Proposer gender, pleasure, and danger in casual sex offers among bisexual women and men

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HIGHLIGHTS
• We examined gender differences in casual sex acceptance among bisexuals.
• Perceived sexual capabilities of proposer were best predictor of offer acceptance.
• Gender differences emerged in acceptance of actual casual sex offers only from men.
• Proposer sexual capabilities explained gender differences in acceptance rates.

Abstract
Previous research suggested that the gender of the casual sex proposer is an important predictor of casual sex acceptance, particularly because male proposers are perceived to have lesser sexual capabilities than female proposers (Conley, 2011). We examined this hypothesis more directly by taking advantage of unique characteristics associated with bisexual individuals. Bisexual people have the capacity to be attracted to both women and men; thus, the present studies tease apart the effects of participant gender and proposer gender — something that is not possible in studies of casual sex among heterosexual individuals. Gender of proposer was a significant predictor in each study, prior to controlling for sexual capabilities, as Conley (2011) predicted. No gender differences emerged in acceptance of actual casual sex offers from women — gender differences only emerged in response to actual offers from men. Sexual capabilities mediated the relationship between gender and acceptance of the casual sex offer.

Introduction
Gender differences in preferences for casual sex are some of the largest sexuality gender differences (Oliver & Hyde, 1993; Petersen & Hyde, 2011). In likely the most well-known and influential set of experiments about casual sex, Clark and Hatfield (1989) found that about 70% of men in their studies accepted casual sex offers from women, whereas none of the women accepted casual sex offers from men. Conley (2011) posited that these findings are due at least in part to the gender of the proposer, in contrast to the long-standing focus on the attitudes of those who accept (or do not accept) the casual sex offer. In the current research, we addressed these well-known gender differences in casual sex among a population of women and men who can give us insight into the complex interplay between proposer gender and acceptor gender in casual sex: bisexual individuals.

Gender and engagement in casual sex: methodological issues
A common assumption about the Clark and Hatfield (1989) studies, as well as subsequent research addressing casual sex attitudes and behaviors, is that a scenario in which a woman is approached for sex by a man is socially equivalent to a man being approached for sex by a woman. However, this assumption is not logical. A woman who is approached for heterosexual casual sex is not approached by a genderless individual; rather, she is approached by a man. Likewise, a man who is approached for heterosexual casual sex is not approached by a genderless individual; rather, he is approached by a woman. If the meanings of the categories “female” and “male” in our culture were identical, then the situation of a male being approached for casual sex by a woman could be considered equivalent to a female being approached by a man. However, women and men are not equivalent in casual sex contexts — “female” and “male” have very distinct and unique meanings in our culture. Conley (2011) found that males are perceived as poorer casual sex partners (i.e., less sexually capable, more dangerous) than females, which could explain why women accept offers (from men) less frequently than men accept offers (from women). Therefore, the meaning
of the categories “woman” and “man” is very different — the experience of being approached by a woman for casual sex is substantially different than being approached by a man for casual sex. Due to this fact, the gender of the proposer may be as important as the gender of the person being propositioned for sex (Conley, 2011).

To examine the unique effects of gender of casual sex proposers from the gender of the person being propositioned, it is ideal to address casual sex in a context in which both women and men are receiving offers from both women and men with the possibility of accepting such offers. Within heterosexual populations, this is not possible — heterosexual women are not attracted to other women and heterosexual men are not attracted to other men; hence, heterosexual women and men could not be expected to view offers from women and men equivalently. Therefore, it was necessary to examine a different population in order to address this issue. In the current research, we investigated the role that proposer gender, perceived danger from and perceived sexual capabilities of the proposer play in bisexual women’s and bisexual men’s decision-making surrounding casual sex.

**Theoretical utility of studying bisexual individuals**

Typically, research addressing gender differences in casual sex exclusively relies on heterosexual individuals within heterosexual contexts. These parameters limit the ways in which the role of gender can be investigated because the gender of the sexual partner is confounded with the gender of the participant (West, Popp, & Kenny, 2008). However, by examining the experiences and attitudes of bisexuals, we can more comprehensively examine gender differences in acceptance rates of casual sex. Bisexual people—who acknowledge attraction to both women and men—provide us with a within-group comparison to assess both reactions to opposite and same-gender casual sex proposers. A within-group comparison allows us to examine if males are less appealing stimuli as casual sex proposers than women (as suggested in Conley, 2011). Bisexual people’s self-identified attractions to both women and men will allow us to consider reactions to casual sex proposals from both genders. As such, this provides us with a way to test Conley’s (2011) argument that gender of the proposer of casual sex may be as important as gender of the participant in understanding acceptance of casual sex offers. Thus, the current research expands that of Conley (2011) by capitalizing on bisexual people’s acknowledged potential for attraction to both women and men. This allows us to directly test Conley’s hypothesis that the gender of the proposer determines whether an individual accepts a casual sex offer.

**Theoretical perspectives addressing gender differences in casual sex**

Conley (2011) found that characteristics of the casual sex proposer, such as the perception that a proposer is sexually capable (i.e., will provide a pleasurable sexual experience) or the perception that a proposer poses danger, could elucidate gender differences in acceptance of casual sex offers. Thus, we will consider two theories that may play a role in documented differences between women and men in casual sex preferences: pleasure theory and risk perception theory.

**Pleasure and casual sex**

According to pleasure theory (Abramson & Pinkerton, 2002), a central sexual motivation is the acquisition of pleasure. Previous work has found that pleasure-seeking was a robust predictor of engagement in casual sex, with other evolutionary-grounded theories (e.g., sexual strategies theory) not similarly predictive of participation in casual sex (Conley, 2011). In the current research, we do not draw on theories of reproductive success or gender-specific mechanisms (i.e., Buss & Schmitt, 1993) to address sexual decision-making because they have not proven useful in prior work (Conley, 2011; Conley et al., under review). We predict that among bisexual individuals (as among heterosexuals), the anticipation of pleasure drives sexual motivations.

Although pleasure theory does not address gender or sexual orientation differences explicitly, the primary thesis of pleasure theory is that sexual pleasure itself is the central motivating factor in sexual decision-making and sexual interactions. To the extent that women and men—regardless of sexual orientation—have equally pleasurable sexual experiences, pleasure theory predicts that they would be equally likely to engage in casual sex (see Abramson & Pinkerton, 2002; Rudman, Fetterolf, & Sanchez, 2013). Pleasure theory, then, is both gender-neutral and sexual orientation-neutral: it attributes motivation for pleasurable experiences as the drive for engaging in sexual activities (for a full discussion see Conley, 2011; Rudman et al., 2013). If pleasure is the main motivational force in sexual decision-making, sexual capabilities of a proposer should be paramount in casual sex interactions. This has been demonstrated in a heterosexual context; the current research expands the argument to bisexual women and men considering offers from both women and men.

**Risk and casual sex**

In addition to the anticipated pleasure garnered from a sexual encounter, the perceived risk associated with a proposer may also explain acceptance of casual sex offers. Based on risk perception theory (Gustafson, 1998), women perceive the world as more risky than men do because of ample socialization indicating that they need to be aware of danger. These perceptions of risk may promote women’s reluctance to engage in casual sex. Conley (2011) expanded the construct of risk perception by suggesting that in addition to women being more cautious than men in their sexual choices, most cultures also assume that men are perceived as more dangerous sexual partners than women. Within casual sex encounters, male proposers were perceived as riskier than female proposers in terms of physical threat (Conley, 2011). Thus, if risk perception (and Conley’s hypothesis about the greater perceived danger of men) can explain gender differences in sexual behavior, we would expect male proposers to engender more concerns about physical danger than female proposers—regardless of whether the recipient of the proposal is female or male—in addition to women perceiving more risk overall than men. Further, we would also expect perceived risk to reduce acceptance of the casual sex offer for both female and male participants propositioned by a male.

The current research

In the current study, we addressed a central issue left untested by Conley’s (2011) research on casual sex—whether people are more likely to accept casual sex offers from women than from men. We expanded Conley’s (2011) assertion that women are more appealing casual sex partners (i.e., perceived as providing a more pleasurable sexual experience and as less risky) than men by examining bisexual people’s reactions to casual sex proposals from either women or men. Given Conley’s (2011) argument that the gender of the proposer is a crucial factor in acceptance of offers, gender of the proposer is a more precise factor to examine. As such, using samples of bisexual participants is a departure from previous research that employed heterosexual samples (e.g., Conley, 2011; Conley, Ziegler, & Moors, 2013). Related, bisexual samples also allowed us to test a second hypothesis: Conley (2011) proposed that people are less likely to accept casual sex offers from men than from women because men are perceived to have poorer sexual capabilities than women. Though it was not possible to explore the role of proposer gender in previous studies of heterosexuals due to the confound between the gender of the proposer and the gender of the participant, the present study can address this methodological drawback more fully by examining the experiences of individuals attracted to both women and men. To our knowledge, employing a bisexual sample is the only means by which we can directly test Conley’s assertion that males are perceived as less appealing casual sex partners.
than females and whether the proposer's sexual capability is the reason for this lack of appeal.

Additionally, we tested both pleasure theory and the risk perception paradigm by examining the role of perceived sexual capabilities and risk (i.e., perceived danger) of casual sex proposers in decision-making about casual sex among bisexual women and men. We explored whether bisexual women and men perceived male proposers of casual sex as less likely to afford pleasurable sexual encounters than women. Likewise, we assessed whether perceived pleasure predicts acceptance of casual sex offers when taking into account the gender of the participant and proposer. We also considered the role of perceived physical danger related to casual sex offers from women and men among bisexual participants.

Study 1: reactions to hypothetical casual sex proposals among bisexual women. In Study 1, we considered bisexual women's reactions to hypothetical offers from either a woman or a man. These data were originally used in Conley (2011), but we have conducted a different set of analyses using unique variables to address new hypotheses. Conley (2011) demonstrated that the bisexual women in this sample were more likely to accept a casual sex offer from a woman than from a man (Study 1d). However, that study did not examine the degree to which bisexual women perceived female or male proposers of casual sex as sexually capable or physically dangerous and did not address predictors of casual sex acceptance. In the present study, we first addressed whether the bisexual women in this study perceived female and male proposers differently in terms of risk and pleasure. Next, we assessed whether pleasure, danger, or proposer gender predicted acceptance of casual sex.

Method

Participants and procedure

Bisexual women (n = 84) were recruited by contacting college lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer organizations and asking that the link to the online survey be posted in the group's newsletter, website, or Internet listserv; thus, this was a college student sample. In terms of the sample’s ethnicity, the women were 84% European American, 9% Asian American, 5% Latina/o and 3% African American. The mean age was 20 years old.²

Measures

In the current analyses, we examined acceptance of casual sex offers and both the perceived sexual capabilities of the proposer as well as perceived danger of the proposer. Both the sexual capabilities and risk scales consisted of a stem: “How likely is it that the proposer...” followed by items to be rated. All ratings were made using a seven-point scale (1 = Not at all Likely to 7 = Extremely Likely).

Acceptance of casual sex offer

We assessed the likelihood that participants would accept a casual sex offer. Participants were prompted with the following scenario: An attractive member of the opposite sex/same sex approaches you on campus and says, “I have been noticing you around campus and I find you to be very attractive. Would you go to bed with me tonight?” Participants received either a version in which a woman approached them (i.e., “an attractive member of the same sex”) or a version in which a man approached them. After reading the prompt, participants were asked to respond to the following item: Assuming you were free that night, how likely would you be to agree to a sexual encounter with this person? Participants responded to this by indicating whether they would accept the sexual proposal on a 7-point scale (1 = Not at all Likely and 7 = Extremely Likely).

Perceived sexual capabilities of the proposer

Participants indicated their impressions of the sexual capabilities of the individual who made the casual sex offer. Two items were used to assess the amount of pleasure that participants expected to receive from the proposer: “How likely is it that the proposer would be a great lover?” and “How likely is it that the proposer would provide you with a positive sexual experience?” with higher numbers indicating more positive reactions to the proposer’s sexual capabilities. These two items were combined into a sexual capabilities scale (α = .77).

Perceived danger of the proposer

To assess danger associated with the proposer of a casual sex offer, participants indicated perceived danger posed by the proposer. Items included: “How likely is it that the proposer would try to physically hurt you?”, “How likely is it that the proposer would try to rob you or mug you?”, and “How likely is it that the proposer would try to sexually assault you?”, with higher numbers indicating more perceived danger. These three items were combined into a danger scale (α = .85).

Study 1: results and discussion. This data set was originally used by Conley (2011). Conley (2011) found that the bisexual women in this sample were more likely to accept an offer from a woman than from a man. However, Conley (2011) did not examine bisexual women’s perceptions of female or male proposers of casual sex as sexually capable or physically dangerous, and also did not determine the factors that predicted acceptance of casual sex. We address these specific questions here.

Gender differences in perceptions of proposers: pleasure and danger

Two t-tests were performed. Interestingly, although the means were in the correct direction, the bisexual women did not perceive female and male proposers significantly differently with regard to their sexual capabilities. However, bisexual women rated the male proposer as a greater physical danger (M = 4.09) than the female proposer (M = 3.39), t(82) = 2.59, p < .02, d = .57, consistent with Conley’s (2011) hypothesis.

Predicting acceptance of casual sex offers

To examine whether gender of the proposer, pleasure, and physical danger are predictors of acceptance of casual sex among bisexual women, a stepwise linear regression analysis was performed with likelihood of accepting the casual sex offer serving as the outcome variable. All variables were mean centered prior to analysis. On the first step, gender of the proposer (0 = female; 1 = male) was entered into the regression equation. Gender of the proposer was entered at step 1 of the analysis to test Conley’s (2011) hypothesis that men are less appealing casual sex partners than women. On the second step, danger and sexual capabilities were entered into the regression equation. See Table 1 for results. Pleasure theory and risk perception theory suggest that these variables reflect reasons why male proposers are less appealing than

<table>
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Note: The values of B and t are at step entry. The value of R² is cumulative. The value of ΔR² represents the change with the addition of the step. The multiple R is significant at step 1 but not significant at step 2.

* p < .05.
** p < .01.
female proposers (thus the effect of gender of the proposer should be weaker once these variables are entered into the equation). Pleasure theory and risk perception theory also suggest that these variables will independently predict acceptance of casual sex offers.

As per Conley’s (2011) assertion that the gender of the proposer is an important factor in acceptance of casual sex, gender of the proposer significantly predicted acceptance of the casual sex offer on the first step. Specifically, bisexual women were more likely to accept offers of casual sex from other women than from men. On the second step, consistent with pleasure theory, perceived sexual capabilities of the proposer also significantly predicted acceptance of the hypothetical offer, such that bisexual women who perceived proposers as possessing greater sexual capabilities (e.g., “would be a great lover”) were more likely to accept an offer of casual sex. Likewise, the effect of gender of proposer was reduced with the addition of the sexual capabilities variable. Danger was not a significant predictor of acceptance of the offer.

Summary
These findings highlight the role that anticipated pleasure and the gender of the proposer play in the acceptance of hypothetical casual sex offers from women and men among female bisexuals. Consistent with Conley’s (2011) hypothesis, gender of the proposer predicted whether or not participants would accept a hypothetical casual sex offer, such that female bisexual individuals were more likely to accept casual sex offers from female proposers than male proposers. Additionally, consistent with pleasure theory, proposers who were perceived to have better sexual capabilities received more favorable responses to their offers of casual sex among bisexual women.

However, because we only examined the reactions of bisexual women, we cannot speak to whether gender differences exist in the reactions of bisexual women and men. This issue will be addressed in the next study.

Study 2: reactions to hypothetical casual sex proposals among bisexual women and men. In Study 2, we considered the reactions of both bisexual women and men to hypothetical casual sex propositions by either a man or a woman. This design allowed us to determine if the findings of Study 1 would replicate in a sample of both females and males. Moreover, this study examined the role of the gender of the proposer, pleasure, and physical danger among bisexual men and their decision to engage in (hypothetical) casual sex.

Method
Participants and procedure
Participants were recruited for an online survey through the volunteer section of craigslist.org. In particular, we recruited for lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals; only bisexual individuals were directed to this survey (lesbian and gay male participants were directed to another survey). Of the 354 bisexual participants, 66% were female and 34% were male. The ethnic distribution of the sample was largely European American (68%), Latina/o (12%) and African American (6%). The mean age was 31 years old. The data presented here include only participants who identified as bisexual and had at least one sexual or romantic experience with a member of their same sex. Participants who fit this criteria also indicated their degree of attraction to members of the same sex and members of the opposite sex on a 100-point scale, such that 0 = “exclusively homosexual” or attracted to members of the same sex and 100 = “exclusively heterosexual” or attracted to members of the opposite sex. The current sample of bisexual participants averaged a score of 50.78, suggesting that the sample was nearly equally attracted to women and men.

Measures
Acceptance of casual sex offer
Participants were prompted with the following scenario: “You are at a casual get together with some friends. While there, a friend introduces you to a cute [girl/guy]. You begin talking to [her/him] and the two of you hit it off. Your best guess is that [she/he] is [straight/bisexual].” One thing leads to the next and [she/he] invite[s] you back to [her/his] place. While you are there, the two of you start kissing and [she/he] asks you if you will have sex with [her/him].” Participants were randomly assigned to receive either a version in which a woman approached them or a version in which a man approached them. Participants then indicated how likely they would be to accept the casual sex offer using the same seven-point scale from Study 1 (1 = Not at all Likely and 7 = Extremely Likely).

Proposer personality measures
As in Study 1, participants rated the hypothetical proposer on the sexual capabilities (α = .79) and danger (α = .88) scales.

Study 2: results and discussion. First, we will address whether gender differences emerged in acceptance of the hypothetical casual sex offers among bisexual individuals. Next, we will consider whether perceptions of the proposer varied by gender of the participant or by gender of the proposer. Lastly, we will assess whether the gender of the proposer, the gender of the participant, pleasure or danger were related to acceptance of hypothetical casual sex offers.

Gender differences in acceptance of casual sex offers
We conducted a 2 (Gender of Participant) × 2 (Gender of Proposer) ANOVA to determine the interactive effects of participant gender and proposer gender on acceptance of casual sex offers. Consistent with previous research (Clark & Hatfield, 1989; Conley, 2011), gender differences emerged in response to hypothetical offers from same-gender versus opposite-gender individuals, such that bisexual men were more likely to accept the hypothetical offer (M = 5.52, SD = 1.74) than bisexual women (M = 4.05, SD = 2.11), F (1, 350) = 48.96, p = .001, ηp² = .12. Likewise, a main effect of target gender also emerged: participants were more likely to accept an offer from a woman (M = 5.01, SD = 1.96) than from a man (M = 4.11, SD = 2.16), F (1, 350) = 15.87, p < .0005, ηp² = .05, replicating the findings of Study 1. The participant gender by gender of proposer interaction was not significant.

Gender differences in perceptions of proposers: pleasure and danger
Next, we conducted two separate 2 (Gender of Participant) × 2 (Gender of Proposer) ANOVAs with danger and sexual capabilities serving as the dependent variables to determine whether bisexual women and men perceived female and male proposers of casual sex (targets) differently.

Sexual capabilities
Only main effects emerged for sexual capabilities. Bisexual men perceived the hypothetical proposer to have higher sexual capabilities (M = 4.72, SD = .84) than bisexual women did (M = 4.09, SD = 1.27), F (1, 350) = 27.08, p = .0005, ηp² = .07. Moreover, regardless of participant gender, female proposers were perceived to have better sexual capabilities (M = 4.69, SD = 1.07) than male proposers (M = 4.25, SD = 1.13), F (1, 350) = 27.08, p = .0005, ηp² = .04. Once again, no interactions emerged, indicating that both bisexual women and men perceived female proposers as more sexually capable than male proposers.
Danger

Consistent with risk perception research (Levinson, Jaccard, & Beamer, 1995), bisexual women perceived the hypothetical proposer to be more dangerous ($M = 2.18$, $SD = 1.13$) than the bisexual men in this sample did ($M = 1.86$, $SD = 1.08$); $(1, 350) = 8.07$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2_{p} = .02$. A main effect of target gender emerged, such that male proposers were perceived as more dangerous ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 1.26$) than female proposers ($M = 1.83$, $SD = .09$); $(1, 350) = 8.41$, $p = .004$, $\eta^2_{p} = .03$. No interactions emerged on the danger scale, indicating that both women and men perceived male proposers of casual sex as more dangerous than female proposers.

Predicting acceptance of hypothetical casual sex offers

To examine if gender of the proposer, pleasure, and physical danger were significant predictors of acceptance of casual sex among bisexual women, a multiple regression analysis was performed with the likelihood of accepting casual sex serving as the dependent variable. All variables were centered prior to analysis. On the first step, gender and gender of proposer ($0 =$ female; $1 =$ male) were entered. On the second step, sexual capabilities and danger were entered into the equation. See Table 2 for results. Conley (2011) hypothesized that gender of the proposer would predict acceptance of the casual sex offer. Consistent with Conley's hypothesis that gender of the proposer is a key factor in whether people accept casual sex offers, gender of the proposer indeed predicted acceptance of the offer. Bisexual participants were more likely to accept offers of casual sex from females than males. Gender of the participant was also predictive; bisexual men were more likely to accept sexual offers from females than males. Gender of the proposer was again a significant factor in acceptance of casual sex offers, consistent with Conley's (2011) claim. The effects of gender of proposer were reduced upon addition of the sexual capabilities variable. Danger did not predict acceptance of the offer.

Summary

Consistent with prior research, this study demonstrated that both female and male bisexuals agreed that male casual sex proposers are less appealing—in terms of their sexual capabilities—than female casual sex proposers. Also consistent with Study 1, the sexual capabilities of the proposer emerged as an important predictor of casual sex. Finally, we found that gender of the proposer was again a significant factor in acceptance of casual sex offers, consistent with Conley's (2011) claim. However, gender of the participant remained an important factor as well—suggesting that there are reasons beyond gender of the proposer, perceived sexual capabilities or perceived danger of the proposer that contribute to women being less likely to accept hypothetical offers of casual sex. Given that reported gender stereotypical behavior is more pronounced in studies that ask participants to comment on hypothetical behavior (rather than actual behavior), we suggest that the differences might be larger because the participants are predicting hypothetical behaviors and, thus, may be responding in socially desirable ways. In the next study, we explored this issue further by examining actual, remembered casual sex offers.

Table 2

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Note: The values of $B$ and $\beta$ are at step entry. The value of $R^2$ is cumulative. The value of $\Delta^2$ represents the change with the addition of the step. The multiple $R$ is significant at step 1 but not significant at step 2.

* $p < .01$.
** $p < .001$.

Method

Participants were recruited for an online survey through craigslist.org and through listserves directed toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer individuals. Bisexual participants ($n = 327$) were 73% female. The ethnic distribution of the sample was largely European American (80%), Latina/o (8%) and African American (8%). The average age was 32 years old. Lesbian and gay individuals were also recruited for this study, but were funneled to a different survey that specifically addressed lesbian and gay participants. As in Study 2, the data presented here include only participants who had at least one sexual or romantic experience with a member of their same sex. The current sample of bisexual participants averaged a score of 52.16 on the sexual orientation scale (used in Study 2), suggesting that the sample was nearly equally attracted to women and men.

Offer acceptance

We asked participants to remember the most recent incident in which someone proposed casual sex to them. We emphasized that they should think of the most recent incident in which a proposal was made, regardless of whether or not they agreed to engage in sex with the person. Those who could not recall ever having received a casual sex offer were directed out of the survey. Participants were asked: has anyone ever asked you to have casual sex? Those who could remember a casual sex offer (94.9%) were retained. We did not include those who indicated that they were not sure if they had ever experience a casual sex offer (9.4%); the open-ended explanations of their lack of certainty (their open-ended explanations of their lack of certainty suggested that these encounters were unusual, ambiguous, and difficult to categorize) or those who reported receiving an offer from someone of an unknown gender, or from a couple rather than an individual. We specifically removed these individuals from the present analyses, because we were interested in responses to proposers based on their gender, and hence it was necessary to focus on individuals who had been approached by one female or one male. Likewise, participants who received offers from lesbians or gay men were excluded to be consistent with Study 2 (in which we only considered offers from heterosexual or bisexual individuals due to prejudice toward bisexual women among lesbians; see Rust, 1995).
**Proposer sexual capabilities and danger measures**

Participants once again responded to the items concerning perceived danger of the proposer ($\alpha = .87$) and sexual capabilities ($\alpha = .80$) of the proposer.

**Study 3: results and discussion.** First, we addressed whether gender differences emerged in acceptance of actual remembered casual sex offers and whether perceptions of the proposers varied by gender among bisexual individuals. Subsequently, we assessed whether sexual capabilities, danger, participant gender or proposer gender predicted acceptance of casual sex in actual remembered offers.

**Gender differences in acceptance of casual sex offers**

To address gender differences in acceptance of the casual sex offers, we conducted a series of chi-square analyses to determine the independent and interactive effects of gender of participant and gender of proposer in acceptance of casual sex offers. Consistent with Conley (2011), differences emerged in response to actual remembered casual sex offers from same-gender vs. opposite-gender individuals. Participants accepted offers from women more frequently (77% of the time) than from men (only 58% of the time), $\chi^2(1) = 6.90$, $p = .009$, phi = .15. Moreover, a greater percentage of men had accepted the remembered offer (82%) than women (55%), $\chi^2(1) = 19.75$, $p = .0005$, phi = −.25. However, an analysis of the simple effects revealed different patterns for female and male proposers. Although men and women were equally likely to accept an offer from a female (87% and 70%, respectively), women were significantly less likely to accept an offer from a male (52%) than men were (80%), $\chi^2(1) = 15.67$, $p = .0005$, phi = −.19. Thus, what is known to be a very large gender difference – that is, in acceptance rates for casual sex – is eliminated when the proposer is female. This finding departs from that of Study 2, in which women were less likely to accept offers from both women and men. This finding is consistent with ample prior research: gender differences are exaggerated in hypothetical scenarios, and exaggerated in a socially desirable direction in response to actual remembered casual sex offers (which are likely a more accurate reflection of consistent casual sex choices of women and men). As such, it is only proposals from men that are disproportionately rejected by women. In this case, our results suggest that the women in our study may have felt social pressure to reject casual sex in general, but data based on actual encounters suggests that they are only turning down offers from men more than they turn down offers from women.

**Gender differences in perceptions of proposers: pleasure and danger**

Two separate $2 \times 2$ (Gender of Participant) $\times 2$ (Gender of Proposer) ANOVAs were conducted to assess participants’ perceptions of the proposer’s sexual capabilities as well as the danger posed by the proposer.

**Sexual capabilities**

As in Study 2, bisexual men perceived the proposer to have higher sexual capabilities ($M = 4.72, SD = .84$) than bisexual women ($M = 4.09, SD = 1.27$), $F(1, 323) = 7.34$, $p = .007, \eta^2_p = .02$. Also, female proposers were perceived to have better sexual capabilities ($M = 4.63, SD = 1.11$) than male proposers ($M = 3.93, SD = 1.49$), $F(1, 323) = 5.88$, $p = .016, \eta^2_p = .02$. As in Study 2, no interactions emerged. Both bisexual women and bisexual men perceived female proposers as more sexually capable than male proposers.

**Danger**

A main effect of gender of proposer emerged; bisexual participants rated the male proposers as more physically dangerous ($M = 1.77$) than the female proposer ($M = 1.38$), $F(1, 323) = 5.03$, $p = .023, \eta^2_p = .04$. However, the means for perceived physical danger were low, indicating a low perceived threat for both male and female proposers. Moreover, no main effects of participant gender, nor any interaction between participant gender and proposer gender, emerged.

**Predicting acceptance of casual sex offers**

To examine if gender of the proposer, pleasure, and physical danger were significant predictors of actual acceptance of casual sex among bisexual women and men, a logistic regression analysis was performed with acceptance of casual sex ($0 = \text{no}; 1 = \text{yes}$) serving as the dependent variable. All variables were mean centered prior to analysis. On the first step, gender of the proposer and gender of the participant ($0 = \text{female}; 1 = \text{male}$) were entered into the regression equation. On the second step, perceived sexual capabilities and danger were entered into the regression equation. For results, see Table 3. Consistent with the results of Studies 1 and 2, gender of the proposer was significant at the first step, providing further support for Conley’s (2011) assertion that gender of the proposer is an important factor in determining whether people will accept a casual sex offer. Gender of participant also was significant. At the second step, sexual capabilities predicted acceptance of an actual casual sex offer, such that bisexual women and men who perceived their proposer as highly sexually capable were more likely to accept their proposer’s offer of casual sex. In other words, regardless of the proposer’s gender, bisexual people were more likely to engage in casual sex with people they perceived as “a good lover.” Consistent with prior studies, danger was not a significant predictor of acceptance of casual sex. Interestingly, gender of the proposer was no longer significant after controlling for sexual capabilities. This finding is consistent with pleasure theory, which suggests that a central reason women turn down casual sex offers from men is that they anticipate that the men have low sexual capabilities.

**Study 4: do sexual capabilities mediate the relationship between gender of proposer and acceptance of casual sex offers?**

Based on Studies 1 through 3, we can conclude that both gender of the proposer and the sexual capabilities of the proposer are important factors determining whether an individual accepts casual sex offers. Conley (2011) also hypothesized that the reason that offers from male proposers are accepted less frequently is because males are perceived to be poorer sex partners. This is an additional question that cannot be addressed within a heterosexual sample, because gender of proposer is confounded with gender of the participant in that context. However, within a bisexual sample, it is possible to determine if people accept offers more often from women than from men because female proposers are perceived to have better sexual capabilities. To answer this question, we conducted this final study using mediation analyses of the combined data from Studies 1 through 3. We assessed whether the relationship between gender of proposer and acceptance of casual sex was mediated by the perception of sexual capabilities of the proposer.

**Table 3**

<table>
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<th>Step</th>
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<th>SE</th>
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</table>

Note: $p < .05$, $** p < .01$, $*** p < .001$, $**** p < .10$. 
to actual offers from men. The instance of the sexual proposal. Importantly, these perceived danger of the proposer never significantly predicted acceptance of casual sex offers. In all three studies, females were more appealing casual sex offers from women than from men is the perceived sexual capabilities of women are higher than the perceived sexual capabilities of men.

General discussion

In the current research, we examined gender differences in bisexual people’s reactions to casual sex offers from women and men. Gender of the proposer was a significant predictor (prior to controlling for the perceived sexual capabilities of the proposer) of casual sex acceptance across all three studies. Also, across three studies, we found that perceived sexual capabilities was a robust predictor of acceptance of casual sex offers. In all three studies, females were more appealing casual sex proposers than males. Male proposers were perceived to be more dangerous than female proposers across all three studies; however, the perceived danger of the proposer never significantly predicted acceptance of the sexual proposal. Importantly, these findings held in both hypothetical (Studies 1 and 2) and actual remembered (Study 3) casual sex scenarios. Finally, a crucial simple effect emerged in Study 3. Gender differences did not emerge in acceptance rates of actual remembered casual sex offers from women—differences only emerged with regard to actual offers from men. Thus, we have identified another circumstance in which established gender differences in casual sex do not exist, consistent with prior research on the limitations of gender differences in sexuality (Conley, Moors, Matsick, Ziegler, & Valentine, 2011). Finally, we supported Conley’s (2011) hypothesis that the reason people are less likely to accept proposals from men is because of the perceived sexual capabilities of male sexual proposers (Study 4).

Pleasure theory

Pleasure theory (Abramson & Pinkerton, 2002; Conley, 2011) is grounded in the idea that sexual decision-making is driven far more by straightforward and non-gendered motivations than has previously been assumed by evolutionary psychology theorists (see also Eastwick, Luchies, Finkel, & Hunt, 2013). In the current research, anticipated sexual pleasure in the encounter was operationalized through a scale addressing sexual capabilities of the proposer. Proposer sexual capabilities strongly predicted acceptance of the casual sex offer in each of the three studies. Moreover, sexual capabilities are the reason that males are turned down for casual sex more often than females. Thus, the pursuit of sexual pleasure is the dominant force in sexual decision-making among bisexual individuals, just as it is in heterosexual, lesbian, and gay samples (Conley, 2011; Conley, Ziegler, Matsick, & Moors, in preparation).

Risk perception theory

It would seem that risk should have a straightforward association with casual sex acceptance, such that one would be less likely to have sex with someone who is more dangerous (Surbey & Conohan, 2000). In all three studies, bisexual women and men were in agreement that male proposers were a greater threat than female proposers. Surprisingly, then, danger did not significantly predict acceptance of the casual sex offer in these studies. Perceived risk of casual sex proposers has not been a strong predictor of casual sex acceptance in prior studies, even though male proposers are perceived to be more risky than female proposers (Conley, 2011). Previously, researchers have speculated that perceived danger may have an indirect effect on casual sex decision-making in that casual sex would not even be entertained with someone who was not perceived to be safe (Conley, 2011), which could also be the case in these samples.

Finally, the premise of risk perception theory that women perceive more risk than men was supported in Study 2 (addressing hypothetical proposals), but not Study 3 (addressing actual, remembered proposals). Perhaps men considering actual remembered proposals were more attuned to risk of violence because of their status as sexual minorities.

Study 4: results and discussion. A bootstrapped mediation analysis was used to examine the indirect effect of proposer gender and acceptance of casual sex offers, through sexual capabilities of the proposer. The analysis in the present study was performed using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) and re-sampled 5000 times for bootstrapping estimates. For each random sample, the mediated effects were computed. The distribution of these effects was then used to obtain 95% confidence intervals for the size of the indirect effects of sexual capabilities of the proposer. With the obtained confidence intervals, we inferred whether the indirect effect was significant (i.e., does not contain 0).

The proposed mediation hypothesis was examined with a path model implemented with the PROCESS SPSS Macro (Hayes, 2013; model 4). Confirming the hypothesis, results showed that the indirect effect of proposer gender on acceptance of casual sex offer through sexual capabilities of the proposer was significant, $b_{\text{indirect}} = -0.43$, $SE = 0.09$, $CI_{95} = -0.69$ to $-0.27$. As shown in Fig. 1, participants propositioned by a female for casual sex were more likely to accept the offer (hypothetical or actual), as a result of the effect of perceived sexual capabilities. In other words, sexual capabilities mediated the association between proposer gender and acceptance of casual sex. As such, in this sample, the relationship between gender of proposer and acceptance of casual sex offers is further explained by the perceived sexual capabilities of the proposer—thus, the reason that people more readily accept offers from women than from men is that the perceived sexual capabilities of women are higher than the perceived sexual capabilities of men.

![Fig. 1. Mediation model showing perceptions of sexual capabilities as a mediator between gender of casual sex proposer and likelihood of accepting casual sex offer. Standardized beta coefficients are displayed. *p < .05. **p < .01.](image-url)
Because sexual minority men are targeted frequently and at higher rates than sexual minority women (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2011), the gender differences that are typical in heterosexual samples may not have been evidenced here—men in this sample are likely acutely aware of the threat of physical violence in a way that heterosexual men are not.

Overall, despite the intuitive appeal of risk as a factor that determines likelihood of acceptance of a casual sex offer, it does not appear to be useful in explaining choices surrounding this sexual situation.

**Proposer gender**

The principle advance of the current study over research conducted by Conley (2011) was that we directly tested the hypothesis that men are viewed as less appealing sexual partners than women. Conley (2011) provided preliminary evidence that gender of the proposer is an important, and overlooked, factor in casual sex acceptance. By examining the responses of bisexual individuals (who, in this sample, were roughly equally attracted to women and men), we could more effectively determine the independent effects of gender of the participant and gender of the proposer.

The basic thesis that gender of the proposer is an important factor in decision-making about casual sex was supported by the data. In every study, participants had more negative reactions to male proposers than to female proposers, and the proposer’s gender predicted acceptance of the casual sex offer.

The fact that hypothetical male proposers of casual sex are perceived more negatively than hypothetical female proposers of casual sex is not unexpected from a gender theory perspective. Women, as a category or social group, are perceived more positively than men are (Eagly, Mladinic, & Otto, 1991). Moreover, female casual sex proposers are perceived more positively than male casual sex proposers (Ziegler & Conley, under review); women who were envisioning hypothetical male proposers had very negative impressions of the proposer’s characteristics, whereas men envisioning female proposers had far more positive impressions (Conley, 2011). As such, both sexes ascribe more negative characteristics to male casual sex proposers than to female proposers. Thus, across many contexts, male proposers are perceived negatively.

Another important reason to continue to examine proposer gender is that among actual casual sex proposals, no gender differences emerged in offers from women. Bisexual women were only less likely to accept offers from male proposers. No gender differences emerged in acceptance of offers from female casual sex proposers.

**Participant gender differences**

Arguably, the original research that spurred current debates about gender differences in casual sex was Clark and Hatfield’s (1989) findings: at two different time points, about 70% of men accepted a casual sex offer from a woman but no woman, in either of their two studies, ever accepted an offer from a man. The different reactions of women and men to the topic of casual sex have been the subject of a great deal of academic debate (e.g. Buss, 1994; Conley et al., 2013; Hatfield, Hutchison, Bensman, Young, & Rapson, 2012; Wood & Eagly, 2002). The current findings add to a set of contexts in which large gender differences can be eliminated. This is consistent with prior research indicating that gender differences in casual sex acceptance evaporate when the proposers are very appealing or very unappealing (Conley, 2011), when the proposers are good friends (after controlling for sexual capabilities of the proposer, Conley, 2011), among lesbian and gay participants receiving same-sex offers (Conley et al., in preparation), and among heterosexuals, when controlling for the sexual capabilities of the proposer and the anticipated stigma associated with participating in casual sex (Conley et al., under review). Likewise, in this study as in prior studies, the size of gender differences are reduced dramatically simply by moving from researcher-generated and hypothetical proposals to actual remembered encounters.

Casual sex gender differences are among the largest gender differences related to sexuality. However, the current research contributes to an emerging picture of the sociocultural factors that reduce or eliminate gender differences in opposite sex casual sex offers.

**Notes**

1 Initially explaining these differences, sexual strategies theorists proposed that gender differences resulted from gender-specific evolved mechanisms. However, further modifications of theories indicate that the most clear-cut hypotheses from this model are not supported. Because sexual strategies theory has been addressed extensively in other contexts, it will not be further addressed here. Sexual strategies theory is not relevant to bisexual individuals’ decision-making regarding same-sex partners, given that the theory itself is about evolution-based reproductive strategies.

2 Relationship status was not addressed as a factor in this study, as it has not been an important factor in prior studies (see Conley, 2011 for a full discussion).

3 Bisexual identities are highly complex. The existence of bisexuality for males continues to be disputed (Rieger, Chivers, & Bailey, 2005). For women, bisexuality has been co-opted by the pornography industry as a means to titillate heterosexual men (Morrison & Tallack, 2005), possibly undermining bisexuality as viable identity for women. There is also substantial stigma toward bisexual people within lesbian and gay communities (Balsam & Mohr, 2005). For these reasons, it is not clear when we recruit participants from the general public whether they actually engage (or have engaged) in sexual behavior with both women and men or whether they are adopting this identity label for other social presentation purposes. Thus, we chose to focus on individuals who had actually experienced an encounter of a romantic or sexual nature with a member of the same sex and thus have something other than purely heterosexual experiences.

4 Pilot participants indicated that the perceived sexual orientation of the proposer would affect their decision-making about a particular sexual encounter. Therefore, we manipulated sexual orientation to include either heterosexual or bisexual proposers. However, we did not observe differences in how participants responded to these two groups and hence that manipulation was not considered further. We did not include lesbian or gay proposals because bisexuals have a more strongly negative impression of bisexual women than gay men do of bisexual men (see Rust, 1995). As such, in this version of the paper, we excluded those who had received casual sex proposals from lesbians or gay men from Study 3 to make it more equivalent to Study 2. Because the level of bisexual prejudice may be different for lesbians versus gay men, lesbians are not equivalent casual sex proposers (for bi women) to gay men (for bi men). That is, including lesbians would mean that bisexual women might be turning down offers from people who have a very negative bias toward their group, perhaps because of that prejudice rather than because of the appeal of the sex offer. This makes the two groups non-equivalent and would artificially depress women’s rates of acceptance of the same sex offer for factors other than how appealing the sexual proposer is. Though studying this dynamic would be fascinating, it is well beyond the scope of this paper. Moreover, in our samples, the actual proposals largely came from individuals that are perceived to be straight or bisexual. Focusing on these types of proposers therefore provides the most generalizable data.

5 Evolutionary theorists have made the point that pleasure is a proximal cause, whereas the evolutionary dynamics that they posit are distal predictors. However, in previous research (Conley, 2011), sexual strategies variables neither predicted agreement to a particular casual sex encounter directly, nor through pleasure variables, as would be predicted by sexual strategies theory.
References


