's education, emphasis on career, and contribution to family income). These fictitious results were summarized in a figure representing the evolution of men's gender identity and behaviours on a continuum ranging from masculinity to femininity end-points.

In the *stability* condition, the results showed that “there has been no change across time in terms of how men act and behave - generally speaking, men remain as masculine as in the past on all the personal and social dimensions.” A few examples were then provided to illustrate this tendency such as “men ascribe as much value to their professional career, and do not spend more time in tasks that are traditionally feminine, at work (for instance, there is not more male nurses or cashiers) or at home (for instance, in domestic chores or in child's care taking). The article concluded that: “In sum, there is no real ‘feminization of men’, and the distinction between masculinity (being a man) and femininity (being a woman) remains fundamental.”

In the *feminization* condition, the results showed that “there is a clear evolution in how men act and behave - generally speaking, men have become more feminine on all the personal and social dimensions”. A few examples were then provided such as the fact that “men place less value on their professional career, and spend more time on tasks that are traditionally feminine, at work (for instance, there is more male nurses or cashiers) or at home (for instance, in domestic chores or in child's care taking)”. The article concluded that: “In sum, we are witnessing a real ‘feminization of men’, and the distinction between masculinity (being a man) and femininity (being a woman) tends to disappear”.³

Measures.

Manipulation check. After the experimental manipulation, participants indicated the extent to which the study's conclusions described in the text they just read were that: 'Men's behaviour seems to have changed in recent years', 'Men's masculinity has changed in recent years', 'What it means to be a man has changed in recent years', and 'There is an evolution of masculinity towards more femininity' (1 = '*not at all*' to 7 = '*absolutely*'). A score was computed by averaging the response of these four items (higher scores reflect perception of men's feminization; $M = 3.67$, $SD = 2.33$, $\alpha = .97$).

Attitudes towards homosexuality. We used a 16-item scale assessing participants' attitudes towards homosexuality (e.g., 'Gay couples should have the right to marry'; 1 = '*strongly disagree*' and 7 = '*strongly agree*'; Anderson, Koc, & Falomir-Pichastor, 2018). An overall score measuring positive attitudes toward homosexuality was computed by averaging the answers of all items after appropriately reverse-coding items ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.53$, $\alpha = .94$).

Perceived difference from gay men. Perceived difference from gay men was assessed at both the interpersonal and intergroup level. A 7-item scale assessed perceived *interpersonal difference* by asking participants to what extent they perceived themselves similar to gay men in several domains - i.e., emotions, needs, wishes, intimate relationships, friendship, professional relationships, and in general (1 = '*very different*' and 7 = '*very similar*'; $M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.68$, $\alpha = .93$; see Falomir-Pichastor & Mugny, 2009, Studies 4-5). Another 6-item scale measured perceived *intergroup difference*. Sample items were: 'Gay men and heterosexual men are psychologically different', 'Gay men and heterosexual men are essentially different' and 'Gay men have different personality traits than heterosexual men' (1 = '*strongly disagree*' and 7 = '*strongly agree*'; $M = 3.86$, $SD = 1.65$, $\alpha = .90$). Scores for the interpersonal difference scale were reversed so that, for both subscales, higher scores reflect a larger differentiation from gay men. The correlation between these scales was significant,

ATTITUDE TOWARD HOMOSEXUALITY AND GROUP DISTINCTIVENESS

$r(173) = .65, p < .001$. Furthermore, both intergroup and interpersonal perceived difference correlated negatively with positive attitudes towards homosexuality, $r(173) = -.68, p < .001$ and $r(173) = -.73, p < .001$, respectively.

Results

Manipulation check. A one-way ANOVA with the men's gender norms (stability vs. feminization) as the independent variable was performed on the manipulation check score and indicated that participants acknowledged a trend in men's feminization to a greater extent in the feminization condition ($M = 5.75, SD = 1.14$) than in the stability condition ($M = 1.62, SD = 0.99$), $F(1,171) = 644.13, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .79$.

Attitudes towards homosexuality. The same analysis performed on attitudes towards homosexuality indicated that participants in the feminization condition ($M = 3.57, SD = 1.54$) reported less positive attitudes than participants in the stability condition ($M = 4.57, SD = 1.37$), $F(1,171) = 20.42, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .11$ (see Figure 1).

Perceived difference from gay men. Analysis on interpersonal difference revealed that participants in the feminization condition perceived a greater difference between themselves and gay men ($M = 4.79, SD = 1.47$) than participants in the stability condition ($M = 3.36, SD = 1.57$), $F(1,171) = 38.04, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .18$. Similarly, analysis on intergroup difference showed that participants in the feminization condition perceived a greater difference between heterosexual men and gay men ($M = 4.34, SD = 1.70$) than participants in the stability condition ($M = 3.39, SD = 1.69$), $F(1,171) = 15.654, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .08$ (see Figure 1).

Mediation analyses. We conducted a multiple mediation analysis with the two mediators operating in parallel (Model 4, Hayes, 2013), based on 5000 bootstrap resamples and bias corrected confidence intervals for indirect effects. Men's gender norm (coded as -1 = feminization and 1 = stability) was entered as the independent variable, attitudes toward homosexuality as the outcome variable, and interpersonal and intergroup difference as

mediators. As the effect of men's norm on attitude (c path), on interpersonal difference (a1 path) and on intergroup difference (a2 path) have been acknowledged in the previous analyses, we present the full regression model. The direct effect of men's norm on attitude (c' path), $B = 0.02$, $SE = 0.08$, $p = .816$, 95% CI [-0.14, 0.18], was reduced to non-significance compared to the total effect (c path). The partial effect of interpersonal difference on attitude (b1 path) was also negative and significant, $B = -0.45$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-0.57, -0.33], and the indirect effect (i.e., the impact of men's norm on attitudes towards homosexuality via interpersonal difference) was significant, $B = 0.32$, $SE = 0.07$, 95% CI [0.19, 0.48]. Moreover, the partial effect of intergroup difference on attitude (b2 path) was negative and significant, $B = -0.33$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-0.45, -0.21], and the indirect effect (i.e., the impact of men's norm on attitudes towards homosexuality via intergroup difference) was significant, $B = 0.16$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [0.08, 0.28]. Taken together (see Figure 2), these results provided evidence in support of the hypothesis that both perceived interpersonal and intergroup differentiation mediate the impact of perceived men's feminization on attitudes toward homosexuality.

Discussion

The results of Study 1 supported H1. They showed that perceived men's feminization results in a decrease of heterosexual men's positive attitudes towards homosexuality. Furthermore, they also showed that participants' increased perception of difference between heterosexual men and gay men mediates this effect. This pattern was observed on both levels of perceived difference - the interpersonal level and, more importantly, the intergroup level. Thus, whereas the effect through perceived interpersonal difference is consistent with previous findings (Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2019), this is the first study showing that perceived men's feminization strengthens intergroup boundaries by increasing heterosexual men's psychological difference between heterosexual men and gay men. This could suggest

that heterosexual men are motivated to redefine men's prototype as heterosexual, which in turn translates in less positive attitudes toward homosexuality.

Though informative, these findings suffer from limitations that pertains to mediation as a methodological tool (e.g., does not allow inferences of causality; see Fiedler, Harris, & Schott, 2018; Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005). In order to overcome this potential issue, Study 2 used an experimental, moderation approach as a means to investigate our main hypothesis.

Study 2

Study 2 used an experimental approach to test the hypothesis that perceived men's feminization leads to decreased positive attitudes toward homosexuality, namely because of heterosexual men's motivation to maintain ingroup distinctiveness. To do that, we based our rationale on existing research showing that biological explanations of sexual orientation can increase positive attitudes toward homosexuality, namely because these explanations (i.e., gay men and heterosexual men being biologically different to each other) can increase ingroup distinctiveness (Falomir-Pichastor & Hegarty, 2014; Falomir-Pichastor & Mugny, 2009; Falomir-Pichastor, Berent, Mugny, & Faniko, 2015). Accordingly, heterosexual male participants were informed that gay men are either biologically different from, or biologically similar to straight men. We reasoned that, compared to the similarity condition, the biological differences condition should reinforce sexuality boundaries by acknowledging intergroup differences between gay men and heterosexual men – that is, the biological differences condition should fulfill the motive for ingroup distinctiveness. Accordingly, we expect that perceived men's feminization will specifically decrease positive attitudes toward homosexuality in the biological similarity condition (i.e., when ingroup distinctiveness remains threatened), but not in the biological difference condition in which distinctiveness needs are met.

Furthermore, the present study aimed to show that similarity between groups is not always threatening and, as a consequence, does not lead to decreased positive attitudes towards the outgroup (in this case, gay men). According to self-categorization theory (SCT; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) and the common ingroup identity model (Gaertner et al., 1993), when people are focused on a supraordinate level of categorization, in which human beings are considered as an undifferentiated whole and are contrasted with other species, intergroup comparisons are no longer salient, and dynamics related to the protection of a particular social identity are reduced. Men's feminization should therefore no longer be perceived as threatening when intergroup similarity occurs within a supraordinate level of categorization. Accordingly, our second hypothesis (H2) specifically states that perceived men's feminization (vs. stability) should specifically decrease positive attitudes toward homosexuality in the heterosexual-gay biological similarity condition, but less so in the conditions where the motive for distinctiveness is eased (i.e., the heterosexual-gay difference condition) or where it is not relevant, because all human beings are cognitively re-categorized in the same group (i.e., human similarity condition).

Method

Participants. A total of 194 male participants were initially recruited. Sixteen participants were however removed from the final sample, because they were either underage ($N = 1$) or not classified as heterosexual ($N = 14$; see Study 1's criteria used for identifying heterosexual men). The final sample comprised 178 heterosexual men (72 students; $M_{\text{age}} = 33.10$ years, $SD = 12.84$). For the present 2 (men's norm: stability vs. feminization) \times 3 (distinctiveness: heterosexual-gay similarity, heterosexual-gay difference, human similarity) experimental design, a sensitivity power analysis using G*Power suggests that this sample size provided 80% power to detect effect sizes of $\eta_p^2 = 0.041$ or greater. Considering that the

effect sizes of both Study 1 (i.e., $\eta_p^2 = .107$) and Falomir et al.'s (2019) research ($\eta_p^2 = .053$ and $.055$) were greater, the present study appears well-powered.

Procedure.

Men's gender norms and attitudes toward homosexuality ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 1.34$, $\alpha = .91$) were manipulated or assessed, respectively, in the same way as in Study 1. At the end of the study, the experimenter orally provided a full debriefing about the purpose of the study.

Ingroup distinctiveness manipulation. Distinctiveness between heterosexual and gay men was manipulated through perception of biological similarity versus difference between heterosexual and gay men (see Falomir-Pichastor and Mugny, 2009, Study 5; see also Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2015). Participants read a text summarizing scientific evidence allegedly comparing heterosexual and gay men on the biological dimensions of their genes, their mother's androgen rate during pregnancy, and their physiological make-up (i.e., the weight of the part of the hypothalamus responsible for sexual orientation). In the *heterosexual-gay difference* condition, the results of these studies highlighted the existence of biological differences between heterosexual and gay men, thereby suggesting that sexual orientation is biologically determined. In the *heterosexual-gay similarity* condition, the results emphasized that heterosexual and gay men are biologically similar, thereby suggesting that sexual orientation is not biologically determined. Finally, in the *human similarity* condition the results showed that all individuals are biologically similar independently of their attitudes and individual preferences. This condition made no reference to sexual orientation, nor to gender.

Manipulation checks. The manipulation check of men's gender norm ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 1.84$, $\alpha = .94$) was assessed the same way as in Study 1. At the end of the study, 5 items were introduced as manipulation checks of the ingroup distinctiveness between heterosexual and gay men. Two items assessed the extent to which sexual orientation is perceived as

ATTITUDE TOWARD HOMOSEXUALITY AND GROUP DISTINCTIVENESS

biologically determined ('Male homosexuality is determined biologically' and 'Male homosexuality has a genetic origin'; $r(176) = .82, p < .001; M = 3.09, SD = 1.87$). Finally, three additional items were introduced in order to examine whether the ingroup distinctiveness manipulation also influenced participants' perception of immutability ('Gay men, at some point of their life, decide voluntarily their sexual orientation', 'Gay men have the possibility to change their sexual orientation', and 'Gay men are personally responsible for their sexual orientation'; $M = 3.84, SD = 1.86, \alpha = .88$). The correlation between the two scores was negative and significant though of weak magnitude, $r(176) = -.19, p = .008$.

Results

Manipulation checks.

We performed a 2 (men's gender norms: stability vs. feminization) x 3 (distinctiveness: heterosexual-gay similarity, heterosexual-gay difference, human similarity) full-factorial ANOVA on both the men's norm check and the ingroup distinctiveness checks.

Check of men's gender norms. The analysis revealed a main effect of the men's gender norms, $F(1,172) = 143.93, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .456$. Participants acknowledged that research indicates a trend in men's feminization to a greater extent in the feminization condition ($M = 5.36, SD = 1.00$) than in the stability condition ($M = 2.88, SD = 1.68$), $F(1,172) = 143.93, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .46$. Neither the main effect of distinctiveness nor the Norm \times Distinctiveness interaction were significant, $F(1,172) = 0.16, p = .855, \eta_p^2 = .000$ and $F(1,172) = 2.00, p = .139, \eta_p^2 = .02$, respectively.

Check of ingroup distinctiveness. The analysis for the measure of perceived biological differences showed a main effect of ingroup distinctiveness, $F(2,170) = 3.38, p = .036, \eta_p^2 = .04$.⁴ Perceived biological differences between heterosexual men and gay men were higher in the heterosexual-gay differences condition ($M = 3.55, SD = 2.00$) than in the heterosexual-gay similarity condition ($M = 2.74, SD = 1.84$), $t(170) = 2.52, p = .013, \eta_p^2 =$

.036. The human similarity condition ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 1.71$) differed marginally from the heterosexual-gay difference condition, $t(170) = 1.81$, $p = .072$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, but did not differ from the heterosexual-gay similarity condition, $t(170) = 0.74$, $p = .46$, $\eta_p^2 = .000$. Neither the main effect of the gender norm nor the Norm \times Distinctiveness interaction were significant, $F(1,170) = 0.65$, $p = .422$, $\eta_p^2 = .000$ and $F(2,170) = 1.97$, $p = .143$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, respectively. Finally, the analysis on immutability scores did not show any significant effect (distinctiveness main effect: $F(2,170) = 0.96$, $p = .386$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$; Norm main effect: $F(1,170) = 2.40$, $p = .123$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$; and Norm \times Distinctiveness interaction: $F(2,170) = 1.32$, $p = .270$, $\eta_p^2 = .012$), which is consistent with past experimental research investigating the consequences of perceived biological differences (Falomir-Pichastor & Mugny, 2009; Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2017).

Attitudes toward homosexuality. In order to adequately test for H2, we first computed two Helmert contrasts with the distinctiveness variable. The first contrast (C1) opposed the heterosexual-gay similarity condition (coded +2) to the heterosexual-gay difference and the human similarity conditions (both coded -1). The second contrast (C2) opposed the heterosexual-gay difference (coded -1) to the human similarity condition (coded 1), with the heterosexual-gay similarity condition being coded 0. According to H2, C1 should be significant, while C2 should not.

We then performed a linear regression on attitudes toward homosexuality with men's norms (coded -1 for feminization and +1 for stability), C1, C2 and their interactions (except those including the two orthogonal contrasts) as predictors. The analysis only revealed a significant C1 \times Norm interaction, $B = 0.27$, $SE = 0.07$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.13, 0.40] (see Figure 3). As expected, in the heterosexual-gay similarity condition, attitudes were less positive in the feminization condition ($M = 3.90$, $SE = 0.24$) than in the stability condition ($M = 4.88$, $SE = 0.25$), $B = 0.49$, $SE = 0.17$, $p = .005$, 95% CI [0.15, 0.83]. Unexpectedly, the

opposite pattern was observed in the modality combining the heterosexual-gay difference and the human similarity conditions: Attitudes were less positive in the stability condition ($M = 3.91$, $SE = 0.17$) than in the feminization condition ($M = 4.51$, $SE = 0.17$), $B = -0.30$, $SE = 0.12$, $p = .013$, 95% CI [-0.54, -0.06]. The $C2 \times \text{Norm}$ interaction was not significant, $B = 0.18$, $SE = 0.12$, $p = .135$, 95% CI [-0.06, 0.41], suggesting that the impact of men's norm on attitude was not different in the heterosexual-gay difference and the human similarity conditions.

Discussion

In line with Study 1, Study 2's findings supported the general prediction according to which perceived men's feminization results in less positive attitudes toward homosexuality, because of an increase in heterosexual men's motivation to differentiate heterosexual men from gay men. More specifically, perceived men's feminization only decreased positive attitudes toward homosexuality when ingroup distinctiveness was challenged (i.e., the intergroup similarity condition). This effect, however, neither appeared when ingroup distinctiveness was acknowledged (i.e., the intergroup difference condition), nor when it was not a salient and relevant concern (i.e., the human similarity condition). Quite the opposite, perceived men's feminization actually increased positive attitudes toward homosexuality in the latter two conditions combined. This unanticipated effect suggests that perceived men's feminization increases positive attitudes toward homosexuality specifically when the motive for ingroup distinctiveness is eased (i.e., either because ingroup distinctiveness is acknowledged or because it is not a salient concern). We tentatively suggest that, in these situations, perceived men's feminization is appraised as a fact that weakens the anti-femininity norm of masculinity. Attitudes toward feminine men (i.e., including gay men) therefore become more positive, as they can be subsumed into the psychological category of men.

General Discussion

Across two studies, this research provided evidence in support of the general hypothesis according to which perceived men's feminization decreases heterosexual men's positive attitudes toward homosexuality because of their motivation to preserve ingroup distinctiveness by psychologically dissociating their group from gay men. Consistent with H1, Study 1 used a mediation approach and showed that the predicted impact of perceived men's feminization on attitude was mediated by heterosexual men's tendency to psychologically differentiate from gay men (both at the interpersonal and the intergroup levels). In line with H2, Study 2 used an experimental approach and revealed that the predicted impact of perceived men's feminization on attitudes was observed when science supported a biological similarity between heterosexual and gay men (when distinctiveness need was at its highest), but vanished when science supported a biological difference between heterosexual and gay men (when distinctiveness need was satisfied) or when this difference was not a salient concern (when the focus was on human similarity).

Theoretical Implications

Several theoretical implications of the present findings can be highlighted. First, the present research suggests that investigating men's reaction to perceived men's feminization can shed light onto the underlying motives that fuel attitudes toward homosexuality. Indeed, perceived men's feminization weakens the anti-femininity norm, which can motivate heterosexual men to affirm the homosexuality norm of masculinity. Accordingly, negative attitudes toward homosexuality, and the inherent heterosexual-gay men distinction, may be used as a mean to restore the challenged men-women dichotomy. By psychologically excluding the 'bad apples' from the group of men, the man prototype is more likely to remain distinct from the female outgroup (see subjective group dynamics; Marques, Abrams, Paéz, & Hogg, 2001). However, another slightly different process could explain the tendency of

ATTITUDE TOWARD HOMOSEXUALITY AND GROUP DISTINCTIVENESS

heterosexual men to reject gay men in situations where men are perceived as becoming more feminine. Indeed, this is consistent with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), according to which group members can react to threats to social identity not only by relying on a *social competition* strategy (i.e., restoring positive distinctiveness through direct comparison with a relevant outgroup), but also on a *social creativity* strategy consisting in shifting the focus on a different outgroup in order to achieve ingroup distinctiveness. Accordingly, in order to satisfy the need for ingroup distinctiveness, men can focus on an *alternative* intergroup comparison based on sexual orientation and increasing the distinctiveness between the ingroup (i.e., heterosexual men) and the relevant outgroup (i.e., gay men). In sum, this latter interpretation differs from the one we referred to in that gay men are mostly derogated because they represent an outgroup on which heterosexual men can easily achieve ingroup distinctiveness, and not because they tarnish the prototype of men (thus challenging the distinctiveness of the gender ingroup). Future research is needed in order to better disentangle these two explanations.

A related issue concerns the motive for ingroup distinctiveness that is supposed to drive negative attitudes toward homosexuality. The literature distinguishes between the motive for positive distinctiveness (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and the motive for mere distinctiveness (Brewer, 1991; Jetten & Spears, 2003), which have both been linked to intergroup outcomes such as intergroup differentiation and discrimination. The motive for positive distinctiveness refers to people's tendency to enhance the ingroup status. In this case, intergroup stereotypes and ingroup norms serve the purpose of creating a positive comparison with relevant outgroups. The motive for mere distinctiveness is related to people's tendency to look for clarity and certainty, which can be achieved through clear-cut intergroup boundaries (see Hogg, 2012). It is still uncertain whether negative intergroup attitudes stem exclusively from the motive for positive distinctiveness or from the motive for mere

distinctiveness. However, studies comparing attitudes toward homosexuality among men and women speaks in favor of the former explanation. Indeed, compared to straight women's attitudes toward lesbians, straight men's attitudes toward gay men tend to be more negative (see Eagly et al., 2004; Herek, 1988). Furthermore, while perceived men's feminization results in an increased propensity to engage in manhood-restoring behaviours among men, the same pattern was not observed among women (Bosson & Michniewicz, 2013; Study 5). Together, these findings suggest that distinctiveness is more important for the high-status gender group (i.e., men) than the low-status gender group (i.e., women), which means that ingroup distinctiveness contributes to create specifically a positive differentiation from relevant outgroups. However, this interpretation remains speculative and more evidence is needed in order to determine which motive is the most influential in shaping attitudes toward homosexuality.

Finally, the present research focused on whether men's feminization is perceived by men as a threat to the maintenance of the gender boundaries (i.e., ingroup distinctiveness). However, one could also wonder whether women's masculinization would produce the same reaction among men, as this would also be a sign that the gender dichotomy is eroding. To our knowledge, no research has examined this issue empirically. On the one hand, one could speculate that both perceptions of men becoming more feminine and of women becoming more masculine would be perceived as a threat to men's status and therefore create the same defensive reactions in men. On the other hand, men could perceive men's feminization as more threatening than women's masculinization, namely because the former directly concerns changes in ingroup norms and specifically challenges a central norm of traditional masculinity. Therefore, further research is needed in order to better understand men's reaction to the transformation of both men's and women's gender norms.

Can Men's Feminization Be Perceived as Non-Threatening?

ATTITUDE TOWARD HOMOSEXUALITY AND GROUP DISTINCTIVENESS

In the present research, we based our rationale on the reactive distinctiveness defensive mechanism (see Jetten et al., 2004), and argued that men's feminization should be perceived as a threat motivating reactions aimed at restoring group distinctiveness (i.e., in the form of decreased positive attitudes toward homosexuality). However, it is possible that some men do not perceive men's feminization as a threat but simply as a fact or a positive tendency in Western egalitarian societies. As a consequence, instead of defensively reacting to social changes, these men could be inclined to accept and conform to the new norm depicting men as more feminine. This means that some men can be less motivated to protect the anti-femininity norm of masculinity, and to conform to a lesser extent to this norm, which might result in increased positive attitudes towards homosexuality.

We tentatively suggest that such a positive reaction to perceived men's feminization would be typical of heterosexual men who valorize gender equality and/or do not endorse traditional masculinity norms (such as anti-femininity and heterosexuality). Indeed, research from Kosakowska-Berezecka et al. (2016, Study 3) showed that when the gender boundaries were threatened, men were less prone to justify gender inequalities and were more willing to adopt typically feminine roles. It is however noteworthy that participants were recruited “using an online research platform created for the purposes of a wider research project focused on egalitarian attitudes and work-life balance strategies” (p. 278), suggesting that the sample could be mainly composed of egalitarian men. In the same vein, Falomir-Pichastor et al. (2019) revealed that endorsement of traditional masculinity norms acts as a moderator of the effect of perceived men's feminization on attitudes toward homosexuality (see also Babl, 1979). Indeed, perceived men's feminization decreased positive attitudes toward homosexuality among men who strongly endorse traditional masculinity norms, but not among men who weakly endorse those norms. Men endorsing these norms the most are indeed more likely to perceive men's feminization as a threat to ingroup distinctiveness and to

react in a way to restore it. According to this rationale, we could expect other variables such as the importance of the gender dichotomy, ingroup identification, and attitudes toward feminism to moderate the impact of perceived men's feminization on attitudes toward homosexuality.

Results of the present research also contribute to a better understanding of the conditions under which perceived men's feminization can increase positive attitudes toward homosexuality. Overall, the observed findings suggest that perceived men's feminization reduces positive attitudes towards homosexuality namely because men's feminization threatens ingroup distinctiveness, which means that any factor contributing to fulfill distinctiveness needs would open the door to positive reactions to perceived men's feminization. More specifically, the results of the second study showed that perceived men's feminization can increase positive attitudes toward homosexuality when ingroup distinctiveness is granted by biological explanations of sexual orientation according to which heterosexual and gay men would be biologically different. These findings highlight the complex processes that are activated when social changes challenge traditional norms of masculinity. Thus, further research is needed in order to investigate how men react and adapt to social changes that require a redefinition of masculinity.

Conclusion

Recent decades have seen an important evolution of social norms towards gender equality (despite gender disparities still being significant in most domains; Eurostat, 2018; Champagne et al., 2015). Although this evolution is encouraging, we should be aware that this can be accompanied by perverse consequences. Progress can indeed be used to argue that gender disparities have disappeared and that efforts to promote gender equality are not legitimate anymore and should be ceased (e.g., Moscoso, García-Izquierdo, & Bastida, 2012; Saguy & Szekeres; 2018; Valentine, Jackson, & Mayblin, 2014). In the present research, we

ATTITUDE TOWARD HOMOSEXUALITY AND GROUP DISTINCTIVENESS

highlighted another undesirable consequence and showed that a particular kind of evolution towards gender equality, that is, men's feminization, may decrease heterosexual men's positive attitudes toward homosexuality. Further research is needed to better understand the consequences of these societal changes, in order to prevent outcomes that could paradoxically be related to decreased tolerance towards stigmatized groups.

Footnotes

- ¹⁾ In both Studies 1 and 2, we also used the single-criterion filter, that is, we only excluded participants who did not define themselves as heterosexuals. Analyses performed with this single-criterion filter showed no significant differences in the results as compared to the ones we report in the paper (in both Studies 1 & 2).
- ²⁾ For transparency purposes, we hereby inform readers that this study additionally aimed at testing whether initially affirming one's masculinity strengthened or weakened the main effect of the men's gender norm manipulation. To do that, a second independent variable manipulated the order of presentation of three scales meant to allow participants affirming their masculinity: gender identification, and the Dasgupta and Rivera's (2006) 15-item scale of conscious beliefs about gendered roles and gender identity. Preliminary results showed that the order of presentation did not play any main or moderating role on attitudes towards homosexuality. Therefore, for economy purposes, we decided to only focus on the main effect of men's gender norms. More information about this manipulation and the results can be obtained from the first author.
- ³⁾ The experimental inductions of both Studies 1 and 2 are originally in French. English versions are available online on the Open Science Framework platform:
<https://osf.io/nd4t6/>.
- ⁴⁾ Due to missing values, degrees of freedom can slightly vary according to the analysis performed.

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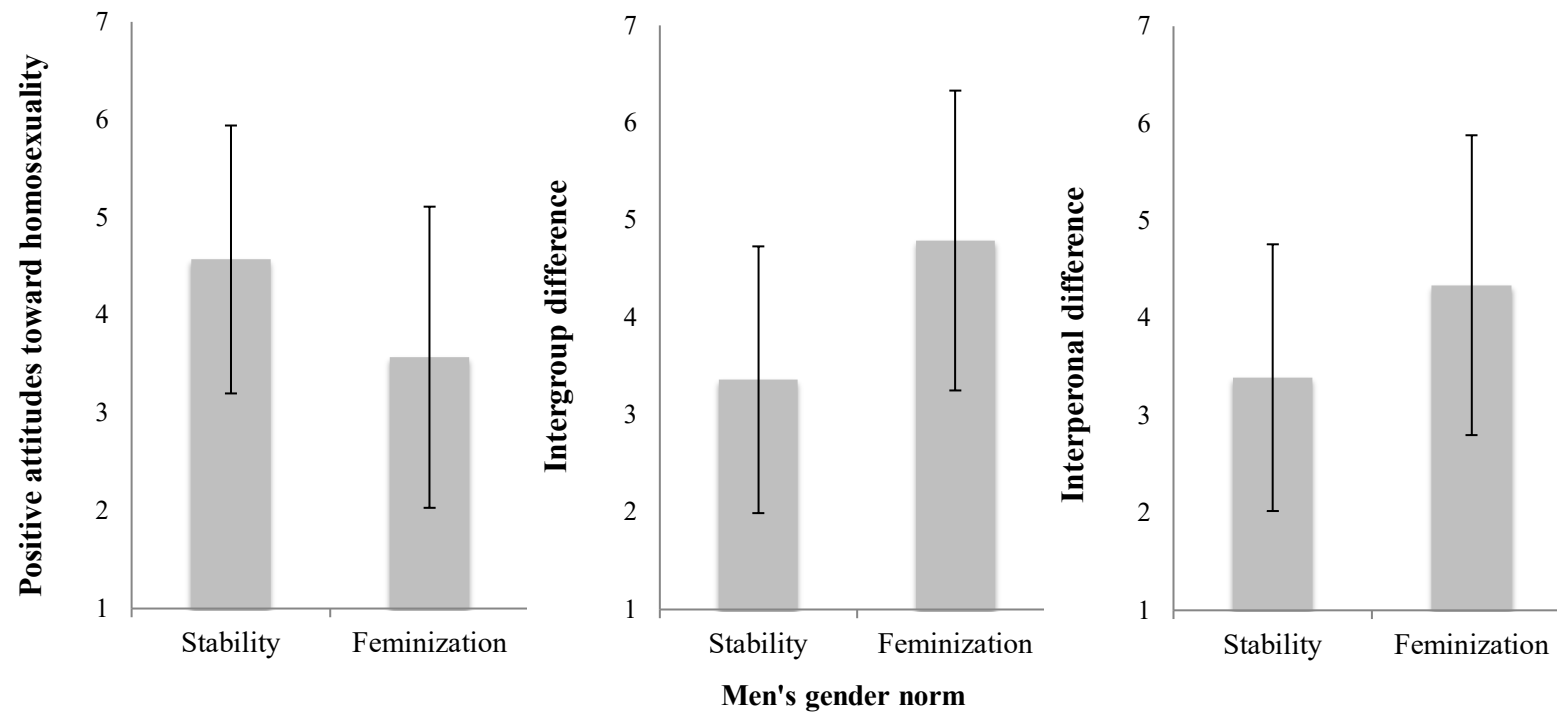


Figure 1. Positive attitudes towards homosexuality and perceived intergroup and interpersonal difference as a function of the evolution of men's gender norm (Study 1). Error bars represent ± 1 SD.

ATTITUDE TOWARD HOMOSEXUALITY AND GROUP DISTINCTIVENESS

ATTITUDE TOWARD HOMOSEXUALITY AND GROUP DISTINCTIVENESS

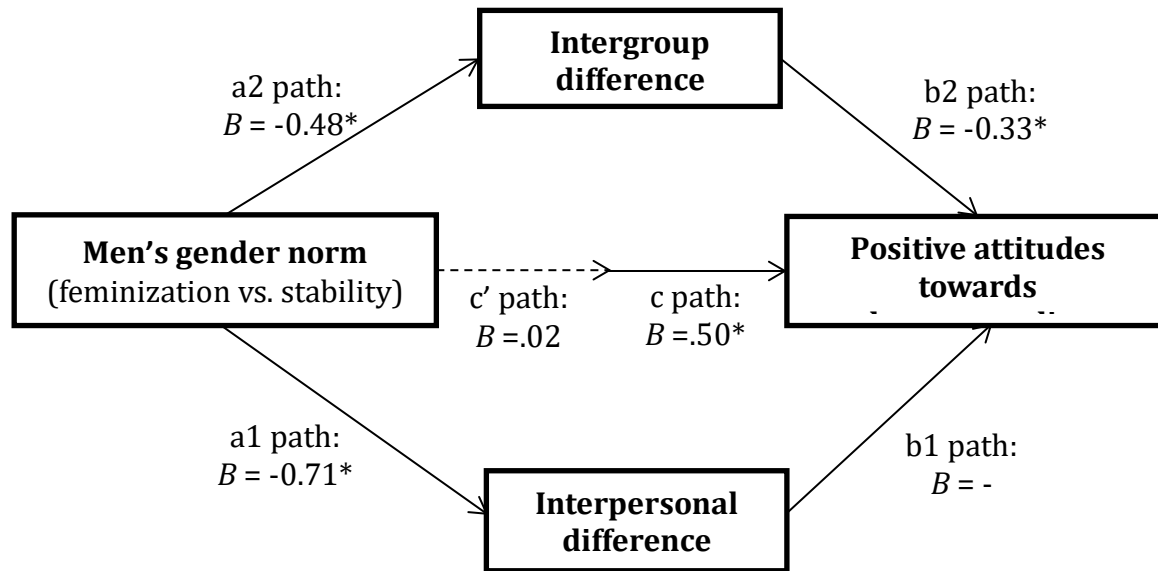


Figure 2. Impact of men's gender norm (-1=feminization vs. +1=stability) on positive attitudes towards homosexuality mediated by perceptions of intergroup and interpersonal difference (Study 1). * $p < .05$.

ATTITUDE TOWARD HOMOSEXUALITY AND GROUP DISTINCTIVENESS

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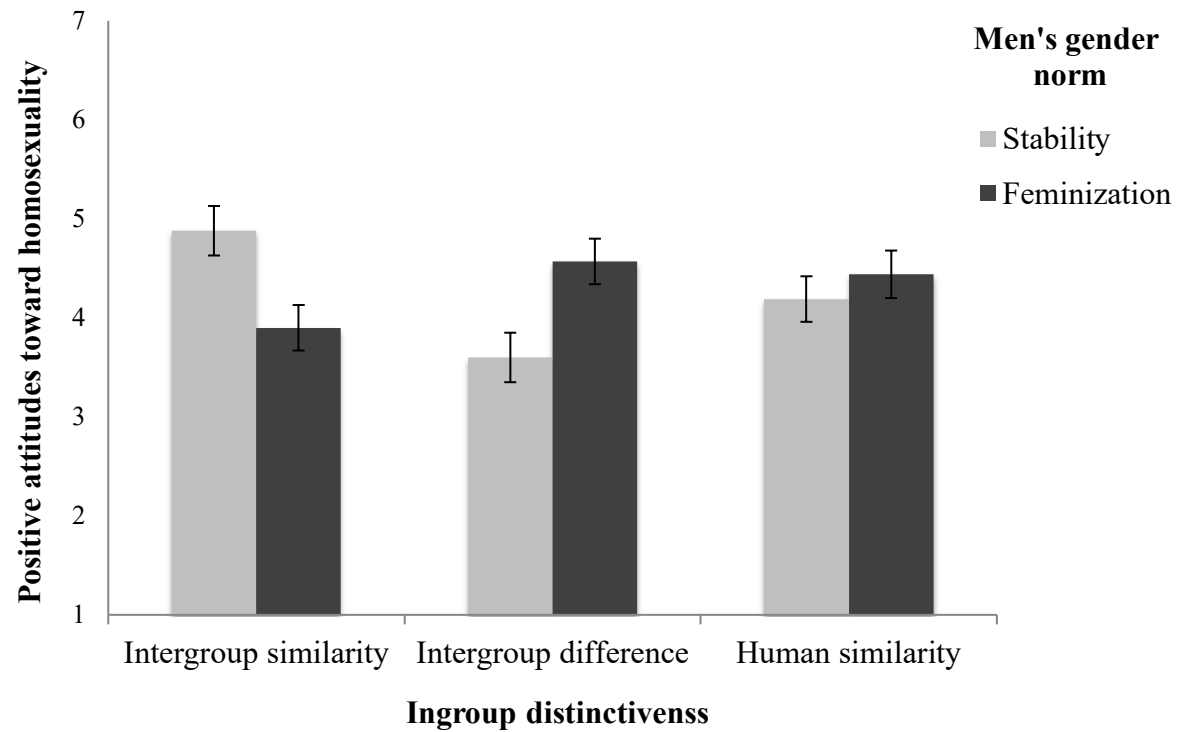


Figure 3. Positive attitudes towards homosexuality as a function of men's gender norm and ingroup distinctiveness manipulation (Study 2). Error bars represent ± 1 SE.

