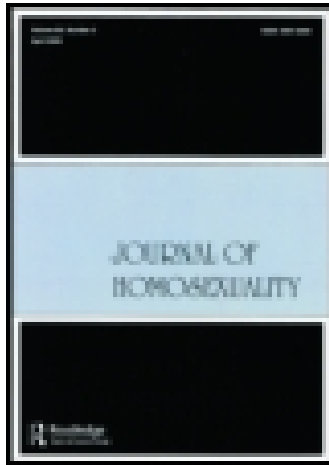


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# **Perceived Similarity With Gay Men Mediates the Effect of Antifemininity on Heterosexual Men's Antigay Prejudice**

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*This research examined the hypothesis that heterosexual men's motivation to differentiate themselves from gay men mediates the relationship between the antifemininity norm of masculinity and antigay prejudice. We assessed masculinity through three concepts: status, thoughness, and antifemininity. Participants then reported their perceived similarity with gay men and their antigay prejudice. The results showed that antifemininity was the best predictor of both perceived similarity and antigay prejudice: The more people endorsed the antifemininity norm, the more they perceived themselves as dissimilar from gay men and showed antigay prejudice. More important, perceived similarity mediated the effect of antifemininity on antigay prejudice. These findings provide direct evidence for the link between masculinity and the motivation to differentiate oneself from gay men, and they suggest that antigay prejudice accomplishes the identity function of maintaining unambiguous gender boundaries.*

*KEYWORDS* antifemininity, distinctiveness need, masculinity, perceived similarity, sexual prejudice

Despite the increasing signs of tolerance toward social minorities observed in most Western societies (Herek & McLemore, 2013), attitudes toward homosexuality and sexual minorities remain largely intolerant. For instance, legal

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recognition of marriages between two adults of the same sex has been accepted in only 11 countries, mainly in the European Union, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGTB) are still discriminated against in Europe (European Union Agency for Fundamental Right, FRA, 2013) and in all regions of the world (United Nations. Resolution/17/19, 2011). In general, heterosexual men show more negative attitudes toward homosexuality than heterosexual women, and in particular toward gay men (e.g., Herek & McLemore, 2013; Hinrichs & Rosenberg, 2002; Kite & Whitley, 1996). This finding suggests the need to investigate attitudes toward sexual minorities by taking into account the gender and the sexual orientation of both the respondent and the target of prejudice (e.g., Worthen, 2013). In the present article we define sexual prejudice as a negative attitude toward an individual based on her or his sexual orientation (Herek & McLemore, 2013), and we focus specifically on antigay prejudice as heterosexual men's negative attitudes toward gay men.

Some scholars agree that sexual prejudice results from cultural constructions of femininity and masculinity that create different expectations for women and men (e.g., Herek & McLemore, 2013; Kimmer, 1997). Antigay prejudice would help men to affirm their masculinity by distancing themselves from those men who violate gender norms (i.e., gay men; e.g., Blashill & Powlishta, 2009a; Kite & Withley, 1996; Lehavot & Lambert, 2007). In support of this view, research has shown that antigay prejudice is consistently and positively related to both beliefs about traditional gender roles (e.g., Barron, Struckman-Johnson, Quevillon, & Banka, 2008; Goodman & Moradi, 2008; Parrott & Gallagher, 2008; Whitley, 2001) and the traditional ideology and norms that define masculinity and delineate masculine behavior (e.g., Keiller, 2010; Kilianski, 2003; Theodore & Basow, 2000). Despite the robustness of the relationship between gender-related beliefs and antigay prejudice, the very nature of this relationship has not yet received the attention it deserves. In the present research we focused on the defensive function that antigay prejudice may serve for some heterosexual men, and we tested the hypothesis that the link between masculinity and antigay prejudice is mediated by heterosexual men's motivation to differentiate themselves from gay men.

## MASCULINITY AND ANTIGAY PREJUDICE

Based on the empirical examination by Branon (1976), Thompson and Pleck (1986) identified three dimensions of the traditional masculinity ideology: status, toughness, and antifemininity. The toughness norm refers to the expectations of men to be strong, competent, and capable of solving their emotional problems in an appropriate way; the status norm is defined in terms of professional and financial success and is generally associated with a high income; and the antifemininity norm is defined as the belief that men should avoid the behaviors and tasks that are typically attributed to

women. In spite of criticisms to this trait-based approach (Addis, Mansfield, & Syzdeck, 2010), research on masculinity has been enormously productive (see also Good & Sherrod, 2001).

Whereas overall adherence to traditional male gender norms appears to be associated with sexual prejudice (e.g., Blashill & Powlisha, 2009b; Whitley, Jr., 2001), this relationship varies across the masculinity dimensions. For instance, Wilkinson (2004) found that men's antigay attitudes were related to fear of appearing feminine (antifemininity) but not to the other two components (i.e., status and toughness). Parrot, Peterson, Vincent, and Bakeman (2008) and Parrot, Peterson, and Bakeman (2011) showed that antifemininity and status were positively associated to sexual prejudice. In the same vein, negative evaluation of gay men seems to be a result of presumed feminine characteristics (Goodman & Moradi, 2008; Lehavot & Lambert, 2007). Experimental evidence for the relevance of antifemininity in antigay prejudice also comes from studies using a false feedback paradigm. Heterosexual men who completed a personality test and who were told that they had scored high in femininity (as opposed to masculinity) showed greater negative affect toward effeminate gay men but not toward masculine gay men (Glick, Gangl, Gibb, Klumpner, & Weinberg, 2007) and behaved more aggressively toward a gay work partner compared to an other sex partner (Talley & Bettencourt, 2008).

These results are consistent with the assumption that sexual prejudice may appear from insecurities about personal adequacy in meeting gender-role demands (Herek & McLemore, 2013) and with the perception of same-sex sexuality as a form of inverted gender differences (e.g., McCreary, 1994; Rudman & Glick, 2008). More specifically, they are consistent with the idea that the renunciation of the feminine ("no sissy stuff") is one of the central elements of the traditional masculinity ideology (e.g., Kimmel, 1997; Plummer, 2005). To the extent that gay men are overall perceived as feminine (LeVay, 1996; Rudman & Glick, 2008), "effeminate" gay men would be perceived as threatening the very central feature of masculine gender identity (Glick et al., 2007; see also Hegarty, Pratto, & Lemieux, 2004; Levahot & Lambert, 2007). As a consequence, antigay prejudice would accomplish the symbolic function of affirming masculinity by distancing oneself from those (e.g., gay men) who violate the most important gender norm (i.e., antifemininity). Therefore, masculinity would not merely mean not being feminine, but also being heterosexual via the rejection of gay men (see also Kimmel, 1997).

According to the above literature review, heterosexual men's antigay prejudice would serve the overall function of affirming masculinity, and in particular the cherished gender differentiation that is implicitly violated by gay men. Therefore, the first hypothesis of the present research is that antifemininity is the best predictor of antigay prejudice, compared with the other two components of masculinity (status and toughness). In addition, this research also aimed to investigate in greater depth the relationship between

antifemininity and antigay prejudice by taking into account the mediational role of perceived similarity between heterosexual men and gay men.

### MASCULINITY AND PERCEIVED SIMILARITY WITH GAY MEN

The predicted relationship between antifemininity and antigay prejudice assumes that masculinity ideology construes and prescribes social distance from other men who fail to live up to the masculine ideal (see Kilianski, 2003; Phoenix, Frosh, & Pattman, 2003). Accordingly, antigay prejudice would contribute specifically to assert the needed differentiation from those men who violate masculinity norms, and in particular that of antifemininity.

Several lines of research provide indirect evidence regarding men's motivation to differentiate themselves from gay men. Men seem to be specifically motivated to avoid the appearance of violating gender norms (Basow & Johnson, 2000; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004), and they feel threatened regarding the potential risk of being mistaken as homosexuals (Bosson, Prewitt-Freilino, & Taylor, 2005). Indeed, men stressed their heterosexual identity after being primed (either subliminally or supraliminally) by homophobic labels (Carnaghi, Maass & Fasoli, 2011). Research also showed that antigay prejudice increases as perceived similarity between oneself and gay men decreases (e.g., Herek, 1988; Krulewitz & Nash, 1980; Talley & Bettencourt, 2008). Male heterosexuals with high sexual prejudice tend to perceive themselves as dissimilar in attitudes to homosexual men, even when these homosexuals are depicted as attitudinally similar (Pilkington & Lydon, 1997). Men's sexual prejudice increases as both motivation to avoid being labeled as gay and perceived dissimilarity with gay men increase (Falomir-Pichastor & Mugny, 2009). Finally, endorsement of traditional gender roles is also associated with sexual prejudice specifically among those heterosexual men who perceive strong differences between themselves and gay men (Falomir-Pichastor, Martínez, & Paterna, 2010).

Therefore, these findings suggest that perceived similarity between oneself and gay men plays a key role in heterosexual men's antigay prejudice. Furthermore, and to the extent that perceived dissimilarity reflects motivated social distance (Liviatan, Trope, & Liberman, 2008; Pyszczynski et al., 1995), these findings also suggest that antigay prejudice would serve the defensive identity function of affirming conformity to masculinity norms via differentiating from those who violate them (Herek & McLemore, 2013). However, and to our best knowledge, no previous research has directly examined the possibility that perceived dissimilarity between oneself and gay men mediates the relationship between heterosexual men's endorsement of masculinity norms (and in particular that of antifemininity) and antigay prejudice. To fill in this gap, the main goal of the present research was to test such a mediation hypothesis. Accordingly, our second hypothesis states that heterosexual

men's perceived dissimilarity between themselves and gay men constitutes a reliable mediator of the link between gender differentiation (i.e., the endorsement of the antifemininity norm) and antigay prejudice.

## METHOD

### Participants

One hundred and thirteen male undergraduate students from a large Spanish university (Murcia) participated initially in the study. However, only the 108 classified as heterosexual men were retained for the analyses on the basis of three items: (1) they defined themselves as heterosexual (rather than homosexual or bisexual), (2) they indicated that they had not previously had sexual relations with a person of the same sex, and (3) they reported that they were not attracted to persons of the same sex. Five additional participants were also dropped from analyses because of missing data. The final sample consisted of 103 heterosexual men. Their ages ranged from 17 to 54 ( $M = 24.35$ ,  $SD = 6.94$ ). All of them were Caucasian and of Spanish nationality.

### Procedure

Participants from two colleges completed the questionnaire in the classroom voluntarily without any compensation. Participation lasted about 30 minutes and consisted of filling out a Spanish version of a paper-and-pencil questionnaire.

## MATERIALS

### Masculinity

We assessed masculinity through a translated version of the 26-item Male Role Norms Scale (MRNS; Thompson & Pleck, 1986). We chose this scale because none of the three subscales (status, toughness, or antifemininity) is explicitly related to sexual orientation or sexual prejudice, whereas more recent masculinity scales include dimensions evaluating homosexuals (e.g., Levant, Rankin, Williams, Hasan, & Smalley, 2010; Mahalik et al., 2003). The *status* subscale (11-item) relates to professional achievement (e.g., "Success in his work has to be a man's central goal in this life"). The *toughness* subscale (6-item) regards male stereotypes and norms of men's physical strength and independence (e.g., "When a man is feeling a little pain he should try not to let it show very much"). Finally, the *antifemininity* subscale (7-item) refers to the norm requiring men not to show feminine behaviors or beliefs expected of women (e.g., "I might find it a bit silly or

embarrassing if a male friend of mine cried over a sad love scene in a movie”). Scales ranged from 1 (*absolutely in disagreement*) to 7 (*absolutely in agreement*). The MRNS has already been validated in Spain (Martínez, Paterna, López, & Velandrino, 2010). Furthermore, a confirmatory factor analysis showed that all items but one in the antifemininity subscale showed the strongest loading on the expected factor. Because reliability analyses also suggested dropping this item from the antifemininity subscale, the score for this subscale was computed by averaging the responses to only six items. Higher scores mean a higher traditional masculinity ideology.

### Perceived Similarity

Participants' perception of similarity between themselves and gay men was assessed as in the research by Falomir-Pichastor and colleagues (Falomir-Pichastor & Mugny, 2009; Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2010). Participants had to indicate the extent to which they perceived themselves as similar to gay men in each of the following domains: emotionality, needs, wishes, intimate relationships, friendship, work relationships, and overall similarity (1 = *absolutely in disagreement* to 7 = *absolutely in agreement*). A principal components analysis extracted one single factor. Higher scores mean higher perceived similarity.

### Antigay Prejudice

Prejudice was assessed through the 24-item scale of attitude toward homosexuality (Falomir-Pichastor & Mugny, 2009; Falomir-Pichastor & Hegarty, 2013), after rewording all the items to target gay men. A Spanish version of this scale has already been used previously (Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2010). Sample items are “Male homosexuality is in opposition to family values,” “I feel sympathy for gay men,” “Gay couples should have the right to get married,” and “I would agree to share an apartment with a gay man.” Scales ranged from 1 (*absolutely in disagreement*) to 7 (*absolutely in agreement*). A principal component analysis extracted five factors, but the content of the items loading on each factor did not make a meaningful or useful contribution to identify a specific construct. As in previous research (Falomir-Pichastor & Mugny, 2009; Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2010; Falomir-Pichastor & Hegarty, 2013), we retained a unidimensional structure for this scale, which was supported by reliability scores (Table 1). After reversing the necessary items, we computed an average score of antigay prejudice (higher values indicate more negative attitudes toward male homosexuality and gay men).



## RESULTS

Means, standard deviations, and correlations between all variables are provided in Table 1. We tested the mediation hypotheses in two ways. First, we used Baron and Kenny's (1986) causal steps approach to test our predicted mediation effect. We initially regressed perceived similarity and antigay prejudice on masculinity subscales (status, toughness, and antifemininity), and then we computed a hierarchical regression analysis with antigay prejudice as the dependent variable, with the three masculinity subscales (step 1) and perceived similarity (step 2) as independent factors. This analysis also allowed us to test our first hypothesis. Second, we used bootstrapping analyses (see Preacher & Hayes, 2008) to test the indirect effects for the predicted mediation analyses. Finally, given the correlational nature of the present data, and that mediation can be bidirectional, we used bootstrapping analyses to test the indirect effects for alternative mediation hypothesis: namely (a) that antifemininity mediates the effect of perceived similarity on antigay prejudice, and (b) that antigay prejudice mediates the effect of antifemininity on perceived similarity.

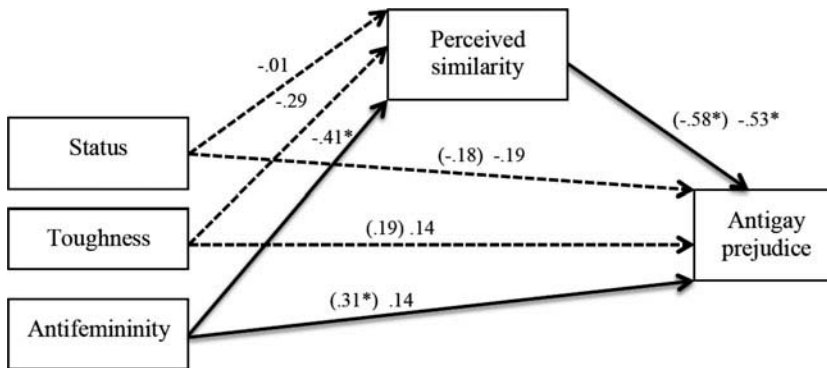
## CAUSAL STEPS APPROACH

The results of the regression analyses are graphically illustrated in Figure 1. The results of the regression analysis on perceived similarity are presented in Table 2 ( $R^2 = .19$ ),  $F(3,99) = 8.09$ ,  $p < .001$ . The effect of toughness was marginally significant, but the expected effect of antifemininity was significant. The higher the participants scored in antifemininity, the more they perceived gay men as dissimilar to them. The results of the hierarchical regression analysis on antigay prejudice are presented in Table 3. In the first step ( $R^2 = .11$ ),  $F(3,99) = 4.30$ ,  $p = .007$ , only the effect of antifemininity was significant; antigay prejudice increased as antifemininity increased. In the second step ( $R^2 = .28$ ,  $F(4,98) = 9.87$ ,  $p < .001$ ), the effect of antifemininity was no longer significant, whereas the effect of perceived similarity was. Antigay prejudice increased as perceived similarity with gay men decreased.

**TABLE 1** Descriptive statistics and correlations

	$\alpha$	$M$	$SD$	2	3	4	5
1. Status	.90	3.85	1.30	.54*	.20*	-.19	
2. Toughness	.85	2.46	1.17		.40**	-.34**	.18
3. Antifemininity	.83	2.50	1.20			-.39**	.30**
4. Perceived similarity	.86	4.51	1.35				-.50**
5. Sexual prejudice	.89	3.74	1.15				

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



**FIGURE 1** Summary of total (between parentheses) and direct effects for the predicted mediation analysis. Continuous lines indicate significant direct paths (\* $p < .05$ ).

**TABLE 2** Regression analyses for participants' perception of similarity between themselves and gay men

	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	Sig.
1. Status	-.01	-0.10	.918
2. Toughness	-.29	-1.86	.065
3. Antifemininity	-.41	-3.11	.002

**TABLE 3** Regression analyses for antigay prejudice

	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	Sig.
Step 1			
1. Status	-.18	-1.43	.154
2. Toughness	.19	1.39	.168
3. Antifemininity	.31	2.61	.010
Step 2			
1. Status	-.19	-1.64	.103
2. Toughness	.07	0.61	.538
3. Antifemininity	.14	1.31	.193
4. Perceived similarity	-.53	-4.86	.001

### INDIRECT EFFECT

The previous regression analyses suggest that perceived similarity mediates the effect of antifemininity on antigay prejudice, while toughness and status do not constitute reliable mediators. We used the Preacher and Hayes (2008) bootstrapping technique with 1,000 iterations to determine whether the indirect effect of antifemininity on antigay prejudice via perceived similarity was significant. Antigay prejudice was the dependent variable, antifemininity was the independent variable, and perceived

similarity was the mediator. We controlled for status and toughness in this analysis. The indirect effect ( $B = .16$ ) was estimated to be between .058 and .306 (bias corrected and accelerated, BCA) with a confidence level of 95%. Given that 0 is not in the confidence interval, the indirect effect is significantly different from 0 at  $p < .05$ . Additional analyses considering the other masculinity subscales as the mediator were not computed given that the total effect of each of these factors was not significant.

We additionally tested for the indirect effect of alternative mediation hypothesis. Status and toughness were still introduced as covariates. The first model tested whether antifemininity mediates the effect of perceived similarity on antigay prejudice. The indirect effect ( $B = -.04$ ) was estimated between -.172 and .006 (BCA) with a confidence level of 95%. The second model tested whether antigay prejudice mediates the effect of antifemininity on perceived similarity. The indirect effect ( $B = -.11$ ) was estimated between -.237 and -.033 with a confidence level of 95%. Because 0 is indeed in the confidence interval for these two alternative models, the tested indirect effects were not significant. This indicates that the mediation was not bidirectional in the present study, and that the predicted mediation path constitutes the best model.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide evidence in support of the hypotheses examined. First, antifemininity appeared as the best predictor of men's sexual prejudice, compared to the two other MRNS subscales (status and toughness; Hypothesis 1). This finding confirms those observed in other studies (e.g., Parrot et al., 2008; Wilkinson, 2004), and it is consistent with the idea that not being feminine is an essential element of masculinity (Maccoby, 1998) and the general tendency to devalue femininity and feminine characteristics when they are present in men (Blashill & Powlishta, 2009a; O'Neil, 1981). Given that gay men are perceived as being more stereotypical of women than men (e.g., Rudman & Glick, 2008), men's conformity with antifemininity norms results in antigay prejudice (Lehavot & Lambert, 2007), in the same way that the rejection of feminine traits in men has been found to be a predictor of aggression toward sexual minorities (Parrot, 2009; Parrot, Peterson, & Bakeman, 2011; see also Glick et al., 2007).

More important, the present results also confirmed our mediation hypothesis. Perceived dissimilarity between oneself and gay men mediated the effect of antifemininity on men's sexual prejudice: the more the participants endorsed the antifemininity norm, the more they showed prejudice against gay men via their perception of themselves as dissimilar from gay men (Hypothesis 2). Given that status and toughness did not predict

antigay prejudice, perceived similarity could not therefore constitute a mediator for the effects of these norms on prejudice. This finding is consistent with past research showing that antigay prejudice is related to heterosexual men's psychological differentiation from gay men (e.g., Herek, 1988; Talley & Bettencourt, 2008). This is also consistent with research showing that the endorsement of traditional gender roles is related to sexual prejudice specifically among those heterosexual men who perceive gay men as different from themselves (e.g., Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2010). However, to our knowledge, the present research is the first in showing that masculinity norms are also related to perceived similarity, as well as that such perception mediates the effect of antifemininity on antigay prejudice.

The present research also investigated two alternative mediation hypotheses—that is, whether antifemininity mediates the effect of perceived similarity on prejudice and prejudice mediates the effect of antifemininity on perceived similarity. Results clearly showed that both alternative models were not significant. Therefore, and despite the correlational nature of the present research, these findings provide additional support for the contention that antigay prejudice reflects a motivation to affirm masculinity via the perception of differences between oneself and those men who violate gender differences. However, these findings are also somewhat surprising given that one could easily envision that, for instance, prejudice mediates the effect of antifemininity on perceived dissimilarity. Further research is welcome to examine more in depth the complex relation between sexual prejudice and motivated differentiation.

These findings provide indirect evidence for the overall hypothesis that antigay prejudice may accomplish the defensive function of affirming masculinity by providing unambiguous gender boundaries (Herek & McLemore, 2013). As a consequence, heterosexual men's antigay prejudice would be a defensive reaction to differentiate themselves from those men who violate the masculinity norm of antifemininity. This is consistent with masculinity theories suggesting that sexual prejudice results from the perceived contradiction between homosexuality and traditional but still hegemonic masculinity, and that masculinity would not merely mean “not being feminine” but also being heterosexual and being sexually prejudiced against gay men (e.g., Edwards 2005; Kimmel, 1994, 1997).

Nevertheless, it is also worth noting that this research does not provide sufficient empirical evidence to support the specific function accomplished by this differentiation process. Of course, the present findings show that antigay prejudice results from heterosexual men's motivation to affirm masculinity by stressing clear-cut gender boundaries, which lead them to differentiate themselves from gay men. However, this motivation may have different purposes. On the one hand, antigay prejudice can reflect different psychological and even defensive functions (Herek &

McLemore, 2013). For instance, antigay prejudice may serve to protect oneself from the anxiety resulting from same-sex desires, help to affirm traditional values about sexuality and family, or to manage a public image in conformity with masculinity norms. Future research is needed to investigate the specific function that motivation to psychologically distance oneself from gay men may accomplish for heterosexual men.

On the other hand, antigay prejudice may still reflect motivation to maintain masculinity status via the rejection of femininity in men. Indeed, the results of the present mediation analysis could be interpreted as supporting the hypothesis that men are overall motivated to differentiate themselves from those men who, like women, benefit from a devaluated status because they are perceived as feminine. Accordingly, this study does not provide empirical evidence that unequivocally concludes that antigay prejudice does not reflect hidden motivations related to the two alternative masculinity norms (toughness and status; see McCreary, 1994). Therefore, further research is needed to examine the independent effects of antifemininity and the general negative consideration of feminine traits (i.e., sexism) on men's prejudice against gays, and even the necessary combination of these (Murphy, 2006).

Finally, the present findings highlighted the relevance of perceived similarity in predicting antigay prejudice, and it would be relevant to investigate which factors other than masculinity norms can influence heterosexual men's perceived similarity with gay men. For instance, research on contact hypothesis showed that positive intergroup contact reduces perceived intergroup threat and dissimilarity (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). Accordingly, we can anticipate that stimulating contact between sexual groups will reduce the heterosexual men's perceived dissimilarity from gay men and thus reduce antigay prejudice. Alternatively, information about alternative models of masculinity that do not introduce normative pressure to avoid feminine behavior could also contribute to reducing heterosexual men's perceived dissimilarity with gay men, and thus reduce antigay prejudice. Future research should investigate these issues.

Before concluding, some limitations of the present study should also be highlighted. First, the participants were all university students, and a replication of the observed findings in a non-student sample would be welcome. Second, the participants were all heterosexual men, but alternative strategies would be recommended to test the specificity of the investigated processes for heterosexual men. For instance, future research could focus on heterosexual women's prejudice against lesbians, or even against other social minorities, either related or unrelated to sexual orientation. Third, it is worth noting that the present study provided only correlational evidence for the hypothesis, and further experimental research is necessary to investigate the causal relationships between experimentally manipulated factors (e.g., perceived distance between

oneself and gay men, gay men's femininity, or threat to masculinity). Finally, the present research used a trait-based approach and assessed differences in individuals' endorsement of masculinity norms. However, different norms may function differently in different contexts and for different individuals (e.g., Addis et al., 2010), and further research is needed to examine which factors moderate the way masculinity relates to antigay prejudice.

## CONCLUSION

As Edwards (2005) pointed out, gay masculinity is a contradiction in itself. The present research provides empirical support for this view by showing that the traditional model of masculinity that rejects feminine manifestations in men drives sexual prejudice. This research also showed that heterosexual men's personal differentiation from gay men is relevant to our understanding of the link between the antifemininity component of masculinity ideology and antigay prejudice. This pattern confirms the idea that traditional masculinity is strongly rooted in the differentiation from feminine traits and that antigay prejudice fulfills the function of maintaining a positive and distinct traditional masculinity identity. Put differently, antigay prejudice protects heterosexual men from the threat that gay men pose to masculinity ideology, and it contributes to maintaining an essentialist and dichotomist view of gender that is opposed to alternative masculinities that are not necessarily antifeminine.

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