Cultural Stereotypes and Personal Beliefs: Perceptions of Heterosexual Men, Women, and People

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The present research prioritizes minority groups’ perspectives, specifically in the context of lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and transgender (LGBQT) and heterosexual dynamics. Study 1 elucidates LGB people’s knowledge of stereotypes about heterosexuals, whereas Study 2 examines the extent to which LGBQT people believe in stereotypes about heterosexuals. In Study 1, we asked a large sample of LGB-identified participants to describe cultural stereotypes that exist about heterosexual men, women, or people (gender unspecified) and analyzed the data in terms of frequency and thematic content. Results indicated that cultural stereotypes about heterosexual targets are gendered (e.g., macho and aggressive; hyper-feminine and submissive) and negative in content (e.g., closed-minded and judgmental). In Study 2, we measured LGBQT participants’ personal endorsement of cultural stereotypes about heterosexual target groups (generated by participants in Study 1). The results of Study 2 demonstrated that LGBQT participants’ beliefs about heterosexual men and people overlap, whereas participants tend to perceive heterosexual women in a favorable light. Taken together, these 2 studies offer new insight into intergroup relations between sexual minorities and heterosexuals by evaluating the cultural stereotypes and personal beliefs held by LGBQT people.

Keywords: stereotypes, personal beliefs, LGBQT issues, gender, intergroup relations

A voluminous collection of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination research positions stigmatized group members as the “objects” of analysis and majority group members as the “subjects” (Amir, 1969, as explained in Shelton, 2000). Beginning with Allport (1954), research on intergroup biases overwhelmingly focused on dominant groups’ thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors about and toward people with marginalized identities (e.g., heterosexuals’ stereotypes about lesbian women and gay men; Clausell & Fiske, 2005; Herek, 2000, 2009; Massey, 2010). Given that intergroup relations are, by definition, a two-way process, the omission of the minority perspective is alarming and leaves an incomplete understanding of intergroup dynamics. By only examining the perspectives of dominant group members, researchers underestimate the value of minorities’ perceptions of others to inform our understanding of what may occur during intergroup interactions.

Empirical Approaches to Intergroup Dynamics Within LGBQT Contexts

Our knowledge about the relations between heterosexual individuals and members of lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and transgender (LGBQT) communities follows a similar trajectory. Although researchers have examined the thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors of heterosexuals toward LGBQT-identified people, the ways in which LGBQT-identified individuals perceive heterosexuals have been given relatively less attention. In particular, a large body of research documents stereotypes that heterosexuals hold about lesbian and gay people (e.g., Herek, 1991), antigay prejudice (e.g., Herek, 2009), and discrimination toward sexual minorities (e.g., Bailey, Wallace, & Wright, 2013). These well-established areas of research pursue a critical line of empirical inquiry because they demonstrate the ways in which people with social and political power (heterosexuals) perceive and interact with those with relatively less power (sexual minorities). Moreover, this approach to research helps to identify strategies for reducing people’s endorsement of antigay stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination.

In addition, a subset of research focused on LGBQT issues departs from traditional models of stereotyping and prejudice research by using LGBQT-identified individuals as participants of research (rather than as targets of person perception paradigms). These studies aim to uncover the ways in which sexual minorities are affected by and respond to stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. To elucidate the psychological and physiological impacts of having a stigmatized identity, a growing body of literature focuses on how people who are stigmatized cope with experiences of everyday prejudice and discrimination (see Major, Mendes, & Dovidio, 2013 for a review). For instance, Duncan and Hatzenbuehler (2014) evaluated the relationship between the antigay hate crimes and the psychological health of people who identify as LGBT and found that the prevalence of hate crimes may contribute to suicidal thoughts and attempts among LGBT-identified adolescents. Thus, within the context of LGBQT issues, research on coping strategies and the negative effects of stigma yields strong implications for promoting greater societal acceptance and legal protection of LGBQT-identified people (Meyer, 2003).
Taken together, these two camps of research (i.e., examining heterosexual people’s perceptions of sexual minorities and the ways in which sexual minorities cope with being the targets of prejudice) seek positive health and justice outcomes for LGBTQT-identified people.

Examining Perceptions of Dominant Group Members

A nuanced approach to intergroup dynamics and the study of stigma posit that marginalized groups are active agents in shaping relationships between groups (e.g., Contrada et al., 2000; Oyserman & Swim, 2001; Shelton, 2000; Shelton, Alegre, & Son, 2010; Shelton & Richeson, 2006a, 2006b). Such an approach advocates that the inclusion of minorities in research should not only focus on minorities’ reactions to prejudice and discrimination; but also, should evaluate minorities’ perceptions of intergroup relations. The current research highlights sexual minorities’ perceptions of heterosexuals, specifically in terms of their stereotypes about heterosexual men, women, and people.

Despite one’s personal beliefs about other groups, stereotypic images and messages are embedded in dominant culture (e.g., media) and influence the content and activation of stereotypes about outgroups (Gerber, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shana- han, 2002; Henderson-King & Nisbett, 1996; Power, Murphy, & Coover, 2006). At the most basic level, stereotypes work as cognitive short-cuts for evaluating and interacting with outgroup members. That is, stereotypes about a group at large may be applied to an individual who belongs to a specific group and, in turn, may shape attitudes toward and interactions with members of the stereotyped group (Allport, 1954). On the basis of this logic, one does not need to be in a position of power to hold stereotypes about another societal group—that is, the definition of stereotyping allows minority groups to hold stereotypes about more powerful groups. Similarly, a person’s stereotypes about another group do not necessarily mean that he or she is prejudiced toward that group or is in any type of position to discriminate against a member of that group. Thus, contrary to popular belief, people of low status groups may hold stereotypes in an upward direction (toward high status people). We argue that LGBTQT-identified people are actively forming their own impressions of heterosexuals, such that they are aware of stereotypes that exist about heterosexuals within LGBTQT communities and may even personally endorse such stereotypes.

The inclusion of sexual minorities’ perceptions of heterosexuals will strengthen our understanding of current relationships between LGBTQT and heterosexual people. In particular, this approach has the potential to identify heterosexuals’ characteristics and behaviors that sexual minorities construe as problematic. For example, in investigating LGB people’s interpretations of heterosexual people’s behaviors, Conley, Calhoun, Evett, and Devine (2001) identified mistakes that heterosexual people make when trying to appear nonprejudiced in their interactions with LGB participants. These results established that dominant group members’ intentions in intergroup interactions may be very different from the impact they have on sexual minorities. That is, a well-meaning heterosexual person may say something to an LGB person that the LGB person interprets in a negative way. For instance, a heterosexual man offering to connect his lesbian coworker with his lesbian-identified roommate can be interpreted by his coworker as stereo-

typically lumping all sexual minorities together or implying that all lesbian women are attracted to one another.

Understanding sexual minorities’ reported thoughts and experiences with heterosexuals is important because it informs heterosexuals of how they may be perceived by LGBTQT-identified people in their lives, such as by friends, family members, coworkers, and employers. It is interesting to note that it is likely that members of a dominant group are completely unaware that the people “beneath” them in societal status may hold negative thoughts about them. In fact, dominant group members may even feel that they are globally admired, respected, and envied by low-status group members (Miller, 1997). Thus, acquiring information about minorities’ perceptions of the dominant group may provide useful knowledge to improve intergroup relations. In particular, heterosexual stereotypes may affect how LGBTQT-identified people interact with heterosexual women and men.

In the present research, we examine sexual minorities’ perceptions of heterosexuals to provide a more comprehensive picture of intergroup dynamics between these two particular groups. To our knowledge, researchers have not documented perceptions (specifically, stereotypes) of dominant outgroup members from the perspectives of sexual minorities; therefore, our work enters new empirical territory in the stereotype literature. Similar to previous research on cognitive biases, we examine both culturally endorsed stereotypes and personal beliefs.

Cultural Stereotypes and Personal Beliefs

It is widely accepted that a conceptual difference exists between cultural stereotypes and personal beliefs (Devine, 1989; Devine & Elliot, 1995), such that stereotypes are associations between characteristics and a group at large; whereas, personal beliefs are endorsements and acceptance of these associations as true. For example, although a majority of White Americans may be familiar with stereotypes about Black Americans, only a subset of Whites may believe Black stereotypes to be true (Devine, 1989). Devine and Elliot (1995) demonstrated that, although both high- and low-prejudiced Whites reported having equivalent knowledge of Black stereotypes, low-prejudiced Whites differed from high-prejudiced Whites in their personal endorsement of the stereotypes. Put differently, the personal beliefs of high-prejudiced participants strongly overlapped with their knowledge of stereotypes, whereas the personal beliefs of low-prejudiced participants diverged from their knowledge of stereotypes.

Because completely removing stereotypes from a low-prejudiced person’s cognitive make-up is a long and laborious task (Devine & Monteith, 1993), cultural stereotypes that are not personally endorsed can still be activated and associated with the target group (see Devine, 1989; Jamieson & Zanna, 1989; Sherman & Gorkin, 1980). That is, it is possible for one to apply stereotypes to a person even if s/he believes the stereotype is not true (e.g., a White person may believe that not all Black Americans are dangerous, but this stereotype may, at some point, be used to shape her/his impression of a Black person). Thus, cultural stereotypes are still an important marker of people’s biases: simply knowing that one’s larger community associates a set of characteristics with a target group may, in fact, contribute to one’s cognitive biases toward the target group.
Stereotype Content

Drawing on social structural theory of stereotype content (Eagly & Steffen, 1984) and social role theory (Eagly, 1987), research posits that the social roles that group members occupy during intergroup contact shape the stereotypes formed about those groups. That is, dominant group members’ social roles determine the behaviors that minority group members may observe through intergroup interactions, newsworthly events, and media representations regarding intergroup relations. Given that women and men have different social positions (e.g., domestic vs. occupational roles; see Rudman & Glick, 2008 for a review), people’s stereotypes about a broader category of group membership should expose status differences between men and women within the broader category. However, because men usually play a larger role in social institutions (e.g., in politics, workplaces, and religion) and may be more likely to participate in newsworthly intergroup interactions than women, it is likely that stereotypes about a broad group category reflect stereotypes about men rather than women, as men inhabit the dominant roles of the larger group category. As demonstrated in early research on gender stereotypes, the stereotype of “a healthy, mature, socially competent adult person” was more similar to the stereotype of an adult man than an adult woman described as healthy, mature, and socially competent (Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972 as cited in Eagly & Kite, 1987).

In an examination of the stereotype content of large groups and dominant subgroups, Eagly and Kite (1987) tested whether nationality stereotypes apply to men of a particular nationality more than they do to women who share that nationality. They found that women were perceived more in terms of their gender than their nationality, likely because women’s roles are more salient regarding stereotypes about their relational and domestic abilities (e.g., wives, mothers) than stereotypes about their roles in public sectors (e.g., international contact). For example, although Iranians (gender-unspecified) and Iranian men were commonly stereotyped as aggressive, Iranian women were not characterized as aggressive, but instead were more likely to be characterized as traditional (Eagly & Kite, 1987).

In our work, we propose a similar hypothesis: Perceptions of heterosexual people (gender-unspecified) will be equated with perceptions of heterosexual men; whereas, stereotypes about heterosexual women will include more distinctive qualities about gender (i.e., women’s traditional roles) than about the broader group category. Following the logic posed by social role theory and social structural theory of stereotype content, we expect that perceptions of heterosexual people are formed by perceptions of those with the most status and influential roles within the broader category (heterosexuality). In terms of intergroup relations between LGBQT people and heterosexual people, political and religious leaders may hold the greatest influence on intergroup relations and, given that these positions are usually held by men, the most prominent stereotypes of heterosexual people may be developed from minorities’ observations of men in power.

The Current Research

The present research prioritizes the minority perspective in elucidating stereotypes about dominant groups. In both studies, we aimed to acquire large and diverse samples of sexual minorities; therefore, we used anonymous, online surveys to yield samples with a greater range of outness and regional diversity than found in laboratory-based studies (Frankel & Siang, 1999; Riggle, Rostosky, & Reedy, 2005; Rosser, Oakes, Bockting, & Miner, 2007).

In Study 1, we examined spontaneously generated stereotypes about heterosexual men, women, and people as provided by LGB-identified participants. The inclusion of three heterosexual target groups allowed us to test whether heterosexuals are stereotyped as a homogenous group (i.e., participants reporting the same stereotypes to describe heterosexuals regardless of the target group’s gender) or if stereotypes about heterosexuals are gendered (i.e., participants reporting distinct stereotypes to describe heterosexual men and women; Eagly & Kite, 1987). In an open-ended prompt, we asked participants to list stereotypes that other members of their communities hold about heterosexual men, women, or people (gender-unspecified) and analyzed these data in terms of frequency and thematic content. Using the stereotypes generated in our analysis of Study 1, we investigated LGBQT people’s personal beliefs about heterosexual target groups in Study 2. Taken together, these two studies afford new insight into intergroup relations between sexual minorities and heterosexuals by evaluating the cultural stereotypes and personal beliefs held by LGBQT people.

Methodological Approaches to Cultural Stereotypes and Personal Beliefs

Several strategies exist to examine the stereotype content of cultural stereotypes and personal beliefs. One qualitative approach is to conduct focus groups or semistructured interviews with participants (e.g., Gazzola & Morrison, 2014), which allows participants to generate and elaborate on the traits and characteristics that they associate with a target group. Another widely used approach is to provide participants with a list of adjectives and ask participants to indicate adjectives that society believes are characteristic of the target group (Katz & Braly, 1933, as used in Devine & Elliot, 1995; Gazzola & Morrison, 2014; Morrison, Morrison, Harriman, & Jewell, 2008). This format may also provide an open-ended option for participants to list additional stereotypes (e.g., Madon, 1997); however, researchers who have used this method noted that few participants take advantage of the open-ended option when a list is already provided (e.g., Devine, 1989, Study 1).

When a phenomenon is understudied and has received little empirical attention, qualitative methodology is helpful to elucidate trends (Glaser & Strauss, 2009; Morrow & Smith, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Given the relatively understudied nature of intergroup relations from the perspectives of sexual minorities, we used an open-ended response format in Study 1 to assess stereotype content and to facilitate scale development to use in future research. We modeled our approach from Conley, Rabinowitz, and Rabow’s (2010) use of the open-ended format to capture stereotypes about another dominant group (White people). Consistent with Conley et al. (2010), we wanted participants to have full creative agency in describing cultural stereotypes about heterosexual target groups, rather than being limited to a preexisting taxonomy of characteristics or traits commonly used as stereotypes about target groups. It is plausible that a list generated by researchers would not have covered the uniqueness and range of partici-
pants’ perceptions about heterosexuals. In contrast, we use the list format in Study 2 to measure participants’ personal beliefs about heterosexual people in terms of the cultural stereotypes found in Study 1.

**Study 1: Cultural Stereotypes**

In Study 1, we examined cultural stereotypes about heterosexual men, women, or people.

**Method**

**Participants**

LGB participants were recruited for an online study through the volunteer section of a classified advertisement site (craigslist.org). The recruitment prompt described “a study on attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people.” This recruitment method provided a regionally diverse sample of LGB-identified people within the United States. Thirty-two percent resided in the Northeast, 24% in the Midwest, 15% in the West, 15% in the Southeast, 6% in the Southwest, and 1% indicated that they resided in a country other than the United States.

The original sample ($N = 763$) included 239 lesbian women, 183 gay men, 185 bisexual people (76% female), and 162 participants who did not identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Given that we were interested in the responses of LGB-identified individuals, 162 participants were dropped for not indicating a sexual identity or indicating an identity that did not provide enough information about their position to heterosexual target groups.

The final sample included 601 participants (61% female), with a mean age of 31 ($SD = 11.0$). The sample was 75% European American/White, 11% Multiracial, 6% Latina/o, 4% African American, 1% Asian American, and 3% did not indicate their ethnic identities. Thirty-five percent of the participants indicated they were undergraduate students to the question “Are you an undergraduate student?” (yes or no).

**Procedure**

**Prompt.** Participants were asked to list cultural stereotypes about heterosexual men, women, or people (gender-unspecified). This group-focused, rather than participant-focused, methodology remains consistent with early stereotyping methodology used to elicit cultural stereotypes (i.e., seminal studies of Black stereotypes; Gilbert, 1951; Karlins, Coffman, & Walters, 1969; Katz & Braly, 1933, as cited in Devine & Elliot, 1995) and more recent research on stereotype content (e.g., Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). The instructions aimed to reduce respondents’ desire to censor their responses to appear nonprejudiced. By asking participants to recall stereotypes that exist about the target group (rather than about their personal stereotypes), the survey randomly assigned participants to respond to one of the following prompts regarding heterosexual men, women, or people:

What stereotypes (i.e., beliefs, images, or perceptions—whether they be true or untrue) do lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people have about heterosexual __________ [men, women, or people]? We are not interested in whether you believe in these stereotypes, but the stereotypes that other LGB people hold about heterosexual __________ [men, women, or people].

Participants were given an unlimited amount of space to list their stereotypes about the heterosexual target group to which they were assigned. Of the 601 participants, 217 participants responded to the heterosexual men prompt, 186 participants to the heterosexual women prompt, and 198 participants received the prompt about heterosexual people.

**Thematic coding.** Each condition of the study was analyzed separately. Two undergraduate researchers independently read through all of the responses and generated a list of recurrent themes that best captured each condition (heterosexual men, women, or people). Following the techniques outlined by Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic coding paradigm, the two researchers met to reach consensus about the final sets of themes that best reflected the responses in each condition.

Another pair of trained undergraduate researchers used the sets of themes to code participants’ open-ended responses. The coders independently indicated the presence or absence of the themes in each participant’s response ($1 = $theme was present, $0 = $the theme was absent$). Interrater agreement was high ($\alpha = .94$), with the coders only disagreeing on less than 10% of all cases (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014 suggest that 80% agreement yields reasonable reliability). The first author resolved discrepancies by meeting with the coders to discuss their written justifications for the codes in disagreement. Together, the raters and first author negotiated consensus to provide a final set of codes for the responses in which the raters diverged in their coding.

**Coding Themes: Stereotypes About Heterosexual Men**

Sixteen themes emerged to describe stereotypes about heterosexual men. The following themes best organized the data (shortened category names are included in parentheses): Heterosexual men have exaggerated confidence in themselves (arrogant), little concern for other people’s feelings (insensitive), irrational fear of and hatred for LGBQT people (homophobic), and hyper-masculine characteristics (macho). Other themes included the ideas that heterosexual men are confrontational and forceful (aggressive), not willing to consider views that oppose their own (closed-minded), obsessed with sex with women (“sex-crazed”), and undesirable in physical appearance (unattractive). Additional themes conveyed stereotypes that heterosexual men lack knowledge and awareness (ignorant), do not tolerate gay men and sexual behaviors between gay men (intolerant), use excessive judgment (judgmental), desire and fantasize about sex with other men (latent homosexuality), endorse prejudice and discrimination toward women (sexist), excessively fantasize about lesbian women and lesbian sex (sexualize lesbians), and belong to fraternities (fraternity brothers).

1 Non-LGB participants who identified as sexual minorities (e.g., queer, pansexual, or omnisexual) were directed out of the Study 1 online survey and into another study. We specifically recruited LGB-identified participants for this study because the meaning and use of queer identities greatly varies across geographic region and age groups (Whittington, 2012). To elicit stereotypes primarily in reference to participants’ sexual identities about the dominant group (heterosexual people) rather than their gender identities in relation to the dominant group (cisgendered people), trans-identified individuals were not recruited into this study.
Categorizing Themes: Stereotypes About Heterosexual Women

The researchers identified 15 themes to code stereotypes about heterosexual women. The themes outlining stereotypes about heterosexual women suggest that heterosexual women are perceived as safe and accepting of LGBTQ-identified individuals (allies), eager to become wives and mothers (“breeders”), not willing to consider views that oppose their own (closed-minded), overly dramatic with their emotions (emotional), not sexually satisfied by men (have bad sex lives), submissive to men’s needs (submissive), dumb and “ditzy” (unintelligent), upright and not adventurous (upright), and obsessed with their physical appearances (vain). Additional themes reflected beliefs that heterosexual women associate mostly or exclusively with gay men (“fag hags”), have hyper-feminine characteristics (hyper-feminine), use excessive judgment in evaluating others (judgmental), desire and fantasize about sex with other women (latent homosexuality), need men because they are weak (dependent), and pretend to like other women while not sincerely pursuing romantic and sexual relationships with women (teases).

Categorizing Themes: Stereotypes About Heterosexual Men

The researchers identified 12 themes to organize stereotypes about heterosexual men. Stereotypes about heterosexual men included the following themes: heterosexual men are perceived as confrontational and forceful (aggressive); eager to become wives/mothers and husbands/fathers (“breeders”); not willing to consider views that oppose their own (closed-minded); average, typical, and boring (boring); and undesirable in physical appearance (unattractive). Other themes included beliefs that heterosexual men have irrational fear of and hatred for LGBTQ people (homophobic), lack knowledge and awareness (ignorant), do not tolerate gay men and sexual behaviors between gay men (intolerant), adhere to traditional gender roles (gender conformists), use excessive judgment (judgmental), desire and fantasize about sex with members of the same sex (latent homosexuality), and promote traditional morals and religious beliefs (“moral police”).

Results

We discuss the data separately for each condition. First, we analyze the frequency of each theme. Second, we turn to the content of qualitative responses to better comprehend the significance and meaning of each theme. In addition, we examine further trends that emerged across responses.

Stereotype Frequency for Heterosexual Men, Women, and People

Across all conditions, the content of stereotypes about heterosexuals mirrored gender prescriptions (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). For instance, themes such as aggressive and macho emerged spontaneously as cultural stereotypes about heterosexual men, whereas, the themes of emotional and hyper-feminine materialized in describing stereotypes about heterosexual women. Other themes captured a reactive quality in stereotypes about heterosexuals, likely formulated in response to negative interactions and experiences with heterosexuals. For example, participants stated that commonly held stereotypes about heterosexuals were judgmental and closed-minded. Interestingly, participants used these two themes to describe the target groups across all conditions. The only other theme that occurred across all conditions was the idea that heterosexuals are sexually attracted to members of their own sex, despite whether they act on their same-sex sexual urges (latent homosexuality).

Heterosexual men. Of the 16 themes used to categorize stereotypes about heterosexual men, the most frequently mentioned themes were homophobic (34.26%), macho (26.30%), “sex-crazed” (19.38%), and aggressive (18.69%). The stereotypes that heterosexual men use excessive judgment (judgmental; 16.96%) and do not tolerate gay men (intolerant; 15.92%) were spontaneously generated themes for heterosexual men that conveyed negative relations between sexual minorities and heterosexual men. The frequencies of themes for heterosexual men and example responses from participants are presented in Table 1.

Heterosexual women. The most commonly mentioned themes for stereotypes about heterosexual women were hyper-feminine (17.62%), submissive (16.39%), latent homosexuality (15.98%), and vain (15.57%). Interestingly, participants listed stereotypes that described heterosexual women as allies (8.20%). Participants did not mention alliance in reference to heterosexual men or heterosexual people, which suggests that LGB people do not see heterosexual women as the central perpetrators of sexual prejudice and, instead, perceive them to be a part of their supportive social networks. In general, participants’ responses depicted heterosexual women in a more favorable light than heterosexual men, likely because sexual minorities recognize that heterosexual men endorse homophobic attitudes to a greater extent than women do (Nagoshi et al., 2008). Participants described stereotypes about heterosexual women often in direct contrast to stereotypes about heterosexual men—some participants even used comparison statements while describing stereotypes about heterosexual women (e.g., “they are more understanding of LGBQ than straight men are”). Although there were negative undertones to the responses for stereotypes about heterosexual women (e.g., “vain, submissive, dependent, etc.”), these themes are largely based on gendered stereotypes of women, not necessarily based on negative relations with heterosexual women. See Table 2 for frequencies of themes and example responses.

Heterosexual people. Frequently mentioned themes used to describe stereotypes about heterosexual people included homophobic (29.92%), ignorant (27.95%), closed-minded (21.26%), and boring (17.72%). See Table 3 for the theme frequencies and example responses.

The stereotypes about heterosexual people largely overlapped with participants’ responses in the heterosexual men condition. This overlap suggests that when people generate stereotypes of a group at large, they likely draw on stereotypes about the most prototypic members of the group (i.e., men; Eagly & Kite, 1987). These data illustrate this effect, such that several stereotypes about heterosexual men were also reported about heterosexual people. For example, the theme homophobic was mentioned in 34.26% of responses for heterosexual men and 29.92% of responses for heterosexual people, but was present in 0% of the responses about heterosexual women. Only one participant out of the 244 participants who provided stereotypes about
Table 1

**Study 1: Frequency of Themes Present in Stereotypes About Heterosexual Men**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example response</th>
<th>% of responses (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homophobic</td>
<td>Have an irrational fear of and hatred for LGBTQ people</td>
<td>“Heterosexual men hate us and are afraid of us”</td>
<td>34.26 (n = 74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macho</td>
<td>Embody hyper-masculine characteristics</td>
<td>“They act tough and manly to prove they are heterosexual”</td>
<td>26.30 (n = 57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Sex-crazed”</td>
<td>Obsess over sex with women</td>
<td>“They are pigs that will screw anything”</td>
<td>17.62 (n = 37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>Confrontational and forceful</td>
<td>“Quick to solve differences with violence”</td>
<td>19.38 (n = 42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judgmental</td>
<td>Use excessive judgment</td>
<td>“Set in beliefs and are quick to judge”</td>
<td>18.69 (n = 41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intolerant</td>
<td>Do not tolerate gay men and sexual behaviors between gay men</td>
<td>“Are uncomfortable with gay men but can’t get enough of lesbians all over each other”</td>
<td>16.96 (n = 37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignorant</td>
<td>Lack knowledge and awareness</td>
<td>“They are ignorant by thinking that being gay is a choice”</td>
<td>15.92 (n = 35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insubordinate</td>
<td>Have little concern for others’ feelings</td>
<td>“They are not sensitive to others, are brutish, and usually cold”</td>
<td>14.91 (n = 32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexualize lesbians</td>
<td>Excessively fantasize about lesbians and lesbian sex; invalidate lesbian identities</td>
<td>“They all think that lesbian couples want to have sex with them”</td>
<td>14.88 (n = 32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexist</td>
<td>Endorse prejudice and discrimination toward women</td>
<td>“Do not actually respect women or consider them to be equal”</td>
<td>12.46 (n = 27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latent homosexuality</td>
<td>Desire and fantasize about sex with other men</td>
<td>“They are not as straight as they think they are”</td>
<td>12.46 (n = 27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>Have exaggerated confidence in themselves</td>
<td>“Egotistical, condescending”</td>
<td>10.73 (n = 23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unattractive</td>
<td>Undesirable in physical appearance</td>
<td>“They have no style. They are ungroomed”</td>
<td>9.34 (n = 20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed-minded</td>
<td>Not willing to consider views that oppose their own</td>
<td>“They are narrow-minded”</td>
<td>9.00 (n = 20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraternity brothers</td>
<td>Members of fraternities</td>
<td>“Frat bros who are only interested in sex, beer, and football”</td>
<td>7.27 (n = 16)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The items are ordered by percentage of themes reported by participants (n = 217), beginning with the theme that was most mentioned by participants. Participants could report more than one theme in their responses.

Table 2

**Study 1: Frequency of Themes Present in Stereotypes About Heterosexual Women**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example response</th>
<th>% of responses (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hyper-feminine</td>
<td>Embody hyper-feminine characteristics</td>
<td>“Girly”</td>
<td>17.62 (n = 33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submissive</td>
<td>Submissive to men’s needs</td>
<td>“Put their man’s needs above their own”</td>
<td>16.39 (n = 30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latent homosexuality</td>
<td>Desire and fantasize about sex with other women</td>
<td>“They all secretly fantasize about having a lesbian/bi encounter”</td>
<td>15.98 (n = 30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vain</td>
<td>Obsess with physical appearances</td>
<td>“Care a lot about their looks”</td>
<td>15.57 (n = 29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Breeders’”</td>
<td>Eager to become wives and mothers</td>
<td>“Conditioned to want a man and have children as their ultimate goals in life”</td>
<td>13.52 (n = 25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judgmental</td>
<td>Use excessive judgment</td>
<td>“Judgmental of people that are not hetero”</td>
<td>12.70 (n = 24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent</td>
<td>Depend on or need men because they are weak</td>
<td>“Feel they need to have a man in their life to support them, that they are not strong enough to make it on their own”</td>
<td>9.84 (n = 18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed-minded</td>
<td>Not willing to consider views that oppose their own</td>
<td>“Closed-minded, religious, and old fashioned”</td>
<td>9.02 (n = 17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Fag-hags”</td>
<td>Associate mostly or exclusively with gay men</td>
<td>“They want a gay male best friend to shop with and pick out paint colors”</td>
<td>9.02 (n = 17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allies</td>
<td>Safe and accepting of LGBTQ individuals</td>
<td>“Tend to be more open and accepting of LGBTQ people and issues. Women are more likely to be sympathetic to the community”</td>
<td>8.20 (n = 15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teases</td>
<td>Pretend to like other women (sometimes for male attention)</td>
<td>“They all want to break bi and gay women’s hearts by acting lesbian to impress their boyfriends”</td>
<td>7.79 (n = 14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptight</td>
<td>Uptight and not adventurous</td>
<td>“Not-adventurous, boring, tight-laced”</td>
<td>7.79 (n = 14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unintelligent</td>
<td>Dumb and “ditzey”</td>
<td>“Ditzey, not down to earth, and dumb”</td>
<td>7.79 (n = 14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have bad sex lives</td>
<td>Not sexually satisfied by men</td>
<td>“Put up with BAD sex”</td>
<td>6.97 (n = 13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>Overly dramatic with their emotions</td>
<td>“Overly emotional”</td>
<td>4.10 (n = 8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The items are ordered by percentage of themes reported by participants (n = 186), beginning with the theme that was most mentioned by participants. Participants could report more than one theme in their responses. LGBQT = lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, transgendered.
In general I tend to think that heterosexual men are out of touch with and unsympathetic to the LGBTQ community. I think they are less likely than heterosexual women to stick up for a member of the LGBTQ community, especially if that person is a gay man. Additionally, I think heterosexual men are more likely than heterosexual women to engage in acts of physical violence motivated by homophobia. I think that most heterosexual men don’t take lesbians seriously.

Other phrases that emerged in responses included “simple-minded,” “unaware of their privilege,” “act violently homophobic, either physically and/or verbally,” and “joke about homosexuality as an insult.” One gay male participant spoke not only about stereotypes of closed-mindedness, but also the gendered nature of stereotypes that may influence gay men and heterosexual men’s understanding of one another:

I believe most LGB people assume that heterosexual men are closed minded and negatively hyper-masculine. I feel that many gay men in particular see themselves as morally superior to heterosexual men because they believe gay men are more opened [sic] minded than straight men. Gay men also often seem to have a disdain for traditional masculinity because they find it oppressive to their own more feminine characteristics. Traditionally masculine activities, such as sports, are viewed as having little value. Gay men also seem to believe that straight men are emotionally stunted and immature. Many gay men believe they do not have any common ground whatsoever with straight men and do not see them as potential friends.

Heterosexual men’s attitudes and relations with women emerged as a prevalent pattern in participants’ responses (i.e., sexist and sexualize lesbians). For instance, one lesbian participant described...
stereotypes of heterosexual men as “Macho pigs, who want a woman as a door matt [sic] and want a slave wife to cook, clean and screw,” whereas other participants provided words such as “chauvinistic,” “misogynistic,” and “sexist.” Further, some participants alluded to the stereotype that heterosexual men sexualize lesbians and have very little respect for lesbian women’s identity. For instance, participants provided statements such as: “they don’t believe in lesbian love,” “they think that all lesbians secretly want to be with a man,” “think that lesbians just haven’t ‘had’ the right man yet,” “fantasize about being a part of lesbian threesomes,” and “think they can cure lesbianism.” One participant’s response suggests that her knowledge of this stereotype may influence her decision to become friends with heterosexual men: “Being lesbian I tend to steer away from friendships with straight guys because I feel they always pursue sexual relations as opposed to just friendship.”

Heterosexual women. Participants reported knowledge of gender stereotypes about women, as well as gender stereotypes that specifically relate to heterosexual women’s relationships with heterosexual men. Additionally, participants described stereotypes that address heterosexual women’s attitudes toward and interactions with sexual minorities.

Participants reported gender stereotypes about women, such as “upholding gender norms,” “feminine,” “full of drama,” “too talkative,” “emotionally vulnerable,” “naïve,” and “naggy.” Further, some participants spoke directly about heterosexual women’s appearance and desire to appear feminine. For example, participants indicated that heterosexual women are perceived as “materialistic and vain,” “shallow and manipulative,” “they all have long fingernails,” “trying too hard to be sexy,” “superficial,” “care more about outer appearance than substance,” and “act differently to attract men, more stupid than they really are.” Last, participants suggested that because heterosexual women are seen as gender conformists, they are also perceived as “vanilla,” “non-adventurous,” and “just plain and boring and way too uptight.”

Another trend in stereotypes about heterosexual women addressed heterosexual women’s relationships with men and their desire to become wives and mothers. Participants reported a stereotype about heterosexual women’s desire to acquire romantic relationships (e.g., “needy for male attention,” “only care about getting a man,” “boy-crazy, and obsessed with all things romance”). Additionally, participants described stereotypes that depicted heterosexual women’s inferiority to the heterosexual men in their lives (e.g., heterosexual women are perceived as “subservient, able to be controlled by men,” “dominated by men,” and “unable to do anything without a man”). A lesbian participant stated that perceptions of heterosexual women are “that they are weak—care more about men’s view of them as sexual objects than they do about their own self-worth.” Likewise, some participants said that heterosexual women are perceived as settling for sexually unsatisfying lives (e.g., “never get their own sexual pleasure b/c it is always about the man during sex,” “don’t like giving oral sex to men,” “sexually frigid”).

Participants used the term, “breeder” (i.e., the idea that heterosexuals desire to couple and reproduce) to describe perceptions of heterosexual women. As a bisexual man explained, “a stereotype exists that heterosexual women are on a hunt to wed and breed.” Similarly, other participants stated that stereotypes about heterosexual women include that they “have to live up to the perfect image of a 1950s housewife and mother,” “want lots of babies,” “are breeders with an internal clock and only babies can complete them,” are “family-oriented,” “are obsessed with baby-making, they find housework fulfilling, that they aren’t REALLY feminists,” and “are breeders, soccer moms, mini-van (drivers).” Participants also explained that LGB people may “think heterosexual women are stupid and uneducated if they stay at home or they are a mommy grizzly or a tea party member or a conservative” and “see them as religious, feminine, uptight, happily domestic in desire to raise children and more interested in family than career.” As one lesbian woman stated, LGB people perceive heterosexual women as follows:

Dependent upon men, helpless, confused by their own sexuality, not confident or self-actualized enough to realize that the societal and patriarchal norm of having a husband, kids, and a mortgage to match is simply another way of controlling the independent spirit of women.

Finally, similar to stereotypes about heterosexual men condition, participants described stereotypes about heterosexual women’s attitudes and relations with sexual minorities. Participants said, “Heterosexual women tease lesbians—flirt then don’t follow through. Most are bisexual when it comes down to it and very curious,” “I hear a lot that they like to kiss women to attract guys,” “they mistreat lesbians and queer women by ‘leading them on’ or under-value their feelings by using them as experiments,” and “they kiss girls and pretend to be bisexual to get attention from lesbians and men.” In terms of heterosexual women’s relations with gay men, some participants explained that heterosexual women are stereotyped as “total fag hags” and “love hanging out with gay men because they think they are like girlfriends but with perfect fashion sense; good shopping partners who will also do their highlights for them.” However, perceptions of heterosexual women in terms of their relationship with sexual minorities were mixed; some participants described positive stereotypes about heterosexual women, whereas other participants reported negative stereotypes about heterosexual women. In the former case, positive stereotypes about heterosexual women included “safe,” “allies,” and “accepting of our lifestyle.” As evidence of negative stereotypes about heterosexual women (e.g., closed-minded, ignorant, and judgmental), a gay man reported, “They are closed-minded and look down on differentness. They have rights and privileges that they take for granted yet are unwilling to share.” Moreover, a lesbian participant stated, “Many of my queer friends find straight women to be rather one-dimensional, relationship-obsessed, stuck in their romantic-comedy view of gender roles. They tend to treat gay men more like accessories than human beings.” Ultimately, these quotations suggest that there is not a homogenous stereotype about how heterosexual women relate to LGB people.

Heterosexual people. Participants who provided stereotypes about gender-unspecified targets (i.e., heterosexual people) often reported gendered stereotypes about heterosexual men and women (including the “breeders” stereotype), stereotypes about being boring and rigid in morality, and stereotypes that reflect negative relations between heterosexuals and sexual minorities. A lesbian participant summed up the content of these stereotypes with the following perception of heterosexual people: “. . . they’re excessively religious, their sex is boring, and they exist only to procreate.”
Many of participants’ responses reflected the idea that heterosexual people are “really interested in conventional gender roles and gender conformity.” For instance, one gay male participant described his awareness of the following stereotypes:

“Hetero men are more macho/tough/strong/sporty and don’t get AIDS . . . Hetero women are prettier than lesbians and do things such as dancing and partaking in beauty pageants.”

Further, many participants provided stereotypes about heterosexual people that overlapped with stereotypes about heterosexual men (e.g., “they can’t dance or pick out good clothing” and “heterosexuals don’t decorate or groom as well as homosexuals do”). Similar to the participants in the heterosexual women condition, participants also reported that heterosexual people are perceived as “breeders.” Specifically, one gay man said, “heterosexuals can’t resist their hormonal impulse to ‘breed’ despite overpopulation,” and a bisexual woman explained “the biggest stereotype about heteros is that they are only interested in clogging up the planet with kids and the concept of family values.”

Another pattern in the content of stereotypes about heterosexual people elucidated the idea that heterosexual people are the “moral police and gatekeepers” of society. Participants provided phrases, such as “religious wingnuts who use the bible to justify heterosexual behavior and condemn non-heterosexual behavior,” “more politically conservative,” and “look down on us as sinners” to describe stereotypes about heterosexual people.

Other responses from participants addressed stereotypes that heterosexual people are boring, plain, dull, and uninteresting, perhaps, because of their perceived morality or adherence to tradition. That is, participants provided statements that heterosexual people are perceived as “living boring and sadly plain lives,” “conservatives who have bad sex,” “less willing to be sexually adventurous,” “vanilla in bed,” and “no fun in the bedroom, too ‘square.’” Some participants provided stereotypes in comparison to perceptions of sexual minorities: “gay people are smarter, more worldly, more informed, and more cultured than straight people” and “they (heterosexual people) are not as quirky/different or interesting as we are.”

As in the heterosexual men and women conditions, participants described stereotypes about negative relations between LGB people and heterosexual people. A lesbian participant stated that they are perceived as “prejudiced, they carry hate and malice in their hearts because they are scared of what they don’t understand.” Participants used words and phrases such as, “heartless and cruel,” “unyielding, unforgiving, not tolerant of others, selfish, opinionated and judgmental,” “narrow-minded, unsympathetic, privileged without even knowing it,” and “bigoted, judgmental, homophobes with a superiority complex” to illuminate stereotypes that LGB people hold about heterosexual people. At times, participants specified that heterosexual men were at the forefront of these stereotypes about homosexuals. For instance, a gay man addressed perceptions of heterosexual people by describing perceptions of heterosexual men as follows:

Hetero men are very hard to deal with for many gay males from what I have heard. They seem very intimidating and unkind. In the workplace, this is very difficult for many homosexuals, such as myself, to interview or to be under a straight male even if he does not have prejudices against gays. It is still in the back of your mind as a gay male.

**Additional Trends and Insights**

In addition to reviewing the qualitative responses to better make sense of the content of each stereotype, we identified other trends that emerged in participants’ responses.

**Subsample differences.** We conducted chi-square tests to examine whether participants’ sexual orientation contributed to the stereotypes they provided in Study 1. LGB participants did not differ in the content of stereotypes they listed about heterosexual people. The only themes in which sex orientation contributed to participants’ responses were in the heterosexual men condition (“sex-crazed,” sexist, sexualize lesbians, and latent homosexuality) and heterosexual women condition (hyper-feminine, submissive, latent homosexuality, and ally).

Lesbian women (63% of responses) reported more stereotypes about heterosexual men being “sex-crazed” than gay men (15%) and bisexual people (22%), $\chi^2(2) = 12.56$, $p = .002$. Of the people who said that heterosexual men are perceived as sexist, 70% were lesbian, 3% were gay, and 27% were bisexual, $\chi^2(2) = 15.64, p < .001$. Lesbian women (77%) also reported more stereotypes about heterosexual men sexualizing lesbians than gay (7%) and bisexual participants (16%), $\chi^2(2) = 19.48, p < .001$.

Similarly, participants differed in the stereotypes they provided about heterosexual women. For example, 64% of the responses describing heterosexual women as hyper-feminine came from lesbian participants, compared with gay men (14%) and bisexual people (22%), $\chi^2(2) = 10.50, p = .005$. Lesbian women (57%) also reported more submissive stereotypes than gay men (14%) and bisexual people (29%), $\chi^2(2) = 6.42, p = .040$. Gay men (80%) reported the most ally-oriented stereotypes about heterosexual women, compared with lesbian women (13%) and bisexual people (7%; $\chi^2(2) = 17.91, p < .001$), suggesting that gay men may have more positive relations with heterosexual women than other sexual minorities do.

Subsample differences emerged in participants’ reporting of latent homosexuality as a stereotype about heterosexual men and women. Compared with other participants, gay men reported greater perceptions of latent homosexuality in the heterosexual men condition (50% of responses came from gay men, 33% from bisexual people, and 17% from lesbian participants; $\chi^2(2) = 6.37, p = .041$); whereas, lesbian women reported more latent homosexuality stereotypes in the heterosexual women condition (57% of responses came from lesbian women, 43% from bisexual participants, and 0% from gay men; $\chi^2(2) = 13.80, p = .001$). Thus, the idea that heterosexual men and women harbor secret same-sex desires may originate from gay men and lesbian women, respectively.

**Latent homosexuality.** Across all three conditions of heterosexual target groups, the theme that LGB people perceive heterosexuals as suppressing their own same-sex desires, urges, and fantasies emerged as a stereotype about heterosexual groups. Several participants suggested that heterosexuals are perceived as being “bi-curious,” “closeted,” “repressed about their homosexual fantasies,” and “in denial about their own sexuality.”

Participants also expressed the idea that the most prejudiced or “anti-gay” heterosexuals harbor the deepest desires for members of the same-sex. For instance, in the heterosexual men condition, a male participant stated, “Some straight men have so much hatred toward LGBT folk because of their own fears about their sexuality.
They fear that gays may somehow get into their heads and make them fully gay.” Regarding heterosexual women, one lesbian woman stated that “Most of them are flip-able. Given the right woman and the right situation, most women will participate in some homosexual action.” Last, in the heterosexual people condition, one participant asserted, “Everyone is gay whether they want to believe it or not . . . Some are just more than others and some choose to explore it while others don’t.” Evidently, not only are latent same-sex urges an aspect of stereotypes about heterosexual men, women, and people; but also, the pervasiveness of this stereotype emphasizes beliefs that same-sex sexuality is universal and natural.

Meta-stereotype processes. Another trend in participants’ responses illustrates the tendency of typical outgroup members (i.e., sexual minorities) to apply meta-stereotypes because they are accustomed to being targets of prejudice (Vorauer, Main, & O’Connell, 1998). Although we explicitly asked participants to provide stereotypes that the LGB community holds about heterosexuals, some participants responded by describing stereotypes that heterosexuals hold about LGB people. That is, participants used their beliefs about the ways in which heterosexual targets stereotype sexual minorities to formulate their own stereotypes about heterosexual target groups. Across all conditions, roughly 4% of responses used meta-stereotypes (e.g., “heterosexuals think that gay people are . . .”). As one female participant said, “They think that lesbians ruin straight marriages, that gay men always hit on straight men, and that gay couples might raise gay children.”

This finding not only indicates that LGB people’s stereotypes about heterosexuals are largely influenced by the stereotypes that heterosexuals hold about sexual minorities, but also, that some LGB people continue to assume the role of a stereotyped target, even when instructed to be a perceiver.

Discomfort with generating stereotypes. Last, 7.65% of the sample responded that they had no knowledge of stereotypes about heterosexuals or articulated discomfort with generating stereotypes about other groups. For instance, one gay man reported the following:

The LGBQ community doesn’t really stereotype against heterosexual women. Most don’t judge because they know its [sic] easy for them to be judged because of their sexual orientation, so why do it to a heterosexual when they could turn on you in a second?

Although it is possible that some LGB people may not be aware of stereotypes about heterosexuals, it is more likely that these participants recognized that there are consequences for minority group members who disapprove of the majority group and threaten the status quo. Therefore, these participants may not have wanted to voice LGB people’s negative perceptions of heterosexuals. Likewise, it is possible that many of these participants feared a research agenda that would cast LGB people in a hateful or spiteful light.

Another possibility is that participants incorrectly interpreted the survey prompt to be about their personal beliefs rather than their knowledge about stereotypes. Participants’ misinterpretation of survey prompts has been discussed as a limitation of the culturally focused approach in other stereotyping research (see Devine & Elliot, 1995). Thus, it is possible that some of the participants who said “none” or chose not to reveal their knowledge of stereotypes interpreted the question incorrectly, such that they believed they were being asked about their personal beliefs about heterosexual targets.

Summary

Study 1 fulfilled a critical goal of documenting cultural stereotypes about heterosexual target groups. In these data, we extracted rich descriptions of heterosexual targets and identified patterns of gendered and negative stereotypes that characterize LGB people’s perceptions of heterosexuals. However, the nature of the Study 1 research question (i.e., what are the stereotypes about heterosexual targets?) limits the type of conclusions that can be drawn from these data. Specifically, these data do not address whether sexual minorities believe the stereotypes about heterosexuals to be true or if the stereotypes are merely cultural artifacts of historically negative intergroup relations. Given the progression of societal acceptance for LGBQT people and, consequently, strengthened relationships between LGBQT and heterosexual people, it is possible that sexual minorities are aware of cultural stereotypes (Study 1) but do not actually endorse such stereotypes.

Study 2: Personal Beliefs

In Study 2, we examined LGBQT people’s personal endorsement of cultural stereotypes. In the present study, LGBQT participants indicated the extent to which they agreed that stereotypes are characteristic of heterosexual target groups.

Method

Participants

Online respondents were recruited for a study about “attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of LGBQT people.” All participants lived in the United States (49% resided in the Midwest, 11% in the Southeast, 11% in the Northeast, 9% in the Southwest, 7% in the West, 7% in the South, and 6% in the Northwest).

Because of the study’s eligibility criteria, 4 participants were excluded from the study because they identified as heterosexual. The final sample consisted of 275 participants, with a mean age of 29 years old, (SD = 12.4). Identifying as female were 159 participants, 101 identified as male, and 15 identified as trans* (transman, transwoman, or transgender; all of whom identified their sexual orientation as queer). Seventy-six participants identified as lesbian, 82 participants identified as gay, 73 identified as bisexual (64% female), 21 identified as queer, and 23 identified as pansexual. The sample was 76% European American/White, 6% Multiracial, 6% Latina/o, 6% African American, 3% Asian American, and 3% Pacific Islander, Native American, or Middle Eastern American. Half of the participants indicated that they were undergraduate students.

Procedure

The design randomly assigned participants to one of three conditions: perceptions of heterosexual men (n = 94), heterosexual
ual women (n = 76), or heterosexual people (n = 105). Participants responded to the following prompt by providing their ratings on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree):

Please indicate the extent to which you agree the following stereotypes (i.e., beliefs, images, or perceptions) are characteristic of heterosexual [men, women, or people]. These characteristics and traits may be negative or positive. In general, I think heterosexual [men, women, or people]:

Participants in the heterosexual men condition indicated their agreement with the following 19 items: are intolerant of gay men, sexist, homophobic, uncomfortable with LGBQT people, closed-minded, obsessed with sex ("sex-crazed"), judgmental, insensitive, aggressive, ignorant, macho, overly confident (arrogant), fraternity "brox," and unattractive. These participants also indicated their agreement with, "In general, I think heterosexual men:" sexualize lesbians, conform to traditional gender roles, fear LGBQT people, hate LGBQT people, and have same-sex urges.3

Participants in the heterosexual women condition indicated their agreement with the following 17 items: are feminine, allies, ignorant, judgmental, closed-minded, emotional, eager to reproduce ("breeders"), dependent on men, obsessed with physical appearances, submissive to men's needs, uptight, and ditzy. These participants also responded to, "In general, I think heterosexual women:" pretend to like women to get men's attention, conform to traditional gender roles, are boring, act like they're "fag hags," and have same-sex urges.

Participants in the heterosexual people condition indicated their agreement with 15 items. Seven of the items overlapped with stereotypes about heterosexual men: are intolerant of gay men, are homophobic, are uncomfortable with LGBQT people, fear LGBQT people, hate LGBQT people, are aggressive, and are unattractive. Five items overlapped with stereotypes about heterosexual men and women: conform to traditional gender roles, are closed-minded, are judgmental, are ignorant, and have same-sex urges. Participants also rated their agreement with one stereotype that overlapped with heterosexual women [are eager to reproduce ("breeders")]. These two stereotypes unique to heterosexual people [are boring and act like they're the "moral police."]

Results and Discussion

First, we present descriptives for each target group. In our subsequent analyses, we conduct one-way multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) to test whether beliefs about heterosexuals are dependent on the target group (condition). Lastly, we determine the effect of participant sexual orientation on personal beliefs about heterosexual men, women, and people through MANOVAs. All significant comparisons received a Bonferroni adjustment.

The most strongly endorsed stereotypes about heterosexual men were sexualize lesbians (M = 4.13, SD = 1.06), conform to traditional gender roles (M = 3.96, SD = 0.99), are intolerant of gay men (M = 3.93, SD = 0.96), and are uncomfortable with LGBQT people (M = 3.81, SD = 1.06). The most strongly endorsed stereotypes about heterosexual women were feminine (M = 3.93, SD = 0.72), conform to traditional gender roles (M = 3.86, SD = 1.04), pretend to like women to get men’s attention (M = 3.66, SD = 1.05), and are obsessed with physical appearances (M = 3.51, SD = 1.01). In the heterosexual people condition, participants most strongly agreed with the stereotypes: conform to traditional gender roles (M = 4.14, SD = 0.90), are uncomfortable with LGBQT people (M = 3.79, SD = 0.97), are ignorant (M = 3.64, SD = 1.14), and are intolerant of gay men (M = 3.63, SD = 1.07). See Table 4 for the means and standard deviations of the stereotypes used in each condition.

Participants’ ratings of the stereotypes slightly departed from the frequencies at which cultural stereotypes were provided in Study 1. Although it is difficult to make sound comparisons because Study 1 and 2 used different methodologies, we can infer that some stereotypes about heterosexuals are more easily personally endorsed than culturally recognized. For instance, the stereotype that heterosexual men sexualize lesbians was only present in 12.46% of responses in Study 1, but participants in Study 2 strongly agreed that sexualizing lesbians is characteristic of heterosexual men (M = 4.13, SD = 1.06). Thus, we posit that personal beliefs and cultural stereotypes regarding heterosexual targets are not veridical and tap into distinct cognitive networks for sexual minorities. One likely reason for this is that participants more easily identified their personal beliefs among the stereotypes provided in Study 2 than when asked to spontaneously generate stereotypes (and recall information) in Study 1.

Target Group Differences

We conducted a MANOVA on the common items included across conditions with condition as the factor. Across conditions, gender conformity emerged as a strongly endorsed stereotype; participants did not differ in their endorsement of this stereotype based on the heterosexual target group, F(2, 272) = 2.06, p = .130, η² = .015. However, participants did differ in their perceptions of target groups as ignorant, closed-minded, and judgmental. Participants perceived heterosexual men (M = 3.56, SD = 1.01) and people (M = 3.64, SD = 1.14) as significantly more ignorant than heterosexual women (M = 2.55, SD = 1.06), F(2, 272) = 26.39, p < .001, η² = .162. They also perceived heterosexual men (M = 3.74, SD = 0.90) and people (M = 3.50, SD = 1.07) as significantly more closed-minded than heterosexual women (M = 2.66, SD = 1.15), F(2, 272) = 24.70, p < .001, η² = .154. Heterosexual men (M = 3.70, SD = 0.94) were also perceived as significantly more judgmental than heterosexual women (M = 3.34, SD = 1.08), but not people (M = 3.61, SD = 0.93), F(2, 272) = 3.03, p = .049, η² = .022. Taken together, these differences indicate that sexual minorities perceive heterosexual men (and people) more negatively than heterosexual women in terms of being open-minded, tolerant, and socially aware.

The belief that heterosexuals have same-sex urges also differed across participants’ perceptions of target groups, such that heterosexual people (M = 3.47, SD = 1.14) were thought to have significantly more same-sex sexual urges than heterosexual men.

3 To comprehensively capture the homophobia stereotype about heterosexual men and heterosexual people, we included more than one item to assess perceived homophobia: homophobic, uncomfortable with LGBQT people, fear LGBQT people, and hate LGBQT people.
intolerant of gay men, and heterosexual people conditions, we found that heterosexual men and people were perceived to be more intolerant of gay men, $t(197) = 2.05, p = .042$, aggressive, $t(197) = 3.16, p = .002$, and unattractive, $t(197) = 4.41, p < .001$. When differences emerged between perceptions of men and people, the content of the stereotypes mostly reflected gendered traits and characteristics rather than stereotypes related to the quality of intergroup relations between LGBQT and heterosexual people.

Because there are social desirability concerns with openly expressing one’s endorsement of stereotypes, we would have expected many of the means to hover around the scale midpoint. This was not the case. There were only two stereotypes about heterosexual men in which participants’ ratings did not significantly differ from the midpoint of the scale (have same-sex urges and unattractive; $p > .700$). Similarly, there were only two stereotypes about heterosexual people that did not differ from the midpoint point (boring and aggressive; $p > .199$). In contrast, several stereotypes about heterosexual women did not significantly differ from the scale midpoint (breeders, dependent on men, associate mostly with gay men, upright, have bad sex lives, and emotional; all $p > .075$). From this we infer that sexual minorities may be more inclined to endorse stereotypes about heterosexual men and people than heterosexual women.

### Subsample Differences

The relatively small sample sizes of queer and pansexual individuals did not provide sufficient statistical power to make all subsample comparisons; thus, we limited our subsample analyses to lesbian, gay, and bisexual participants.

Overall, LGB participants did not differ in their beliefs about heterosexual men, $F(38, 114) = 0.97, p = .521, \eta^2 = .245$, or in

### Table 4

Study 2: Means (Standard Deviations) for Perceptions of Heterosexual Men, Women, and People

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Heterosexual target group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexualize lesbians</td>
<td>4.13 (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conform to traditional gender roles</td>
<td>3.96 (.99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intolerant of gay men</td>
<td>3.93 (.78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncomfortable with LGBQT people</td>
<td>3.81 (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexist</td>
<td>3.77 (.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homophobic</td>
<td>3.76 (.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed-minded</td>
<td>3.71 (1.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obsessed with sex (“sex-crazed”)</td>
<td>3.70 (104)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judgmental</td>
<td>3.68 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insensitive</td>
<td>2.97 (111)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>3.56 (1.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignorant</td>
<td>3.51 (.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macho</td>
<td>3.46 (.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overly confident (i.e., arrogant)</td>
<td>3.66 (.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear LGBQT people</td>
<td>3.44 (1.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hate LGBQT people</td>
<td>3.41 (1.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraternity “bros”</td>
<td>3.37 (1.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unattractive</td>
<td>3.30 (.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have same-sex urges</td>
<td>3.33 (1.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>3.26 (.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretend to like women to get men’s attention</td>
<td>3.22 (1.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obsessed with physical appearances</td>
<td>3.14 (1.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submissive to men’s needs</td>
<td>3.13 (1.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allies</td>
<td>3.10 (1.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>3.10 (1.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eager to reproduce (“breeders”)</td>
<td>3.10 (1.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent on men</td>
<td>3.06 (1.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upright</td>
<td>3.05 (1.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have bad sex lives</td>
<td>2.91 (1.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate mostly with gay men (“fag hags”)</td>
<td>2.79 (1.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ditzy</td>
<td>2.61 (1.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act like they’re the “moral police”</td>
<td>3.46 (1.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boring</td>
<td>2.89 (1.16)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Items are listed by condition and mean ratings. ($N = 275; n = 94$ in men condition, $n = 76$ in women condition, $n = 105$ in people condition). Superscripts indicate instances in which $a$ differs from $b$ at $p < .05$. LGBQT = lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, transgendered.
their beliefs about heterosexual women, $F(34, 82) = 3.20, p = .338, \eta^2 = .316$. Single item analyses revealed that gay men ($M = 3.69, SD = 0.97$) provided significantly stronger agreement with the macho stereotype than lesbian women did ($M = 3.09, SD = 1.00$), $F(2, 75) = 3.20, p = .047, \eta^2 = .079$, but neither lesbian or gay participants differed from bisexual participants ($M = 3.62, SD = 0.75; p > .139$). Additionally, gay men ($M = 3.56, SD = 0.92$) were slightly more likely to perceive heterosexual women as allies than lesbian women ($M = 2.88, SD = 0.97$) and bisexual people ($M = 3.41, SD = 0.94$), $F(2, 57) = 2.77, p = .054, \eta^2 = .097$. Overall, these subsample comparisons indicate that, regardless of their own sexual identities, LGB people hold very similar beliefs about heterosexual men and about heterosexual women.

LGB participants differed in their ratings of heterosexual people, $F(30, 152) = 2.27, p = .001, \eta^2 = .309$, and single analyses revealed differences on the following stereotypes: ignorant, $F(2, 93) = 3.16, p = .047, \eta^2 = .066$, unattractive, $F(2, 93) = 5.68, p = .005, \eta^2 = .112$, closed-minded, $F(2, 93) = 5.25, p = .007, \eta^2 = .104$, and breeders, $F(2, 93) = 5.01, p = .009, \eta^2 = .100$. Lesbian women ($M = 4.04, SD = 0.74$) compared with gay men ($M = 3.31, SD = 1.26$) more strongly endorsed the stereotype that heterosexual people are ignorant; neither lesbian nor gay participants differed from bisexual people ($M = 3.63, SD = 1.27$). Further, lesbian ($M = 3.79, SD = 0.79$) and bisexual ($M = 3.73, SD = 0.94$) participants provided greater agreement with the closed-minded stereotype than gay men did ($M = 3.06, SD = 1.21$); lesbian women also more strongly agreed that heterosexual people are unattractive than gay men did, although lesbian ($M = 2.79, SD = 0.69$), gay ($M = 2.11, SD = 0.83$), and bisexual ($M = 2.43, SD = 0.82$) participants provided relatively low ratings on this item compared to the other stereotypes included in the people condition. Finally, gay men ($M = 3.71, SD = 1.15$) endorsed the breeder stereotype about heterosexual people to a greater extent than bisexual people ($M = 2.90, SD = 1.03$), though lesbian women ($M = 3.50, SD = 0.96$) did not significantly differ from gay and bisexual participants.

These subsample differences depart from the trends found in Study 1. In Study 1, LGB participants differed in the frequency to which they provided some stereotypes about heterosexual men and women; in these analyses, sexual minorities uniformly held personal beliefs about heterosexual men and women. Yet, LGB people differed in their beliefs about heterosexual people. This inconsistency across studies is worthy of investigation. Specifically, future research should take into account who is being imagined as “heterosexual people” (e.g., a heterosexual couple, heterosexual men). Perhaps, lesbian and bisexual people thought differently about “heterosexual people” than gay men did because they were imaging a different target group than gay men were. Moreover, in Study 1, a lesbian participant was asked to provide stereotypes held by other “LGB people” (not just other lesbians). In Study 2, a lesbian participant was asked about her personal beliefs (as a lesbian). Future research could examine cultural stereotypes based on more specific aspects of identity (i.e., cultural stereotypes only held by lesbians) to understand the underpinnings of subsample differences.

Summary

In Study 2, we assessed LGBQT people’s personal beliefs about heterosexual target groups. Consistent with Study 1, these data indicated that sexual minorities perceive heterosexual men and people in a more negative light than they perceive heterosexual women. Additionally, this study lends further support to the idea that stereotypes about men and people overlap; perceptions of heterosexual men and people did not differ on several stereotypes (e.g., closed-minded, homophobic). Last, these data allowed us to take a closer look at subsample differences among LGB participants. Given there were almost no differences between lesbian, gay, and bisexual participants in their ratings of heterosexual men and women, we infer that some beliefs about heterosexual men and women may be almost universally held in LGB communities. In contrast, perceptions of heterosexual people may be dependent on a perceivers’ sexual orientation or interpretation of “people.”

General Discussion

This research enters new empirical territory by investigating stereotype processes with sexual minority samples. We hope that the findings from these two studies will help spawn interesting research questions that investigate minority perspectives. The aim of highlighting minority perspectives in intergroup relations is not to portray minorities in a negative light or cast them as responsible for tension between groups, but rather to uncover the reality of minority groups’ thoughts, attitudes, and lived experiences related to society’s dominant groups.

Study 1 catalogued stereotypes about a dominant group and Study 2 tested whether these stereotypes are perceived to be true. Across both studies, stereotypes about heterosexual men were generally more negative than stereotypes about heterosexual women. Further, the inclusion of the gender unspecified target group (i.e., “heterosexual people”) provided insight into what contributes to LGB people’s perceptions of heterosexuals as a larger group. Consistent with Eagly and Kite’s (1987) framework, unless participants were explicitly asked to consider the gender of the target group, they seemingly relied on their stereotypes about heterosexual men to report on their stereotypes and beliefs about heterosexual people. Given the negative stereotypes associated with heterosexual men, this pattern of overlap may contribute to negative perceptions of heterosexuals, overall. Ultimately, this set of findings provides further evidence for social structural theory of stereotype content in a new context (heterosexual/LGBQT dynamics) and further highlights the importance of specifying gender in stereotype processes.

As suggested by some stereotype themes and items, participants sometimes used distinctive vocabulary to convey LGB people’s stereotypes about heterosexuals. Participants used words such as “breeders,” “fag hags,” “baby factories,” “fruit flies,” and “allies” to describe stereotypes about heterosexual target groups. The organic use of these words by our participants uncovered an ingroup vocabulary that exists within the LGB community that is used in reference to heterosexual men, women, and people. It is highly unlikely that heterosexual people would choose such terms to describe themselves; in fact, they might not even be aware that this language exists. Moreover, it is unlikely that these terms would have been found in preexisting stereotype taxonomies or generated by researchers for scale-construction; thus, we believe this language lends support to the importance of qualitative research in capturing phenomena and embracing minority perspectives in research. We hope these rich data help other researchers to discover...
new theoretical insights about intergroup relations that are unique to LGBQT and heterosexual dynamics, rather than using a “one size fits all” approach in studying minority and dominant group relationships (e.g., applying preestablished frameworks to sexual minority samples).

Limitations and Future Directions

The current research focuses on only the cognitive aspect of intergroup biases—stereotyping; thus, we can only speculate about how cognitive biases toward heterosexuals manifest in terms of attitudes (prejudice) and behavior toward heterosexuals. We believe that stereotypes and personal beliefs about heterosexuals likely affect sexual minorities’ quality of interactions with heterosexuals. For example, if a lesbian woman knows that a stereotype about heterosexual women is that they are “teases” and she personally believes this stereotype to be true, she may take extra precautions in her interactions with heterosexual women who show romantic or sexual interest in her. In turn, this may affect how she behaves toward the heterosexual woman: she may either wrongly assume the woman is showing romantic interest when there is none or assume that the woman’s genuine interest is suspect. The possibility that one’s stereotyping of a dominant group may affect interpersonal relationships in romantic, platonic, and professional contexts is certainly a worthy future direction.

Another limitation of our research stems from the recruitment of our participants and the resulting selection bias. Participants were recruited by online postings of the survey targeted toward LGB- and LGBQT-identifying adults. We infer that our participants are more open and comfortable with their sexual orientations than other sexual minorities because they volunteered to participate in this research. Consequently, the responses of the sample used in this research may not fully reveal the thoughts of more diverse LGBQT communities (e.g., individuals who are uncomfortable identifying themselves as “LGBQT” and individuals with limited Internet access).

Last, the bisexual-identified individuals recruited for this survey largely consisted of women; thus, the inclusion of more bisexual men, as well as people who identify in non-LGB ways (e.g., “pansexual” and “queer”), would help to provide a more accurate reflection of all sexual minorities’ perceptions of heterosexuals.

Ultimately, by being aware of stereotypes that sexual minorities hold about heterosexual men, women, and people, heterosexual individuals can be more vigilant about how their words and actions are perceived by sexual minorities. Knowing what the minority group thinks of the dominant group would be especially beneficial for heterosexuals who are motivated to reduce their prejudice and stereotyping of sexual minorities. Although these heterosexuals may have good intentions, they may not be aware of which stereotypes they are confirming in intergroup interactions, which may lead to an LGBQT person’s desire to avoid future intergroup interactions. For instance, if a heterosexual man wishes to become friends with a coworker who identifies as lesbian, stereotypes about his group’s degree of homophobia, intolerance, and disregard for the validity of lesbian relationships may affect how he is perceived by the lesbian woman. As a result, he should be mindful of how his actions or comments may be interpreted as stereotypical. Previous research argues that a fundamental obstacle to establishing positive relationships and interactions between groups is the expectations and preconceived perceptions that groups have about one another; thus, it is critical to be aware of how one’s group is perceived by another and to adjust one’s actions accordingly (Devine, Evett, & Vasquez-Suson, 1996).

Similarly, we believe it is beneficial for sexual minorities to be aware of stereotypes and how they may influence their thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors toward heterosexuals. For instance, as discussed in the Study 1 results, one gay man stated the following:

... In the workplace, this is very difficult for many homosexuals, such as myself, to interview or to be under a straight male even if he does not have prejudices against gays. It is still in the back of your mind as a gay male.

This participant’s response implied that simply knowing that a heterosexual man may fit one’s stereotypes could be enough to distract or stress a sexual minority in intergroup interactions (in this case, from performing well in an interview). Thus, it would be useful for LGBQT people to recognize when they are drawing on cultural stereotypes to form their impressions of heterosexuals. This information could help LGBQT people determine when their stereotypes are activated and how to overcome the activation if the perceptions are irrational or exaggerated.

On the basis of the relative ease our participants had with listing stereotypes about heterosexual target groups and participants’ use of ingroup vocabulary that we identified in our thematic coding, we suspect that the process of stereotyping exist, change, and grow among LGBQT communities. Now that a catalogue of stereotypes has been generated from LGBQT perspectives, it would be fascinating to see how stereotypes change over time with society’s increasing acceptance of same-sex sexuality.

Finally, it is unknown what role, if any, that the awareness of these stereotypes serves for sexual minorities. It is possible that stereotyping the dominant group, or being in the role of the “perceiver” rather than the “target,” may offer sexual minorities the opportunity to form bonds with other ingroup members, to unify around a common “enemy” (e.g., share reality; Echterhoff, Higgins, & Levine, 2009; Hardin & Conley, 2001; Hardin & Higgins, 1996), and to feel a heightened sense of belonging with the community, which ultimately may buffer the effects of stigma (e.g., Fingerhut, Peplau, & Gable, 2010). As stigma researchers approach a more health-focused framework, future research should evaluate stereotyping a dominant outgroup as a strategy to ameliorate the psychological stress related to having a stigmatized identity (Major & O’Brien, 2005; C. T. Miller & Kaiser, 2001).

Conclusion

In the current research, we prioritized sexual minorities’ perceptions of heterosexual women, men, and people. We hope that researchers will continue to involve minorities in their understanding of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination by acknowledging minorities’ perceptions of dominant groups. Further, we encourage researchers to distinguish between men and women in evaluating stereotypes about broader categories. As evidenced by the results of this research, this approach to intergroup relations research expands our understanding of the information sexual minorities may rely on to form their impressions of heterosexual people.
PERCEPTIONS OF HETEROSEXUAL MEN, WOMEN, AND PEOPLE

References


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