



Sexual Sex-Role Stereotypes: An Exploration of Stereotypic Beliefs Regarding Sexual Attitudes, Values, and Behaviors

Gregory D. Morrow

Department of Psychology
Edinboro University of Pennsylvania

Susan D. Boon

Department of Psychology
University of Calgary



Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore sex-role stereotypes of sexual attitudes, values, and behaviours among North American college students. Participants (680 undergraduates) judged the extent to which 66 statements concerning sexual attitudes, values, and behaviours were characteristic of one of four targets: a masculine male, masculine female, feminine male, or feminine female. A series of 2 (Target Sex) X 2 (Target Sex Role) X 2 (Participant Sex) ANOVAs performed on the three factors that emerged in analysis of participants' judgments revealed that beliefs concerning the degree to which sexual desire, discomfort with sexual activity, and homosexuality/comfort with homosexuality were considered typical of a target varied with the target's sex and sex role (the effects of participant sex were largely nonsignificant). Participants rated sexual desire more characteristic of masculine than feminine targets with the difference particularly pronounced for ratings of male targets. In contrast, they rated discomfort with sexual activity more typical of feminine than masculine targets, with the difference particularly pronounced for female targets. Finally, they rated homosexuality/comfort with homosexuality more typical of feminine than masculine males and more typical of masculine than feminine females, again with the discrepancy greatest for ratings of males. Explanations for these differences and possible implications will be discussed.



Introduction

Helgeson's (1994) prototype analysis of sex role stereotypes identified three prototypical aspects of masculinity/femininity including:

- physical appearance
- psychological characteristics
- interests and concerns

•Interest in sex emerged as a "minor factor" (p. 677) characteristic of masculinity

The goal of the present study was to explore possible sex-role stereotypes of sexual attitudes, values, and behaviors in North American culture and explore whether sex or sex role accounts for any differences in these stereotypes

Method

- 680 undergraduates (286 M, 393 F) rated the extent to which 66 statements concerning sexual attitudes, values, and behavior were characteristic of 1 of 4 targets:
 - Masculine male
 - Masculine female
 - Feminine male
 - Feminine female
- Eighty percent of participants reported that they were exclusively heterosexual; 0.7% were exclusively homosexual

Results

Three factors emerged in an exploratory factor analysis (PFA, varimax). Three top loading items for each factor:

Sexual Desire (n = 30, $\alpha = .96$)

- think about sex frequently
- fantasize about sex often
- have a strong sex drive

Discomfort with Sexual Activity (n = 10, $\alpha = .75$)

- be concerned about the possible negative consequences of sex
- refuse to engage in unwanted sexual activity
- refuse unwanted sexual activity

Homosexuality/Comfort with Homosexuality (n = 4, $\alpha = .92$)

- engage in sexual activity with [person of the same sex]
- be sexually attracted to [person of the same sex]
- fantasize about [person of the same sex]

Table 1. Sexual Desire by Target Sex and Target Sex Role

	Male	Female	Total
Masculine	5.73	4.79	5.26
Feminine	4.64	4.58	4.61
Total	5.19	4.69	4.94

Target Role F(1, 671) = 90.53, p < .001
Target Sex F(1, 671) = 54.09, p < .001
Target Sex x Target Role F(1, 671) = 42.01, p < .001
Target Sex x Participant Sex F(1, 671) = 4.38, p = .04

Table 2. Discomfort with Sexual Activity by Target Sex and Target Sex Role

	Male	Female	Total
Masculine	3.73	4.11	3.92
Feminine	4.33	4.99	4.66
Total	4.03	4.55	4.29

Target Role F(1, 671) = 176.54, p < .001
Target Sex F(1, 671) = 88.09, p < .001
Target Sex x Target Role F(1, 671) = 6.55, p = .01

Table 3. Homosexuality/Comfort with Homosexuality by Target Sex and Target Sex Role

	Male	Female	Total
Masculine	2.11	4.55	3.33
Feminine	4.69	3.59	4.14
Total	3.40	4.07	3.73

Target Role F(1, 671) = 66.57, p < .001
Target Sex F(1, 671) = 45.36, p < .001
Target Sex x Target Role F(1, 671) = 316.75, p < .001

Discussion

Consistent with Helgeson (1994), the present results suggest that stereotypes about the sexual attitudes, values, and behaviors characteristic of individuals

- include beliefs about sexual desire but also include beliefs about
 - Discomfort with Sexual Activity
 - Homosexuality/Comfort with Homosexuality
- are evident in conceptions of both masculine and feminine individuals and
- vary as a function of both the individual's biological sex and sex role

Stereotypes that link homosexuality with incongruence between sex and sex role (i.e., being a masculine female or feminine male) may partially explain the pattern of differences we observed

To the extent that people evaluate and respond to others in terms of these sexual sex-role stereotypes, they may

- miss stereotype-incongruent aspects of individuals' attitudes, values, and behaviors
- make judgment errors in sexual contexts
- and discriminate against those who appear to fall into particular social groups (i.e., homosexuals and those whose sex roles appear incongruent with their sex)