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How Context Matters: Predicting Men's Homophobic Slang Use

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Abstract

This manuscript reports two experiments exploring heterosexual men's use of homophobic slang in social contexts, varied by sex-ratio. Study 1 ($N = 127$) experimentally demonstrated that compared to a mixed-sex audience, heterosexual men with an all-male audience reported higher levels of hetero-identity concern (HIC) and more homophobic slang use; these men had similar levels of HIC compared to men with an all-female audience. Study 2 replicated Study 1's mean difference tests, and explored whether the relationship between HIC and homophobic slang was affected by group sex-ratio and social norms. Results suggest the relationship between HIC and homophobic slang was significant only in all-male and mixed-sex audiences, and the norm of noninterference was predictive of homophobic slang only in all-male groups.
(120 words)

Keywords: gender identification, hetero-identity concern, homophobic slang use, self-categorization theory

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In September of 2010, a tragic series of suicides among gay teens prompted nation-wide attention into the widespread problem of anti-gay bullying (New Civil Rights Movement, 2010). Sexual minority youth are particularly vulnerable to being targets of bullying by young heterosexual boys and men (Berlan, Corliss, Field, Goodman, & Austin, 2010). In the spring of 2011, one of the NBA's most recognizable figures, Kobe Bryant, was fined $100,000 by the league for the use of an "anti-gay slur" against a league official (ESPN.com, 2011, Introduction, ¶1). Apparently undeterred by league fines, Joakim Noah, center for the Chicago Bulls, used a similar insult against a fan during a playoff game and was fined $50,000. The persistence of such language in men's professional sports was linked to gay teen suicide by ESPN columnist Henry Abbott, calling "NBA's macho culture" "shameful" and part of a wider culture of "bullying" (ESPN.com, 2011, Question 1, ¶2). Despite anecdotal evidence to the contrary, recent research has empirically demonstrated that homophobic slang use is related to underlying sexual prejudicial attitudes against gay men (Hall & La France, 2012). Among young men, homophobic slang is often used for bullying (Poteat & Espelage, 2005), sometimes to the point of harassment, especially when used against males who are not stereotypically masculine (Coates, 2003; Pascoe, 2007). Empirical inquiry into the ways that language is used to enact violence sheds light on how cognitive constructs regarding gender influence prejudicial behavior (Poteat & Espelage, 2005).

The present article will explore how the use of derogatory terms about gay men serves an identity management function for heterosexual men in contexts that vary by the sex-ratio of the audience. In some contexts, young men use homophobic slang—such as gay and fag—as a substitute for something that is stupid, worthless, weak, or feminine (Coates, 2003; Lalor &

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Hall, J. A., & La France, B. H. (in press). How context matters: Predicting men's homophobic slang use. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology.*   4

Rendle-Short, 2007; Pascoe, 2007). Homophobic slang use is one of the more common prejudicial communicative behaviors among men (Burn, 2000; Pascoe, 2007). Lalor and Rendle-Short (2007) report that nearly two-thirds of young men admit to using the word gay in a negative or derogatory way. Resent research has established that heterosexual men's desire to project a heterosexual identity and avoid behaviors that can be called gay is related to homophobic slang use (Hall & La France, 2007). The present investigation establishes how the sex-ratio of the audience (i.e., male, female, mixed-sex) influences homophobic slang use, and assesses the strength of the relationship between the concern over appearing gay and homophobic slang.

To generate hypotheses, self-categorization theory (SCT) is employed (Turner, 1982, 1985, 1987). Self-categorization theory explains how group norms and behaviors are influenced by group prototypes, which are a set of attributes that distinguish what makes that shared group identity distinct from other groups (Hogg, 2001). When a social context makes salient some aspect of individuals' social identity, then individuals are more likely to act in accord with the prototype of the ingroup. SCT is based on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which has a long history of exploring how social identities influence prejudicial attitudes (Hogg & Reid, 2006) and is well-suited to examine how discriminatory language is used in varying contexts (Hall & La France, 2012). To better account for the self-presentational processes underlying homophobic slang use, the present investigation aligns three related concepts: gender identification, (Cameron, 2004), gender threat (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2001), and group norms (Terry & Hogg, 2001). The audience to whom men present a desired heterosexual self-image and the norm of noninterference influences levels of concern over appearing gay, homophobic slang

THIS IS THE PRE-PEER REVIEW VERSION OF THE BELOW ARTICLE:

use, and the strength of the relationships among these concepts. In developing a more complete understanding of these relationships, the identity-related processes that attenuate heterosexual men's need to engage in homophobic slang can be identified and thereby help to create a less prejudicial and heterosexist environment.

Self-Categorization Theory

Self-categorization theory (Turner, 1982, 1985, 1987) argues that one's self-concept is primarily composed of one's social identities (e.g., male, American, college student) and one's personal identity, which differentiates oneself from other ingroup members. The salience of any self-category depends upon the social frame of reference (Turner, 1985). That is, the social components of one's self-concept can be activated in situations or contexts that make some aspect of the self more salient (Turner, 1982). Therefore, the behavior of individuals within groups is predicated on this interaction between self-concept and situational or contextual cues. Furthermore, when one attempts to demonstrate to others one's own fit to a social group, one seeks to enhance the self by gaining approval from and inclusion within the social group (Cooper, Kelly, & Weaver, 2001). In conceiving of the self in terms of a shared group identity, individuals will depersonalize themselves (Turner, 1985). That is, individuals will begin to conceive of themselves as prototypical of the shared social identity. This process of self-categorization can be understood as the basis for communicative shifts toward the group prototype (Reid, Giles, & Harwood, 2005). The group prototype is a set of characteristics that embodies the distinctive qualities of members of that social group (Turner, 1987). Because most groups are defined by ingroup characteristics (i.e., us) and by how they are different than other

groups (i.e., them), prototypes define who we are and who we are not (Turner, 1985, 1987; Turner & Reynolds, 2001).

To better understand why heterosexual men use homophobic slang under the framework of SCT, three theoretical extensions of SCT and SIT must be considered: gender identification, gender threat, and group norms. Gender identification is the degree to which individuals associate positive feelings with their biological sex, think frequently about their biological sex, and see commonality between members of the same sex (Abrams & Hogg, 2004; Cameron & Lalonde, 2001). That is, gender identification is the degree to which an individual's self-concept is tied to his/her biological sex. If confronted with situations where individuals' biological sex is made salient, such as in the company of same-sex peers, more highly identified individuals will readily self-categorize and behave in accord with a group prototype. In such environments, Hogg and Reid (2006) note that individuals attempt to perform or demonstrate their prototypicality to other ingroup members or communicate in a way that is demonstrative of their fit to the group prototype.

Second, recent extensions of SCT into identity threats (e.g., Branscombe, Spears, Ellemers, & Doosje, 2002) suggest that when individuals perceive that a valued identity is threatened, they will attempt to mitigate that threat. One aspect of identity that can be threatened is gender (Branscombe & Schmitt, 2001). An important aspect of gender threat is the degree to which men are concerned that others will perceive them as gay, which has been identified as hetero-identity concern (Hall & La France, 2007, 2012). This concept has been conceptualized as a chronic concern that informs men's self-presentation (Floyd, 2000; Hall & La France, 2007) as well as an aspect of self that can be activated or heightened in certain environments (Bosson,

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Hall, J. A., & La France, B. H. (in press). How context matters: Predicting men's homophobic slang use. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology.*   7

Prewitt-Freilino, & Taylor, 2005). Both chronic and situational threats to gender identity are

relevant in explaining why men use homophobic slang.

Finally, the concept of group norms has long been an important component of research

examining social influence (e.g., Turner, 1982, 1991). Recent research has extended prior work

on group norms into attitude and behavioral domains (Terry & Hogg, 1996, 2001). From the

perspective of SCT, individuals will look to the behaviors of other ingroup members to inform

their own response to stimuli (Turner, 1982, 1985). Extensions of SCT have suggested that

individuals look to specific group norms to guide their own behavior (Terry & Hogg, 1996)

including group norms informing prejudicial language use (Hall & La France, 2012). In the case

of managing threats to one's gender identity, men consider the norms of how men communicate

to guide their linguistic choices. Specifically, the norm of noninterference – the norm against

questioning men's offensive language – increases homophobic slang use, but only in the

presence of male peers. Therefore, these three concepts –gender identification, gender threat, and

group norms – are central in explaining the relationship between ingroup identification and

outgroup derogation in the case of heterosexual men's use of homophobic slang.

Gender Identification and Social Context

When individuals are highly gender identified, they are motivated to present themselves

in terms of the qualities they want to display and share with others (Hogg, 2001; Hogg & Reid,

2006). The resulting behaviors will conform to the attitudes, feelings, and actions of the relevant

ingroup prototype (Turner, 1982). What is important about gender identification in the case of

explaining sexual prejudice (i.e., negative attitudes toward gay men) and homophobic slang use

is that a masculine gender identity implies a biological sex *and* a set of attitudes and behaviors

THIS IS THE PRE-PEER REVIEW VERSION OF THE BELOW ARTICLE:

that constitute one's gender identity (Kilianski, 2003; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2001). Gender

theorists have persuasively argued that compulsory heterosexuality is a central part of the

contemporary masculine identity (Yep, 2003). To perform masculinity successfully, men must

avoid behaviors that others may perceive as gay. That is, to identify oneself as a man, a man

must not behave in a way that may be called gay by other men (Herek, 2000; Kimmel, 2003).

There is some evidence that compulsory heterosexuality in self-presentation is a concern for gay

men as well as heterosexual men (Hajek, Abrams, & Murachver, 2005). In fact, "straight acting"

among gay men conflates heterosexual passing with masculinity, thereby perpetuating the

heteronormative expectations placed upon all men – gay and straight alike – to behave in accord

with masculine, heterosexual stereotypes (Eguchi, 2009).

From the perspective of SCT, when a man's gender identity is made salient in a certain

context, he is more likely to conform to a group prototype (Turner, 1982, 1985). Past research

has demonstrated that when the social group or context is defined by prototypical masculinity,

such as in a fraternity or sports team, men are particularly likely to conform to masculine

prototypes (Curry, 1991/2003; Hall & La France, 2007). It is through performing prototypical

behaviors, maintaining prototypical attitudes, and dismissing non-prototypical others that

individuals demonstrate their allegiance to their gender identity. One way to demonstrate a

masculine identity to other men is to use language to mock or deride other people, things, or

situations that are considered overly feminine or indicative of being gay (Hall & La France,

2012; Herek, 2000). In fact, there is a strong relationship between gender identification and the

use homophobic slang to "demonstrate allegiance to the collective expectations of presumably

heterosexual male peers" (Hall & La France, 2012, p. xx). A recent micro meta-analysis of 1,135

THIS IS THE PRE-PEER REVIEW VERSION OF THE BELOW ARTICLE:

self-identified heterosexual men demonstrated that members of all-male organizations (i.e.,

athletic teams, fraternities, ROTC) are more likely to use homophobic slang ($d = .41$) than men

not in such groups (Hall, 2011). Self-categorization theory would suggest the salience of all-male

group membership would activate a prototypical response from heterosexual men. In this case,

the context would inspire men to use homophobic language. Therefore, it is predicted that (H1)

men in an all-male context will use more homophobic slang than men in other contexts.

Hetero-Identity Concern

Past research has demonstrated that heterosexual men's gender identity can be threatened

in several ways: threats to group distinctiveness, threats to a valued self identity, and threats of

misclassification (Branscombe et al., 2002; Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002). All three types of

threats to men's identity are positively related to sexually prejudicial attitudes (Branscombe &

Schmitt, 2001; Falomir-Pichastor & Mugby, 2009) and negative behaviors towards gay men

(Bahns & Branscombe, 2011). Although much of the prior research on gender threat has used

concepts similar to hetero-identity concern, as created by Floyd (2000) and extended by Hall and

La France (2007), prior research has not been systematic in conceptualizing nor measuring men's

concern over appearing gay. In fact, Bosson and colleagues (2005) identify heterosexual men's

concern over appearing gay as a threat to misclassification, while Falomir-Pichastor and Mugby

(2009) identify the same concept generically as gender threat. In addition, some research

suggests that concern over appearing gay is a chronic state of the individual (Falomir-Pichastor

& Mugby, 2009; Floyd, 2000; Hall & La France, 2012; Moradi, van der Berg, & Epting, 2006)

while other research suggests that concern over appearing gay can be experimentally

manipulated by changes in context (Bosson et al., 2005). Although men have a chronic level of

concern over maintaining a heterosexual identity, particular cues in certain contexts and

situations can make those concerns more threatening than in other contexts. This

conceptualization clarifies and consolidates past research on gender threat, anti-gay sexual

prejudice, and homophobic slang use. From this point forward, the concept of concern over

appearing gay will be consistently identified as hetero-identity concern (HIC) (Hall & La France,

2007, 2012). This conceptualization of HIC is constructive because it: (a) distinguishes

impression management concerns from other related constructs, such as sexual prejudice and

homophobic slang use, and (b) allows for the measurement and manipulation of both chronic

gender threat and situational/contextual gender threat. This latter point is particularly relevant for

the current investigation in that such an allowance is consistent with gender theory and SCT.

Gender theorists have suggested that rather than stable or fixed, masculinity is in a

constant state of threat both at the societal and individual levels (Yep, 2003). Because

maintaining an appearance of heterosexuality is an organizing principle of masculinity (Kimmel,

2003; Yep, 2003), it is consistent with gender theory that the concern over appearing gay is a

chronic identity concern for men. Some gay men also desire to publicly maintain a heterosexual

identity (Eguchi, 2009; Hajek et al., 2005), which suggests that HIC is not merely a product of

identifying as a heterosexual man but is a performative component of heteronormativity and

heterosexism more broadly. Furthermore, SCT would suggest that sex and race are self-identity

categories that are both personally and contextually accessible (Hogg & Reid, 2006). Similarly,

Branscombe et al. (2002) suggest that because individuals' status in a group or acceptance in a

group can be threatened, threats to a valued social identity can be both chronic and situational.

For example, a marginal member of a social group may be chronically aware that their position

THIS IS THE PRE-PEER REVIEW VERSION OF THE BELOW ARTICLE:

Hall, J. A., & La France, B. H. (in press). How context matters: Predicting men's homophobic slang use. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology.* 11

is insecure (Jetten, Branscombe, & Spears, 2002), but the degree to which that threat is made

salient can vary from situation to situation. Similarly, a man, regardless of his sexual orientation,

may feel compelled to project a heterosexual identity to others, particularly if the context is

prototypically masculine or outwardly hostile toward behaviors that can be perceived as gay

(Hajek et al., 2005). Conceiving of gender threat as related to hetero-identity concern is

particularly useful when considering how self-presentational issues affect communication.

Conceptually, HIC is sensitive to communicative acts that result from self-presentational

concerns arising from the composition of an audience. Research has demonstrated that concern

that one's heterosexually is in question motivates heterosexual men to perform specific behaviors

and to avoid other behaviors entirely for the purpose of impression management (Bosson et al.,

2005; Hall & La France, 2007).

Chronic levels of HIC are related to heterosexual men's homophobic slang use. Men's

concern over appearing gay to others motivates men to perform behaviors that shore up a

masculine and implicitly heterosexual identity (Hajek et al., 2005; Hall & La France, 2012). As

Herek (2000) argued, if the goal is to disprove conclusively that one is a gay man, then

publically proclaiming sexual prejudice against gay men is an effective way to do so. In accord

with extensions of SCT (e.g., Branscombe et al., 2002; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2001), for men

who are highly gender identified the relationship between HIC and homophobic slang use will be

stronger than for men who are weakly gender identified. Specifically, Branscombe and

colleagues (2002) suggest that under conditions of threat, individuals with a strong identification

with a group will be more likely to derogate outgroups in comparison to individuals with a weak

group identification (see also Bahns & Branscombe, 2011). Thus, it is predicted that (H2)

chronic levels of HIC will be positively related to homophobic slang use, and (H3) this

relationship will be strongest for men who strongly identify with their gender.

Secondly, in contexts and situations where one's gender identity is threatened, the

relationship between HIC and homophobic slang use will be strengthened. Because men's HIC

can be more or less heightened in any given environment, it is anticipated that the strength of the

relationship between HIC and homophobic slang use is context dependent. According to research

investigating identity threat, different contexts can elicit different threats to identity (Bosson et

al., 2005; Branscombe et al., 2002). When men are members of all-male organizations, they are

more likely to be concerned whether other men perceive them as gay (Hall, 2011). This idea is

consistent with gender theorists' (Kilianski, 2003; Kimmel, 2003) concept of exclusive

masculinity, which suggests that men constantly police their own and each others' behavior to

restrict any indication of femininity. It is also consistent with Hall and La France's (2012)

research that suggests that heterosexual men use homophobic slang specifically to talk up their

heterosexual identity to other men. Men with male audiences are likely to experience heightened

HIC because in the presence of a male audience, being perceived as a gay man is undesirable.

Therefore, H4 predicts that gender threat is heightened in with all-male audience and the

relationship between HIC and homophobic slang use will also be strengthened with a male

audience.

Group Norms

Individuals manage their identities in different ways depending on what is normative,

acceptable, or sanctioned in various environments (Abrams & Hogg, 2004; Hogg, 2001). Norms

are followed to gain social approval and to avoid censure from others (Hogg & Reid, 2006).

THIS IS THE PRE-PEER REVIEW VERSION OF THE BELOW ARTICLE:

13

Consistent with past research demonstrating that the social norms of all-male contexts influence

homophobic slang use (Hall & La France, 2012), the norm of noninterference is expected to

further increase homophobic slang use but only in the presence of male audiences. The norm of

noninterference is based on the idea that men should not interfere or attempt to augment each

other's language, especially course or offensive language. In performing masculinity, men adopt

a position of independence and noninterference towards their male peers partly because a

masculine identity is predicated on an independent self (Rudman & Glick, 2009; Wood & Eagly,

2009). It is more consistent with an interdependent self-concept rather than independent self-

concept to be concerned with how one's behavior affects others (Wood & Eagly, 2009). The

prototypical concept of masculinity reinforces an attitude of non-engagement in general,

particularly in the case of the use of coarse or offensive language, an attribute that originally

defined masculinity in Bem's (1974) Sex Role Inventory. Hall and La France's (2012) analysis

of heterosexual men's open-ended responses to questions about their use of homophobic slang

showed that some men expressed irritation and derision in response to simply responding to

questions about their use of homophobic slang.

In the case of homophobic slang use, men who perceive a norm of noninterference are

more likely to use homophobic slang but only in the company of male peers. Self-categorization

theory suggests that norms of any given social group influence how an individual behaves in that

group (Turner, 1985). In extending this concept, Terry and Hogg (1996, 2001) assert that group-

specific norms reinforce the association between self-presentational concerns and behaviors but

only when social identities are rendered salient. Hall and La France (2012) illustrated the

predictive value of social norms in their exploration of the relationship between sexual prejudice

THIS IS THE PRE-PEER REVIEW VERSION OF THE BELOW ARTICLE:

Hall, J. A., & La France, B. H. (in press). How context matters: Predicting men's homophobic slang use. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology.* 14

and homophobic communication. Men who perceived that it was normative for men to use homophobic language and who did not care about other men's offensive speech were more likely to use homophobic language themselves. Hall and La France (2012) did not explore, however, the influence of group context in this relationship. Given the relevance of this norm to a male audience, the final hypothesis predicts that (H5) the norm of noninterference is likely to increase homophobic slang use but only with a male audience where this norm is contingent on audience composition.

Experiment 1

Method

Participants and Procedure. One-hundred and twenty-seven self-identified heterosexual men participated in Experiment 1. The sample consisted of respondents representing different ethnicities: 84% Caucasian, 5% Asian-American, 4% Latino, 4% African-American, and 3% other or mixed race. The average age was 20 ($SD = 2.19$, range 18 to 36). Respondents, recruited from introductory communication courses at a large public university, completed an online experimental instrument. Partial course credit was offered in exchange for participation. This experiment was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board.

Participants were told they were participating in a study about communication and group behavior occurring in different social contexts. Participants were randomly assigned to one of six conditions: 2 male audience conditions (i.e., at a fraternity, hanging out with other guys), 2 mixed-sex audience conditions (i.e., with male and female classmates doing a group project, hanging out with men and women), or 2 female audience conditions (i.e., at a sorority, hanging out with only women). Participants were asked to imagine they were in this situation voluntarily.

THIS IS THE PRE-PEER REVIEW VERSION OF THE BELOW ARTICLE:

Measures. Participants completed two measures, HIC and homophobic slang use, using 4-point scales (1 = NO, 2 = Probably Not, 3 = Probably Yes, 4 = YES). All measures were subjected to confirmatory factor analysis procedures to ensure that items loaded significantly on their respective constructs and that cross-factor loadings were insignificant.

Hetero-identity concern (HIC) was measured using a four-item measure adapted from Floyd (2000) and used in Hall and La France (2007, 2012). Items measuring HIC began with the stem, "In this situation . . ." (e.g., I would be very upset if someone else thought I was gay; I would be careful not to do things that might make others think I am homosexual)($M = 1.79$, $SD = .85$, $\alpha = .73$). **Homophobic slang use** was measured by asking participants to indicate the degree to which they would use the terms gay, queer, fag, or faggot in order to describe something that was negative in the context (Hall & La France, 2012). Homophobic slang use was measured using four items with the stem, "In this situation . . ." (e.g., I would use the word gay to describe something that is stupid; It would be typical for me to use the word gay to describe something that is stupid)($M = 1.75$, $SD = .83$, $\alpha = .71$).

Results and Discussion

Data analysis revealed that for each type of audience (male, female, mixed-sex), the specific context (e.g., at the fraternity, hanging out with guys) did not impact HIC nor homophobic slang use. Thus, for each type of audience, mean levels of HIC across the different activities were combined as were mean levels of homophobic slang use.

The first hypothesis (H1) predicted that men with a male audience would be more likely to use homophobic slang than men with other audiences. To examine the effect of audience sex composition on homophobic slang use, a one-way ANOVA was conducted. Results revealed that

audience sex composition significantly predicted homophobic slang use, $F(2,124) = 15.43$,

partial η^2 = .199. Post hoc analyses demonstrated that men with male audiences ($M = 2.31$, $SD =$

.98) were significantly more likely to use homophobic slang than men with mixed-sex ($M = 1.42$,

$SD = .57$, $p < .001$) and female audiences ($M = 1.63$, $SD = .70$, $p < .001$). These results are

consistent with H1. The difference between homophobic slang use for men with female

audiences and men with mixed-sex audiences was not significant (see Figure 1).

The second hypothesis (H2) specified that HIC and men's use of homophobic slang

would be positively related. These data were consistent with that prediction, $r(126) = .41$, $p <$

.001 (see Table 1 for correlations between constructs). The fourth hypothesis (H4) predicted that

because gender threat is heightened in all-male groups, the relationship between HIC and

homophobic slang use would also be strengthened in this context. This prediction suggests that

men with a male audience would be more likely than men with a female or mixed sex audience

to experience HIC. To examine the effect of sex-ratio of the audience on HIC, a second one-way

ANOVA was performed. Audience sex composition influenced HIC, $F(2, 124) = 6.68$, $p < .01$,

partial η^2 = .097. Post hoc analyses demonstrated that men with male audiences ($M = 2.08$, $SD =$

.95, $p < .001$) and female audiences ($M = 1.91$, $SD = .82$, $p < .01$) were significantly more likely

than men with mixed-sex audiences ($M = 1.46$, $SD = .68$) to experience HIC. The difference

between male and female audiences was not significant. H4 also suggested that the relationship

between HIC and homophobic slang would vary by audience. Results bear out this prediction.

For participants with a male audience there was a positive relationship between HIC and

homophobic slang use, $r(45) = .40$, $p < .001$, and for men with a mixed-sex audience, $r(46) =$

.73, $p < .001$. For men with a female audience, this relationship was not significant, $r(36) = .08$, $p = ns$ (see Figure 1).

The findings of Study 1 offer some support for the hypothesized relationships between social context (i.e., sex-ratio of the audience), HIC, and homophobic slang use. Consistent with the prediction that men in the company of other men are more likely to behave in prototypically masculine ways, Study 1 demonstrated that men with a male audience were more likely to use homophobic slang compared to men with female or mixed-sex audiences (H1). In support of H2, men's chronic concern over appearing gay (i.e., HIC) and homophobic communication were positively related. This latter finding provides further evidence that concern over maintaining a heterosexual identity are related to derogating outgroups through prejudicial language.

The fourth hypothesis predicted that HIC would be heightened for men with a male audience. The results from Study 1 demonstrated, however, that HIC was more pronounced for both men with male and female audiences compared with men with a mixed-sex audience. HIC did not significantly differ for men with male or female audiences, which offers only partial support for H4. This suggests that both male and female audiences can activate HIC. Although it was anticipated that all-male contexts would threaten men's gender identity, it appears that the presence of a female audience also generates a similar amount of gender threat. If a man finds himself placed in a group composed of members dissimilar to his biological sex (i.e., with an all-female group), this assignment may be threatening because he does not share the group's gender identity. Bosson et al. (2005) demonstrated that a man who participates in female activities, like braiding hair, experiences greater concern that others may misclassify him as gay. This suggests

THIS IS THE PRE-PEER REVIEW VERSION OF THE BELOW ARTICLE:

a man in a situation that might result in questions about his heterosexual identity is more likely to experience a threat to his gender identity (Bosson et al., 2005).

Correlational analyses demonstrate, however, that threats to gender identity are managed differently in different contexts. For men in the company of male and mix-sex audiences, greater HIC corresponds with greater use of homophobic slang, but this relationship is not present with a female audience. In the company of females, Figure 1 shows that greater HIC does not lead to increases in homophobic slang.

Taken together, the results from Study 1 offer support for the idea that HIC is related to chronic and situational gender threat and that HIC is managed differently amidst different audiences. That HIC was heightened for men with male or female audiences requires further exploration. Experiment 2 sought to document further these empirical findings and include measures of gender identification and the norm of noninterference.

Experiment 2

Method

Participants and Procedures. Two-hundred and ninety-five self-identified heterosexual male participants completed Study 2. The sample was 80% Caucasian, 6% Latino, 4% Asian-American, 4% African-American, 3% Native American, and 3% other or mixed race. The average age was 20 ($SD = 3.36$, range 18 to 54). Respondents, recruited from introductory communication courses at a large public university, completed an online experimental instrument. Partial course credit was offered in exchange for a completed experiment, which was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board.

Participants were told they were to imagine the following scenario: "It is the beginning of summer and you have decided to take a class in small group communication at [a local] Community College. You don't expect that you'll know anybody in your class. When you arrive at class on the first day, the small group communication class is given the first assignment. The whole class has been split into groups, but you don't know which group you are assigned to. Your assignment is to go out with other people in your group and go bowling. You have been given a time to meet and a bowling alley location for that night. Your assignment is to get to know the people in the group and pay attention to the way people get along as a group. When you arrive at the bowling alley at the assigned time, you find a sign that tells you that class members will be meeting at the first lane. There are several people already there, but you have not met them before." The next line of the scenario was the experimental induction. Participants were told they were either in a group of all men ($n = 126$), a group with all women (except the participant) ($n = 86$), or in a mixed-sex group with an equal number of men and women ($n = 83$).

Measures. All items were measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale where 1 indicated strong disagreement and 5 indicated strong agreement. All measures were subjected to confirmatory factor analysis.

Prior to the experimental manipulation, participants completed Cameron's (2001) 12-item **gender identity** measure, (e.g., I have a lot in common with other men; I feel strong ties to other men), which was reliable ($M = 2.68$, $SD = .52$, $\alpha = .80$). Following completion of this measure, participants read the scenario described above. In addition to completing filler items, participants responded to the three study measures: HIC, the norm of noninterference, and homophobic slang use. **Hetero-identity concern** was measured using the same four items as Study 1. The measure

was reliable ($M = 3.25$, $SD = .86$, $\alpha = .81$). The **norm of noninterference** was measured using

seven items created for this study (e.g., People in this group would not approve if I told another

person in the group to stop using the word fag.). Higher scores on this measure indicated a

greater perception that there was less approval by others to object to others' homophobic slang

use ($M = 3.02$, $SD = .51$, $\alpha = .73$). Finally, **homophobic slang use** was measured using Hall and

La France's (2012) 9-item scale ($M = 3.09$, $SD = .69$, $\alpha = .81$).

Results and Discussion

H1 predicted that men in the male audience condition would be likely to use the most

homophobic slang. The second hypothesis (H2) suggested that HIC would be positively related

to men's use of homophobic slang, and the third hypothesis (H3) predicted that this relationship

would be stronger for men who were more gender identified. The fourth hypothesis (H4)

predicted that greater gender threat for men with a male audience would strengthen the

relationship between HIC and homophobic slang use. Finally, the last hypothesis (H5) predicted

that the norm of noninterference would influence homophobic slang use but only with an all-

male group. H1 and H4 require mean difference tests akin to the ANOVA analyses conducted in

Study 1. H2 and H3 require a test of the relationship between HIC and homophobic slang use,

and an interaction effect between two continuous variables (i.e., HIC and gender identification)

on homophobic slang use. H4 and H5 require another test of the interaction between

experimental condition (i.e., sex-ratio of the audience) and a continuous measure (i.e., HIC).

To test all of these hypotheses simultaneously, a multiple group comparison structural

equation model was constructed in MPLUS 5.0 (Muthen & Muthen, 2007). Multiple group

comparison models can estimate all three tests simultaneously: difference between group means

for independent and dependent variables, the presence (or absence), and strength of relationships between variables. This modeling technique offers a parsimonious alternative to conducting several ANOVA and regression analyses or dichotomizing continuous predictor variables. All three experimental conditions were treated as groups, and gender identification, HIC, the norm of noninterference, and interaction between HIC and gender identification were used as independent variables to predict the prevalence of homophobic slang use.

The multiple group SEM analysis demonstrated mean differences between experimental conditions for HIC. The first hypothesis (H1) predicted that men with a male audience would use the most homophobic slang, and the fourth hypothesis (H4) predicted that men with a male audience would report more HIC. The group difference test in SEM for homophobic slang use indicated that participants with a male audience, $M = 3.14$, $SD = .66$, were equally likely as participants with a female audience, $M = 3.08$, $SD = .75$, $t = 1.65$, $p = ns$, and equally likely as participants with a mixed-sex audience, $M = 2.95$, $SD = .67$, $t = .48$, $p = ns$, to use homophobic slang. Participants with a female audience were equally as likely as participants with a mixed-sex audience to use homophobic slang, $t = .63$, $p = ns$. Taken together, these results show no support for H1. The group difference test for HIC indicated that participants with a male audience, $M = 3.35$, $SD = .80$, were significantly more likely than participants with a mixed-sex audience, $M = 3.07$, $SD = .91$, $t = 1.99$, $p < .05$, to experience HIC. Participants with a female audience, $M = 3.25$, $SD = .86$, did not differ on HIC from those participants with a male audience, $t = .57$, $p = ns$, or mixed-sex audience, $t = 1.07$, $p = ns$. The findings for HIC offer little support for H4, but they confirm the results obtained in Study 1 wherein men with a male audience experienced greater concern over being perceived as gay than did men with a mixed-sex audience.

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THIS IS THE PRE-PEER REVIEW VERSION OF THE BELOW ARTICLE:

Hall, J. A., & La France, B. H. (in press). How context matters: Predicting men's homophobic slang use. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology.*   22

To test the relationships between variables, the multiple group SEM analysis tested the significance and the strength of each relationship for each group separately. For participants assigned to a male audience, HIC, β = .38, *SE* = .10, *t* = 3.81, *p* < .001, and the norm of noninterference, β = .27, *SE* = .17, *t* = 2.23, *p* < .01, positively predicted homophobic slang use, R^2 = .15. This result provides support for H2 and H5. Neither gender identity, β = .17, *SE* = .21, *t* = .80, *p* = *ns*, nor the interaction effect between gender identity and HIC were significant. These results offer no support for H3, which predicted an interaction between gender identity and HIC on homophobic slang use.

For men with a mixed-sex audience, HIC positively predicted homophobic slang use, β = .74, *SE* = .12, *t* = 6.01, *p* < .001, R^2 = .46, supporting H2. Neither gender identity, β = -.36, *SE* = .25, *t* = -1.41, *p* = *ns*, nor the interaction between gender identity and HIC were significant. The lack of interaction offers no support for H3. The norm of non-interference also failed to explain additional variance in homophobic slang use, β = -.57, *SE* = .62, *t* = -.91, *p* = *ns*. The non-significant finding, however, supports H5 that posited that the norm of noninterference would only be present for men with a male audience.

For men with a female audience, gender identity, β = .65, *SE* = .33, *t* = 1.98, *p* < .05, positively predicted homophobic slang use, R^2 = .08, providing some evidence for H3. The norm of noninterference, β = -.57, *SE* = .57, *t* = .98, *p* = *ns*, HIC, β = .24, *SE* = .15, *t* = 1.58, *p* = *ns*, and the interaction between gender identity and HIC, β = -.46, *SE* = .56, *t* = .58, *p* = *ns*, were non-significant.

The results of Study 2 demonstrate partial support for H2 and H4, full support for H5, and no support for H1 or H3. Hypothesis 1 predicted that homophobic slang use would be

highest for men with a male audience. This hypothesis was not supported. Although the data

trended toward more homophobic slang use in an all-male context, the differences between

groups were not significant. H2 predicted that HIC would be positively related to homophobic

slang use, and H3 predicted that this relationship would be stronger for highly gender-identified

men. H2 was supported but only for participants with male and mixed-sex audiences. The

increased homophobic slang use by highly identified men was not found for men with male or

mixed-sex audiences but was found for participants with a female audience. In accord with past

research (e.g., Bahns & Branscombe, 2011; Branscombe et al., 2002), these results show that

under conditions of gender threat, individuals with a strong identification with their gender will

be more likely derogate outgroups in comparison to individuals with a weak gender

identification. It appears, however, that this finding occurs when gender threat is induced by

group assignment and not when it is measured chronically. H4 predicted that HIC would be

highest for men with a male audience. Results only offer partial support H4 and were consistent

with Study 1 in that men with a male audience were more likely than men with a mixed-sex

audience to have higher levels of HIC. Men with a female audience, however, did not differ in

the mean level of HIC in comparison to the other two groups. H5 suggested that the norm of

noninterference would predict homophobic slang use but only with a male audience, and this

hypothesis was fully supported.

General Discussion

This investigation describes two experiments that tested the relationship between group

context and homophobic slang use. Hypotheses predicted that heterosexual men would use more

homophobic slang (H1) in the presence of other men compared to mixed-sex and all-female

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audiences. Hypotheses also stated that concern over appearing gay (i.e., hetero-identity concern) would predict homophobic slang use (H2), and this relationship would be stronger for highly gender identified men (H3). Furthermore, it was predicted that HIC would be higher for men with a male audience, which would increase the relationship between HIC and homophobic slang use (H4). Finally, it was anticipated that in the company of other men, the norm of noninterference would be associated with more homophobic slang use (H5). The results of the present investigation suggest that that sex-ratio of the audience contributes to the mean levels of HIC as well as to the relationships among HIC, gender identification, communication norms, and homophobic slang use.

Mean Levels of Homophobic Slang

To test H1, two experiments explored the mean levels of homophobic slang use resulting from assignment to groups that differed only in the sex-ratio of the audience. Consistent with H1, Study 1 revealed that homophobic slang use was higher with a male audience than with other audiences. Although Study 2 demonstrated a trend toward more homophobic slang use in all-male environments, the differences were not significant. This latter finding presents inconsistent support for H1. Perhaps the experimental manipulation in Study 2 was insufficient to produce significant mean group differences. One important difference between experiments was that in Study 2 participants were instructed to imagine interacting with strangers from a different college, but in Study 1 they were instructed to believe they were communicating in a social environment by choice. The differing results from Study 1 and Study 2 suggest that familiarity with an audience affects communication. Perhaps when men are around peers with whom they are comfortable (e.g., hanging out with male friends), they might be more likely to use

THIS IS THE PRE-PEER REVIEW VERSION OF THE BELOW ARTICLE:

Hall, J. A., & La France, B. H. (in press). How context matters: Predicting men's homophobic slang use. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology.*   25

homophobic slang than with strangers. In fact, SCT would suggest that when group salience is

high and the group norms are certain, individuals are more likely to behave in a prototypical way

(Abrams & Hogg, 2004). In support of this explanation, Hall and La France (2012) demonstrated

that when men describe the norms of familiar social environments as using more homophobic

slang, they are more likely to express their own underlying sexual prejudice. In the company of

strangers, the communication norms may be unknown. As a consequence, participants in the

present study responded similarly regardless of group assignment when asked to indicate how

much homophobic communication they would use in an unfamiliar environment. Put simply,

men's behavior, particularly potentially offensive behavior, may be more tempered when around

strangers at a bowling alley rather than at a fraternity or voluntarily hanging out with male

friends.

HIC and Homophobic Slang in All-Male Groups

Greater HIC for members of all-male groups (Hall, 2011), and the strong relationship

between HIC and homophobic slang use in all-male groups (Hall & La France, 2007) have been

documented. One of the challenges of the present investigation was to analyze both the overall

levels of HIC and slang use as well as the relationship between HIC and slang use within the

same study varying the sex-ratio of the audience by employing the lens of SCT. The results of

the present investigation are in accord with SCT in that high salience increases prototypical

responses from ingroup members (Turner, 1985). These findings are also consistent with the idea

proposed by gender theorists (e.g., Kilianski, 2003; Kimmel, 2003) that men police their own

and each other's behavior to restrict behaviors that are considered feminine or gay.

THIS IS THE PRE-PEER REVIEW VERSION OF THE BELOW ARTICLE:

It was predicted that men who were experimentally assigned to a male audience would

experience higher levels of HIC (H4). Furthermore, it was predicted that the relationship

between HIC and homophobic slang would be significant (H2) and further strengthened in that

condition (H4). Consistent with expectations, both studies confirmed that men in the company of

other men were more likely than men in mixed-sex groups to experience heightened HIC, and

that the relationship between HIC and homophobic slang use was significant for men with male

audiences. In accord with SCT, it was anticipated that gender salience would be highest for men

in the company of male peers. As Hall and La France (2012) have argued—and SCT would

predict—due to high gender salience, men experience pressure in all-male groups to demonstrate

allegiance to the group prototype. In the company of men, men begin to conceive of themselves

in relation to what is shared with other men; they depersonalize the self. The desire to share a

heterosexual—and by extension more masculine—identity motivates men to behave in a manner

conforming to this prototype. In this situation, they behave in ways that demonstrate their

heterosexuality through derogating gay men via homophobic slang use (Herek, 2000). Therefore,

men increase their use of homophobic slang around other men to manage their HIC. This process

of depersonalization is related to policing gendered behavior. Gender theorists (e.g., Kilianski,

2003)

have noted that men attempt to restrict any indication of femininity, particularly in the company

of other men. Conformation to the group prototype requires the performance of a masculine

gender identity, thereby leading to gender policing. By comparison, both studies found no

relationship between HIC and homophobic slang use for men with female audiences as well as a

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lack of difference between mean levels of HIC for men among male and female audiences. These results require further explanation.

HIC and Homophobic Slang Use with Female and Mixed-Sex Audiences

In the company of women, men may feel that their heterosexuality is in question because of the conflation of feminine behaviors with homosexuality (e.g., Bosson et al., 2005; Kilianski, 2003). One explanation for the unpredicted results of Study 1 was that HIC is heightened for men in the presence of a female audience because when a man finds himself placed in a group composed of members dissimilar to his biological sex, he may experience gender threat (Bosson et al., 2005). This explanation suggests that HIC can be either threatened by self-group mismatch or made salient by self-group match. For men with a female audience, however, the lack of relationship between HIC and homophobic slang use in Study 1 and confirmed in Study 2 suggests that this identity threat cannot be relieved by outgroup derogation (i.e., homophobic slang use). Potentially, there are other normative processes occurring in the company of a female audience. Women have less sexual prejudice against gays and lesbians than do heterosexual men (Loftus, 2001). Because a marginal group member (i.e., the lone man in a group of women) is at risk of isolation and exclusion (Hogg & Reid, 2006), it is consistent with SCT that a man might attempt to attenuate the risk of exclusion by conforming to the communication norms of women by not using homophobic slang. Whatever the reason, the results offer strong evidence that greater HIC is not associated with using homophobic slang for males with female audiences.

Correlational analyses in Study 1 and the multiple group SEM analysis in Study 2 showed that for men with a mixed-sex audience, HIC was the strongest predictor of homophobic slang use compared to men with female or male audiences. In Study 2, the greatest variance in

homophobic slang was explained ($R^2 = .46$) in the mixed-sex audience condition. This result is particularly noteworthy because the mixed-sex audience also showed the lowest mean levels of men's HIC and homophobic slang use in both studies. Consistent with SIT, individuals revert to individual determinants of behavior when they lack social cues to inform their own self-presentation (Turner, 1987). Turner and Reynolds (2001) note that one of the premises of SIT is the interpersonal-intergroup continuum or the degree to which individuals act in terms of the self versus act in terms of the group. Perhaps men in a mixed-sex group lack a salient social group identity to guide their communicative behavior, and therefore they reverted to internalized, chronic self-presentational concerns, such as HIC, to inform their behavior. It is also possible men are aware of social norms, but those norms were contradictory. When faced with two contradictory communication norms—to engage in homophobic slang for the benefit of men and not to engage in such communication so as to not offend women—it is reasonable to conclude that men may have chosen to behave in accord with an internalized sense of gender threat rather than any norm.

Another interpretation of this finding that is consistent with SCT is that men in mixed company seek to accentuate their distinctiveness from other men because of intragroup competition. Personal self-categorization occurs when individuals conceive of the self based on differences between the self and other ingroup members in attempts to define the self as a unique (Turner, 1985). In mate-selection situations, men will often attempt to differentiate themselves from other men to emphasize their unique value (Schmitt & Buss, 1996). Although it may not be an effective or appealing strategy for a man to emphasize his heterosexuality through prejudicial language, it probably successfully signals to women in the group that he is available for

THIS IS THE PRE-PEER REVIEW VERSION OF THE BELOW ARTICLE:

Hall, J. A., & La France, B. H. (in press). How context matters: Predicting men's homophobic slang use. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology.*   29

courtship. Therefore, this strong relationship between HIC and homophobic slang use may be found in mixed-sex environments because of men's desire to appear sexually available to women. Future research should determine the processes underlying men's homophobic communication in mixed-sex audiences and assess whether it is appealing to women.

Gender Identification

In accord with extensions of SCT (e.g., Schmitt & Branscombe, 2001), it was anticipated that the relationship between gender threat and homophobic slang use would be stronger for highly identified men. Study 2 found weak support for such a relationship in that neither gender identification (i.e., the degree to which a man identifies with being male) nor the interaction between gender identification and HIC predicted homophobic slang use for men with male or mixed-sex audiences. There was evidence, however, that gender identification played a role in increasing outgroup derogation under one condition of gender threat, a finding which is in line with past research (e.g., Bahns & Branscombe, 2011). The effect of gender identification appeared when gender threat was induced by group assignment but not when it was measured chronically. When men were experimentally assigned to the female audience condition, gender identification positively predicted homophobic slang use. As mean difference tests revealed in Study 1, men with a female audience reported higher levels of HIC than did men with a mixed-sex audience. This finding demonstrates that men who are more gender identified are more likely to use homophobic slang to alleviate the gender threats brought about by being in the company of women. Given that HIC did not interact with gender identification to produce the expected effects on homophobic slang use for men with male and mixed-sex audiences, there could be something unique about the contextual threat of a female audience. Perhaps highly identified

THIS IS THE PRE-PEER REVIEW VERSION OF THE BELOW ARTICLE:

men find the experience of being with a female audience distinctly threatening. As a

consequence, highly identified men prefer to publically confirm their heterosexuality (Herek,

2000) rather than risk of being misclassified as gay (Bosson et al., 2005)—despite the potentially

negative consequences of expressing prejudicial language amidst a more tolerant audience.

Nonetheless, these findings beg the question why gender identification did not interact

with chronic HIC to produce more prototypical behavior (i.e., homophobic slang use) from

heterosexual men in male and mixed-sex contexts. Part of the lack of effect was due to the non-

significant relationship between gender identification and homophobic slang use. According to

the correlation matrix associated with Study 2 (Table 1), gender identification was significantly

associated with homophobic slang use. Past research (Falomir-Pichastor & Mugny, 2009; Hall &

La France, 2012) also suggests that at the univariate level gender identification is significantly

associated with homophobic slang use—even for men who are only weakly gender identified.

Yet, once accounting for the effects of HIC, the expected interaction between HIC and gender

identification was not significant in the multiple group SEM. This result suggests that the effects

of HIC account for the univariate relationship between gender identification and homophobic

slang use. That is, whatever aspect of gender identification that promotes derogation of outgroup

males is accounted for by taking into account men's concern over appearing gay.

Communication Norms

Study 2 explored the communication norm of noninterference, which asserts that men

should not censor nor condemn other men's homophobic slang use. The results of this study

offer clear support for H5 that stated the norm would predict men's homophobic slang use for

participants with a male audience. One of the motivating factors leading men to increase their

THIS IS THE PRE-PEER REVIEW VERSION OF THE BELOW ARTICLE:

homophobic slang use in all-male environments is that they perceive there is more normative

pressure in such environments not to question others' homophobic slang use. This finding

supports past research that indicates the influence of any given norm depends upon the context

(Terry & Hogg, 2001). This also speaks to the difficulty of changing men's homophobic attitudes

and language (Herek, 2007). When men's gender identities conform to a prototype in all-male

contexts, their use of homophobic slang is more pronounced. Furthermore, they are influenced

by a communication norm that decreases the chance that men will censor each other's

homophobic speech. Consequently, changing men's homophobic language is unlikely to occur in

the presence of other men because there is a norm against raising such objections.

The Masculine Prototype and HIC

As has been demonstrated conceptually and empirically, men's concern over appearing

gay (i.e., HIC) is not synonymous with the masculine prototype, but it is related to it. Moreover,

the findings of the present investigation support the conceptualization of HIC as a chronic and

situational self-presentational concern aligned with the masculine prototype in all-male contexts.

According to SCT, highly gender identified men in a salient environment should produce

the most prototypical behavior. This assumption implies that HIC is isomorphic with the

masculine prototype. If this assumption was accurate, then HIC would be highest for highly

identified men in all-male environments. Yet, two findings do not support this claim. First, both

studies demonstrate that HIC is equally heightened in all-female environments. This result is

consistent with distinguishing HIC from the masculine prototype. Second, HIC is most predictive

of homophobic slang use in mixed-sex contexts when men are acting in terms of the self, not in

all-male contexts when men are acting in terms of the group. These results are best understood

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by considering HIC as both a chronic and situational variable rather than identical to the

prototype.

Concern over appearing gay is linked to a masculine prototype when it is contextually

activated in all-male groups, and it is also chronically internalized by individual, which is

particularly predictive of homophobic slang use when no group prototype is activated (e.g.,

mixed-sex environments). In social contexts where a shared group identity is in accord with an

individual's own HIC, such as when a man with a chronically high HIC joins a group that is

prototypically masculine, then that chronic identity threat is socially reinforced. This situation

occurs when high HIC men join fraternities or all-male sports teams, thereby increasing both

HIC and homophobic slang use (Hall, 2011). In these environments, depersonalization of the self

and conformation toward the prototype reinforces heightened HIC and reinforces the idea that

gender threat must be managed through outgroup derogation. When HIC is chronically

internalized into the aspect of self that is separate from group identity, then HIC is most

predictive of outgroup derogation when the self is activated, such as in the mixed-sex

environment. The results of the present investigation demonstrate that men's slang use in other

social environments, particularly mixed-sex environments, is better explained by men's

internalized, chronic concern over appearing gay rather than contextual demands. By considering

HIC as both a chronic and situational variable, it provides an explanation for why men would use

homophobic slang in mixed-sex company. Their internalization of the chronic instability of

masculinity motivates men's behavior even when the social environment does not activate the

prototype, and their choice of language to manage that gender threat is potentially offensive to at

least some of their audience. Gender theorists (e.g., Kimmel, 2003) have long argued that the

THIS IS THE PRE-PEER REVIEW VERSION OF THE BELOW ARTICLE:

instability of masculinity becomes internalized because men's gender is constantly under

scrutiny. This tension, in addition to the compulsory performance of heterosexuality (Yep, 2003),

leads men (heterosexual and gay men alike) to internalize a concern that others will perceive

them as gay. This is a concern that can be further activated by the audience to whom men present

their desired image.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Although gender salience was assumed to be the reason for men's more prototypical

behavior with a male audience, gender salience was not measured. This omission is a limitation

of the present study. Without clear evidence that gender salience is being induced by group

assignment, it remains unclear whether it is the operative variable in prototype formation.

The present study used experimental methods to induce the effect of audience sex-ratio

by creating a hypothetical scenario to which participants were asked to respond. It is possible

that men would report using a certain amount of homophobic slang when presented with such a

scenario but would not behave similarly in practice. Future work might replicate Study 2 in an

actual bowling alley using a confederate to record the use of homophobic slang. More work in

natural environments is necessary to determine whether the findings of this study can be

replicated in real-world environments.

Past research has indicated that HIC is associated with sexual prejudice against gay men

(Falomir-Pichastor & Mugny, 2009) and the use of homophobic language (Hall & La France,

2007). The present studies extend past work by identifying how the sex-ratio of varying social

contexts influences this communicative process, and this exploration is the first to demonstrate

that the mere presence of other men increases concerns over appearing gay and these self-

THIS IS THE PRE-PEER REVIEW VERSION OF THE BELOW ARTICLE:

presentational concerns are managed through homophobic language use. Furthermore, the

present study consolidated past research by demonstrating that HIC, which has been identified in

past research as gender threat or misclassification threat, can be conceived as both a chronic self-

presentational concern as well as a context-specific concern.

Attention to the ways that gender influences communication, particularly prejudicial

language use, is a relatively new topic of inquiry in communication studies (Yep, 2003).

Unpacking the ways that heteronormativity influences the presentation of self among varying

audiences helps to make visible the ways that masculinity is implicitly organized and

heteronormativity perpetuated (Eguchi, 2009; Yep, 2003). The present work extends prior

research (e.g., Hall & La France, 2012) by demonstrating how heterosexual men implicitly

conform to the expectations of their presumably heterosexual peers by explicitly using

derogatory language to achieve gendered self-presentational concerns. The prevalence of this

language among men (Lalor & Rendle-Short, 2007) normalizes heterosexist behaviors and

contributes to the sense of rightness that is inherent to compulsory heterosexuality (Yep, 2003).

As such, this empirical study of heterosexual men's performance of masculinity offers

quantifiable evidence of heteronormativity.

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Table 1

Correlations between constructs

	Gender Identity	Hetero-identity Concern	Norm of Non-Interference	Homo-phobic Communication
Gender Identity		.14*	.01	.16*
Hetero-identity Concern			.14*	.44***
Norm of Non-Interference				.24**
Homophobic Communication		.41***		

Study 1 correlations appear in the lower diagonal; Study 2 correlations appear in the upper diagonal.

* Significant at *p* < .05
** Significant at *p* < .01
*** Significant at *p* < .001

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