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# A Review of the Impact of Gender Self-Confidence on Attitudes toward Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual People

Cindy L. Marino  
*Pacific University*

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# A Review of the Impact of Gender Self-Confidence on Attitudes toward Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual People

## **Abstract**

The United States has increasingly politicized lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) issues over the past decade. The elimination of laws, such as “don’t ask, don’t tell” and the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), illuminates how the country appears to be making changes in regards to overall attitudes toward LGB people. At the same time, anti-gay violence and LGB bullying in school continues to exist. These conflicting attitudes toward LGB people in the United States require further examination in order to work toward the prevention of discrimination. Researchers have identified a variety of factors that either negatively or positively impact heterosexual peoples’ attitudes toward LGB persons, such as geography, contact, education, and religiosity, among other factors. This paper focuses specifically on the impact of gender self-confidence (and gender more broadly) on attitudes toward LGB people. Positive gender self-confidence is proposed as a variable that may be associated with more positive attitudes toward LGB people.

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Thesis

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A REVIEW OF THE IMPACT OF GENDER SELF-CONFIDENCE ON ATTITUDES  
TOWARD LESBIAN, GAY, AND BISEXUAL PEOPLE

A THESIS

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BY

CINDY L. MARINO

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APPROVED:  
Jane M. Tram, Ph.D.

## **Abstract**

The United States has increasingly politicized lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) issues over the past decade. The elimination of laws, such as “don’t ask, don’t tell” and the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), illuminates how the country appears to be making changes in regards to overall attitudes toward LGB people. At the same time, anti-gay violence and LGB bullying in school continues to exist. These conflicting attitudes toward LGB people in the United States require further examination in order to work toward the prevention of discrimination. Researchers have identified a variety of factors that either negatively or positively impact heterosexual peoples’ attitudes toward LGB persons, such as geography, contact, education, and religiosity, among other factors. This paper focuses specifically on the impact of gender self-confidence (and gender more broadly) on attitudes toward LGB people. Positive gender self-confidence is proposed as a variable that may be associated with more positive attitudes toward LGB people.

*Keywords:* LGB, sexual minorities, gender, gender self-confidence, attitudes, knowledge and attitudes

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The United States has increasingly politicized lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) civil rights issues, such as marriage equality, adoption rights, health benefits, and anti-violence laws (Rimmerman, 2001, 2008). For example, in 2010, a United States District Judge struck down the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy, which required military members who were also LGB to essentially stay in the “closet.” In 2013, the United States Supreme Court eliminated the federally enforced ban on same-sex marriage known as the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) (Burks, 2011; Pelts, 2014). These recent major changes to federal law and the continued media coverage regarding these issues, create the opportunity for heterosexual people to reflect upon their own feelings and attitudes toward LGB civil rights issues and LGB people’s lifestyles (Worthington, Savoy, Dillon, & Vernaglia, 2002; Worthington, Dillon, & Becker-Schutte, 2005).

Over the last several decades, there has been an increase in positive support for LGB people, specifically in regards to LGB civil rights (Yang, 1997). Simultaneously, research indicates there has been an increase in reported violent offenses toward LGB people (Skolnik et al. 2008) who are likely to experience discrimination in high schools (Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2007), university campuses (Cotten-Huston & Waite, 2000; Herek, 2002; Hinrichs & Rosenberg, 2002), and also at work (Waldo, 1999). These contradictory findings display a wide-range of attitudes toward LGB people that illuminate the need for further investigation.

There are many different factors that may contribute toward a heterosexual person’s attitude toward LGB people; of interest to this review is the topic of gender as it relates to heterosexual people’s attitudes toward LGB people. Research indicates that a person’s gender identity may influence a person’s decisions (Deaux, 1999). Thus, the more heterosexual people understand their gender and how it might influence their attitudes toward LGB people, the more it might impact their ability to diminish negative or discriminative views toward LGB people. On

a larger level, a better understanding of the impact of gender on attitudes toward LGB persons could influence both the educational and therapeutic fields. Given the contradictory findings regarding attitudes toward LGB people and that gender has been shown to play a large role in a person's attitude toward LGB people, further examination is necessary and it thus will be the focus of this review.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this review is to determine how a person's gender self-confidence might impact their attitudes towards LGB persons. There is a substantial amount of research, which discusses gender as it relates to attitudes toward LGB people. However, there is no research found by this author that specifically discusses how a person's gender self-confidence relates to their attitude toward LGB people. Therefore, this review will examine gender self-confidence and attitudes toward LGB people, following with an examination of the two variables combined. When the intersection of the variables is discussed, the review will examine research on gender more broadly while building the case for the importance of future research to examine how gender self-confidence might relate to attitudes toward LGB people.

### **Literature Review**

#### **An Exploration of Gender**

**A brief history of gender research.** Researchers began investigating differences between men and women by assessing what they thought were the results of biological sex differences (Lewin, 1984). That is, researchers examined correlations between individuals' responses and their biological sex. In addition, much of the first research in the late 1800s that looked at the differences between the sexes was conducted by men and tended to depict females as the inferior sex (Lewin, 1984). For example, in 1891, Joseph Jastrow conducted a study in

which they asked 25 men and 25 women to list 100 words as quickly as possible (Jastrow, 1891). Jastrow found that women thought more concretely and men thought more abstractly. Jastrow also found that women showed less variability than men in word choice, which at the time was important support for evolutionary theory. Jastrow inferred that, because men were more varied in their responses, they had evolved to a higher level than women (Lewin, 1984).

Although there were not many female researchers at that time, Mary Whiton Calkins was not satisfied with Jastrow's research results. Calkins was a student of the distinguished William James, who was known as one of the founders of psychology in America (Lewin, 1984). Calkins twice replicated Jastrow's study at Wellesley College, a private liberal arts college for women (Calkins, 1896). These female participants produced more abstract terms than did either sex in Jastrow's original study. Neither of Calkins' studies supported Jastrow's results. Calkins concluded that it is not possible to measure innate intellectual differences between the sexes that are not contaminated by environmental factors (Calkins, 1896). Jastrow thought he was studying true differences between the biological sexes, but his results more likely reflected the impact of culture and environment.

It is common knowledge that, historically, gender has been defined on a traditional binary system (i.e., male or female). This bipolar conceptualization of gender has begun to dissipate over time as people have realized that there are more ways to conceptualize gender that expand beyond both stereotypical traits and biological gender. Thus, it is not surprising that, around the time the women's liberation movement took stride, a new study of masculinity and femininity research emerged in the 1970s, which was the study of androgyny (Cook, 1987). Androgyny involved the idea that men and women could possess similar characteristics. Researchers began to interpret similarities and differences between people in terms of the degree to which they

associated with characteristics that were traditionally associated with men (i.e., masculine) or those associated with women (i.e., feminine). In essence, androgyny allowed for a person to have a combination of traits that were both stereotypically and traditionally associated with one or the other sex (Hoffman, 2001).

The aforementioned research briefly illustrates how the study of the differences between the biological sexes began, and slowly evolved into a more accurate reflection of the process of studying the differences between genders (i.e., gender roles, gender identity, gender expression). Researchers now believe that socialization is one of the biggest variables impacting gender (Eagly, 1987; Perry & Bussey, 1979). Bem (1996) noted that a person's gender role orientation is the social construction of their gender identity based upon the situational context of that person's life. Thus, the person's gender identity is the way a person perceives whether their personal choices are appropriate with their culture's ideals for being male and female. This connection of socialization and gender brings us back to Calkin's aforementioned discoveries, which displayed that it might be impossible to measure innate intellectual differences between the sexes that are not contaminated by environmental effects.

With a growing understanding of the impact of culture and environment on biological sex, researchers began to shift their focus from the search for the differences between the sexes to searching for the differences between masculinity and femininity. Masculinity and femininity were first defined in terms of differences in the response of each person's biological sex (i.e., male or female) (Constantinople, 1973). However, many modern researchers argue that we do not have a strong conceptualization or construct of what masculinity and femininity really are, and thus efforts to measure these concepts is really just measuring the differences between the

biological sexes (Constantinople, 1973; Deaux, 1999). Other researchers argue that we are actually measuring the socialization of gender stereotypes (Hoffman, 2001; Deaux, 1999).

Hoffman (2001) notes that, although the literature on gender-related topics is growing and adding to our knowledge of gender, most of the concepts that consider masculinity and femininity continue to rely on traditional and stereotypical interpretations rather than an individual's personal interpretation of his or her gender. As a result, the concept of masculinity and femininity perpetuates stereotypes about gender that are restrictive and do not allow a person to reach their full potential. Thus, the research displays a strong need for future work to provide more clarity around its conceptualization and constructs in regards to looking at differences in any gender-related topics.

**Defining Gender-related Terms.** According to the American Psychological Association (APA; 2010) gender is “cultural and is the term to use when referring to women and men as social groups,” in most psychological research (p. 71). On the other hand, the APA defines sex as “biological” (p. 71). The terms masculinity and femininity have often been used as words that describe traits that males (masculinity) or females (femininity) often express (Spence, 1985). With this in mind, the question of what traits represents masculinity and femininity comes to the surface. Who determines this? Has it changed over time? Will it continue to evolve? These unanswered questions remain in the research, in which concepts of masculinity and femininity have been poorly defined (Spence, 1985).

**Common gender-related measurement tools.** Although there have been several different measures of gender and other gender-related concepts, a full review would be out of the scope of this review. However, this review will discuss two of the most commonly used measures of gender to provide clarity on how the current state of research tends to conceptualize

and measure gender. The Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1974) was created to facilitate research on androgyny and to challenge previous assumptions of bipolarity in masculinity and femininity. Bem postulated that masculinity and femininity are both theoretically and empirically distinct from each other. However, Bem felt that people could have both types of traits, not just one type. The BSRI classifies a person into one of four gender role types: androgynous, feminine, masculine, and undifferentiated. Although Bem intended this scale to open the door to understanding and acceptance of androgyny (i.e., that a person can have both feminine and masculine traits), it inadvertently reinforced stereotypes of masculinity and femininity because he utilized culturally desirable traits for men and women in its construction (Hoffman, 2001).

While Bem was creating the BSRI, another important gender-related measurement tool called the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1974) was developed. Spence (1985) contended that masculinity and femininity should be conceptualized as a person's gender identity (i.e., masculinity/maleness or femininity/femaleness). Spence (1985, 1999) noted that most people have a fairly secure gender identity, which remains relatively secure regardless of whether they meet conventional standards of masculinity or femininity. Thus, the PAQ differed from the BSRI in that its masculine and feminine scales included items that may be seen more typically in one sex over the other, yet they could potentially be deemed as desirable for both sexes. Essentially, the PAQ better promoted the concept of androgyny.

While these two measures were an improvement over prior measures because they incorporated cultural contexts (Hoffman, 2001), Spence (1993, 1999) later asserted that both the BSRI and PAQ were actually measures of instrumentality and expressiveness, rather than masculinity and femininity. Despite the debate regarding what exactly these measures are capturing, researchers continue to use these two instruments as global measures of masculinity

and femininity (Hoffman, 2001). All things considered, the literature reveals a clear need for a better conceptualization and measurement of gender.

### **Re-defining Gender Through the Lens of Gender Self-confidence**

This review supports and utilizes the Hoffman, Borders, & Hattie (2000) model of gender self-confidence as an alternative to more traditional definitions of gender. The gender-self confidence model supersedes previous conceptualizations and measures of gender because it incorporates a more modern multidimensional and flexible approach to conceptualizing gender. It relinquishes practices of the past that conceptualize and measure gender through gender norms or gender stereotypes, which change over time. The following section will include a review of the literature regarding the Hoffman, Borders, & Hattie (2000) model of gender self-confidence, which is comprised of two components: gender self-definition and gender self-acceptance.

Hoffman, Borders, and Hattie (2000) noted that the concepts of gender and gender identity have historically been poorly defined in the literature. These researchers commented that initial gender conceptualizations using interests or traits based on sex difference statistics are outdated because they are based on social rather than personal concepts of gender. Hoffman, Borders, and Hattie (2000) also noted that previous conceptualizations did not allow for variation within the person to decide how feminine or masculine they personally felt. Others have also argued that it is worthless to categorize traits or interests as feminine or masculine, while at the same time acknowledging the presence of these traits in both sexes (Lewin, 1984).

Hoffman, Borders, and Hattie (2000) explain that their conceptualization of gender self-confidence should not be considered as a global measure of gender identity, rather it should be considered as a component to one's gender identity. These researchers explain that gender self-confidence is more inclusive measure of gender because it is not based on social stereotypes of

femininity and masculinity and it considers the individual's personal definition of these terms. These researchers conceptualized gender self-concept as the broadest construct in their model, whereby one's gender self-confidence is at the core of their gender identity within the model.

Based on this model, these researchers created a more modern measure known as Hoffman Gender Scale (HGS; Hoffman, Borders, and Hattie, 2000), which measures a person's gender self-confidence. According to Hoffman, without knowledge of gender self-confidence, people would be unable to identify their gender identity and their gender self-concept. Thus, gender self-confidence is the starting point in the process to understanding oneself as a gendered being. This comprehensive conceptualization is the framework on which this review will focus.

Hoffman, Borders, and Hattie (2000) coined *gender self-confidence* to mean "the intensity of one's belief that she/he meets her/his personal standards for femininity or masculinity" (Hoffman, Borders, & Hattie, 2000, p. 481). This definition is more inclusive as it takes a step away from the historical gender binary views, which are based on others' perceptions and stereotypical views of gender. *Gender self-confidence* incorporates two components, which are *gender self-definition* and *gender self-acceptance*.

*Gender self-definition* refers to how much a person considers femininity or masculinity to be a significant component to their identity (Hoffman, Borders, & Hattie, 2000). The very name of the term displays a more empowering and modern view of gender. *Gender self-definition* allows the person to determine how they define femininity and masculinity versus it being based on outdated stereotypes of femininity and masculinity.

*Gender self-acceptance* refers to the comfort that a person feels in regard to being a member of his or her gender. A person's comfort with their gender self-acceptance is independent of how one feels about their gender self-definition. For example, a person can feel

very strongly about their gender self-definition and very uncomfortable with their gender self-acceptance, or they may not have a strong gender self-definition, yet they may be very comfortable with their gender self-acceptance. While these two terms work independently, together they define a person's overall gender self-confidence.

Previous gender research has had much debate over defining what gender is and if the measurement tools were actually measuring said construct. However, gender self-confidence is a modern and more holistic approach to understanding a person's gender. This conceptualization avoids imposing gender stereotypes and restrictive gender roles onto a person; it affords the person the power to determine the salience of their gender (allowing them to define it) to their identity. Given that gender self-confidence is such a revolutionary conceptualization of gender, there is limited research utilizing this construct. However, the following studies incorporated this concept.

Gender self-acceptance and gender self-definition have been associated with predicted statuses of feminist and ethnic identity development among college women (Hoffman 2006a). Hoffman (2006b) also investigated the relationship between gender self-confidence and subjective well-being in male and females within an ethnically diverse sample. Subjective well-being (SWB) is defined as "people's cognitive and affective evaluations of their lives" (Diener, 2000, p.34). Hoffman (2006b) notes that SWB focuses on how people experience their lives in positive ways, noting that others have likened the concept to be defined as happiness. Hoffman (2006b) found a positive correlation between gender self-acceptance and SWB. This finding indicates that the more comfortable and secure people feel about their own gender (i.e., gender self-acceptance), the more positive and happy feelings they will experience regarding their lives.

The aforementioned research illustrates the various and very important areas of our lives that gender self-confidence can impact.

Hoffman, Hattie, and Borders (2005) also explored responses to the only two HGS open-ended questions, “what do you mean by femininity?” and “what do you mean by masculinity?” to provide a framework for conceptualizing the participant’s personal definitions of these constructs. In addition, they also examined participants HGS subscale scores with the scores on the BSRI (Bem, 1974). The comparison of the participants HGS and BSRI was conducted to identify (a) any correlations between gender self-definition and an inclination to view stereotypically masculine and feminine qualities as one or the other (i.e., masculine or feminine); (b) any inclination toward perceiving stereotypical qualities as just human (i.e., neutral); and (c) any possible relationships between gender self-acceptance and these tendencies (Hoffman, Hattie, & Borders, 2005).

These authors found that biological sex (maleness/femaleness) was a key variable in their participants’ personal definition of their masculinity or femininity. In fact, for women, biological sex was the most identified category and for men it was the second. The authors noted that gender stereotypes and societal standards were also evident. For example, women described their femininity to include expressive/relational components and men described their masculinity to include forceful/aggressive components (Hoffman, Hattie, & Borders, 2005). Strong gender self-definition was related to participants’ assessment of stereotypically masculine and feminine qualities rather than as neutral. However, strong gender self-acceptance was not related to participants’ assessment of stereotypically masculine and feminine qualities (Hoffman, Hattie, & Borders, 2005).

These findings suggest that, for many people, biological sex is a common factor in how they describe their masculinity and femininity and further suggest that these constructs do not need to be defined stereotypically. Interestingly, participants with stronger gender self-definition utilized more societal and stereotypical categories while participants with stronger gender self-acceptance more often utilized their biological sex as a description for their masculinity or femininity (Hoffman, Hattie, & Borders, 2005). These findings imply that the more confident and comfortable people are within themselves regarding their gender, the less they will rely on stereotypical and societal descriptors of their masculinity and femininity.

These findings could be highly useful for educators and counselors working with people that feel constrained or restricted by their definitions of masculinity or femininity. Dillon, Worthington, and Schwartz (2008) explored how counselors' levels of gender self-confidence and exploration of sexual identity influenced their counseling self-efficacy to provide affirmative therapy with LGB clients. Their findings suggested that gender self-confidence (gender self-definition emerging as the primary predictor) and sexual identity exploration was positively associated with higher levels of LGB-affirmative counseling self-efficacy. Dillon, Worthington, and Schwartz (2008) suggest that psychotherapists who examine what their gender means to them (via supervision, continuing education, etc.) may be less likely to exhibit heterosexist biases grounded in discomfort toward LGB clients. The implications of these findings support previous research, which suggests that self-identified gender is associated with LGB-affirmative attitudes in mental health workers (Bowers & Bieschke, 2005; Matthews et al., 2005).

Although, gender self-confidence is a fairly novel way to examine gender, it has been shown to relate to many positive outcomes (Worthington & Dillon, 2003; Hoffman, 2006a; Hoffman 2006b). Additionally, it allows people the power to define and/or accept their gender

based on how they feel versus old societal gender norms that can be quite limiting. For instance, males are capable of providing love and nurturing and yet this quality is commonly associated with females. Females are often strong and tough and yet these qualities are often associated with males. This type of antiquated thinking is restrictive and does not allow all people, male and female, to reach their full potential. Thus, this review supports the use of the HGS for future research on gender-related topics.

### **An Exploration of Attitudes Toward LGB People**

The civil rights of LGB people in the United States have been receiving increasing political attention, with issues such as discrimination, employer's lack of health care for partners of LGB employees, and most recently, with marriage equality (Rimmerman, 2001, 2008). As LGB people and allies continue to advocate for LGB civil rights, this movement has captured the attention of mainstream media. Recent research has also begun to focus on heterosexual attitudes toward LGB people. Historically, literature that explored attitudes toward LGB persons has assessed such attitudes in a unidimensional manner. That is, attitudes toward LGB persons were measured on a scale from condemnation to tolerance (Herek 1984). However, with the growing visibility of LGB people living "openly" over the last several decades, heterosexuals' attitudes toward LGB people have broadened to include more LGB affirmative attitudes (Worthington, Dillon, & Becker, 2005). Furthermore, as the attitudes of the general population toward LGB shifts, the research on these attitudes has simultaneously followed.

Much of the existing research has explored attitudes toward LGB people in an attempt to understand what variables might shift a person's attitude to feel more negatively or positively toward LGB persons (Barth & Overby, 2003; Snively, Kreuger, Stretch, Watt, & Chadha, 2004; Hinrichs & Rosenberg, 2002; Herek 2002; Ochs, 1996; Cotten-Huston & Waite, 2000). For

example, the region of the United States where a person lives (Barth & Overby, 2003), or whether a person lives in a rural setting (Snively, Kreuger, Stretch, Watt, & Chadha, 2004), have both been shown to result in higher levels of sexual prejudice or anti-gay bias toward lesbians and gay men. In relation to geography, the lack of contact that a heterosexual person has with lesbian, gay, and bisexual people also has been shown to negatively impact attitudes toward LGB people (Barth & Overby, 2003; Hinrichs & Rosenberg, 2002). Religiosity has also been found to positively correlate with negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay people (Cotten-Huston & Waite, 2000; Hinrichs & Rosenberg, 2002). It is important to note that there is only sparse research on attitudes specifically toward bisexual people (Herek 2002; Ochs, 1996). Herek (2002) notes that there are some ways in which bisexuals are perceived to differ from lesbians and gay people. For example, bisexual people are often thought of as sexually promiscuous or non-monogamous. However, some researchers suggest that in many ways the anti-bisexual and anti-gay prejudices overlap with each other (Och, 1996).

Notably, a person's gender (i.e., biological sex; their maleness and femaleness) has also been shown to correlate with negative attitudes toward LGB people (Herek, 1984, 1988; Kite & Deaux, 1986; Cotten-Huston and Waite, 2000; Whitney, 1987; Chonody, Siebert, and Rutledge, 2009; Gurwitz & Marcus, 1978). This specific topic is a part of the focus of this review and it will be expanded upon further in a later section.

Antigay attitudes are especially important to understand because they are highly correlated with antigay behaviors, such as physical assaults against LGB people (Franklin 2000; Roderick, McCammon, Long & Allred, 1998). In fact, LGB people experience harassment and violence at alarming rates due to their sexual orientation (D'Augelli & Grossman, 2001; D'Augelli, Pilkington, & Hershberger, 2002). Additionally, we must also acknowledge that LGB

victims often do not report crimes to law enforcement because they expect that the law enforcement will not support them; and in some cases they expect that they may even receive a hostile response from the police. Thus, it is possible that the rates of reported harassment and discrimination would be even higher if all LGB people felt safe to report. The correlation between antigay attitudes and behaviors, illuminates how pervasive antigay attitudes support continued discrimination against LGB people; as heterosexual people who feel uncomfortable with a LGB person's sexual orientation continue to deny equal rights or access in housing, employment, education, and health care (Hunter, Joslin, & McGowan, 2004).

**Defining Attitude Toward LGB People-related Terms.** It is important to note that the study of heterosexual people's attitudes toward LGB people is far newer than the lengthy history of the study of gender. However, common constructs that have previously been used to describe and study attitudes toward LGB people and related issues have included homophobia, homonegativity, and heterosexism.

Weinberg (1972) coined the term *homophobia*, which is known as the intense irrational fear and intolerance of being around a gay or lesbian person. However, research indicates that prejudices toward LGB people are not based on a phobia, in a clinical matter (O'Donohue & Caselles, 1993). More specifically, negative heterosexual attitudes toward LGB people are not made evident through physiological reactions, like that of other phobias. Thus, the need for a more modern construct became apparent. Hudson and Ricketts (1980) proposed the term *homonegativity*, which they broadly conceptualized as the prejudicial attitudes toward and devaluing of LGB people. Last, *heterosexism* is a modern term used to describe the belief that heterosexuality is the norm in our society, which includes a sense of entitlement and privileges that LGB people do not receive (Herek, 1995, 2000). The evolution of the constructs used to

study attitudes toward LGB people appears also to be a reflection of changes of LGB civil rights in the United States at that given time.

**Common tools measuring attitudes toward LGB people.** A full review of all the different modern measures created to capture a heterosexual person's attitudes toward LGB people would be out of the scope of this review. However, this review will discuss three of the most commonly used measures to explain how current research conceptualizes and measures attitudes toward LGB. The Index of Homophobia (IHP; Hudson & Ricketts, 1980) was created to capture "homophobic versus nonhomophobic attitudes" (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980, pp. 357). The IHP focused on the negative cognitions, affect, and behavioral elements of homophobia. Over a decade later, Herek (1994) created the Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men (ATLG; Herek, 1984), which focused on the bipolar factor of condemnation versus tolerance attitudes toward LGB people. This scale has two different subscales: Attitudes Toward Lesbians (ATL) and Attitudes Toward Gay Men (ATG) (Herek, 1994). Although the ATLG is also commonly used, it does not account for bisexuals, which leaves a gap in its ability to account for attitudes toward all sexual minorities.

Although these two measures are commonly used in research regarding attitudes toward LGB people, they capture attitudes using a lens that focuses on either "homophobic or nonhomophobic" or "condemnation or tolerance" attitudes, which do not account for the complex nature of the of attitudes toward LGB people (Worthington, Dillon, & Becker-Shutte, 2005). The general attitude toward LGB people appear to change as society evolves and changes, which suggests the need for a modern measure (Herek, 1994). One noteworthy modern measure is called the Modern Homophobia Scale (MHS; Raja & Stokes, 1998). The MHS includes factors that focus on a heterosexual person's own personal discomfort with lesbians and gay men,

institutionalized homophobia, and deviance/changeability of female/male homosexuality (Raja & Stokes, 1998). Although this measure reflects a more complex and modern view into a heterosexual person's attitudes toward lesbians and gay men, it fails to include bisexual people in its measurement. This scale demonstrates the common issue with the more modern scales; being that they either fail to include all sexual minorities (lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals) or they fail to capture the complexities of attitudes toward LGB people, which have become more multidimensional as the larger cultural context toward LGB people changes over time.

### **Knowledge and Attitudes Toward LGB People**

Worthington et al. (2002, 2005) created a conceptualization and measurement of heterosexual attitudes toward LGB people that is multi-dimensional in nature by allowing for both positive and negative attitudes towards LGB people. Attitudes toward LGB people are complex, dynamic, and evolving. After reviewing the conceptualizations and measures in this realm, this measure best represents the current and changing climate of attitudes toward LGB people.

It is important to note that although these authors insert the word "knowledge" into their conceptualization and measurement tool, which is called the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Knowledge and Attitudes Scale for Heterosexuals (LGB-KASH; Worthington et al., 2002), it is still ultimately conceptualizing and measuring attitudes toward LGB people through a more modern lens. As previous research has indicated, as a person's knowledge and contact with LGB people increased, so did their positive attitudes toward LGB persons (Barth & Overby, 2003; Hinrichs & Rosenberg, 2002). Thus, the LGB-KASH incorporated contact through considering a person's knowledge.

Worthington et al. (2002) posited that heterosexual attitudes toward LGB people are contextualized during the process of their sexual identity development. Thus, Worthington et al. (2002) created a heterosexual identity model, which subsequently facilitated the creation of the LGB-KASH. Through exploratory factor analysis, Worthington et al. (2005) revealed five factors that contribute to heterosexual peoples' knowledge and attitudes toward LGB people. Based on that research, the LGB-KASH incorporates five factors titled Hate, LGB Knowledge, LGB Civil Rights, Religious Conflict, and Internalized Affirmativeness. Hate refers to attitudes about avoidance, self-consciousness, hatred, and violence felt toward LGB people. LGB Knowledge captures a person's knowledge about the history, symbols, and organizations of the LGB community. LGB Civil Rights reflects the beliefs a person has about the civil rights of LGB people with respect to issues such as marriage, child rearing, health care, and insurance benefits. Religious Conflict refers to the conflicted beliefs and ambivalent attitudes toward LGB people that are derived from religious beliefs. Internalized Affirmativeness reflects a person's comfort with, and willingness to engage in, proactive social activism. These factors are wide-ranging, comprehensive, and reflective of the many factors to consider when exploring heterosexual person's attitudes toward LGB people.

### **Intersection of Gender and Attitudes Toward LGB Persons**

In order to thoroughly understand how gender self-confidence and knowledge and attitudes toward LGB people relate, further investigation is necessary. This section examines the existing literature regarding gender self-confidence and knowledge and attitudes toward LGB people. However, due to the lack of literature on these specific variables, a more broad discussion on the impact of gender on attitudes toward LGB persons will follow. General themes of these findings and their implications will be discussed.

As previously discussed, the attitudes of heterosexual people toward LGB persons have been the primary focus of previous research, which was often conducted with the goal to better understand and help mitigate the effects of homophobia or heterosexism. Researchers have shown that the gender of a heterosexual person has a large impact on his or her attitudes toward LGB persons. A discussion of the main themes found in the literature regarding the relationship of these two variables will be explored in this section.

Although, historically, there have been many different ways to conceptualize gender, most of the literature refers to gender as the biological sex. Therefore, when referring to male or female in this section, I will refer to a heterosexual person via their biological sex, unless otherwise specified. Additionally, it is important to note that, because the study of attitudes was motivated by a desire to further the understanding of homophobia and heterosexism, most of the research generally categorizes the attitudes as either more negative or more positive.

In an effort to validate a scale to measure heterosexual attitudes toward sexual minorities, Kite and Deaux (1986) conducted a study, which explored how heterosexual male college students with differing attitudes toward sexual minorities would respond when they believed they were interacting with a sexual minority. The participants who had more positive attitudes toward sexual minorities were referred to as tolerant persons; participants that had more negative views toward sexual minorities were referred to as intolerant persons. The results indicated that the tolerant males held more feminine traits and that masculinity was less vital to their self-concept than it was for the intolerant males. Interestingly, tolerant males asked more questions during the interactions regarding music (noted as a potentially neutral topic), whereas intolerant males asked more questions about sports and made more references to masculine hobbies. These researchers found their new scale to be effective in measuring attitudes toward sexual minorities,

while at the same time they found that tolerant males reacted very different than intolerant males when they believed they were interacting with a sexual minority. Additionally, intolerant males would later rate their interaction with a sexual minority more negatively on the measurement that assessed for overall impression and liking of their assigned partner.

Kite and Deaux (1986) note that, although it was not statistically significant, tolerant males, like intolerant males, rated the interaction with a perceived sexual minority more negatively than a person with whom they believed to be heterosexual. These results imply that males, in general, held more negative attitudes toward sexual minorities than females. However, males who were comfortable expressing both feminine and masculine traits had more positive ratings toward sexual minorities. These findings also infer that males whose self-concept is less connected to just having masculine traits might be more accepting toward sexual minorities.

Overall, the Kite and Deaux (1986) study provides some interesting points to reflect upon. Although the study was based on the biological sex of males, it utilized an initial measurement that assessed for traits of masculinity and femininity, which as history has shown are typically reflective of gendered stereotypes. However, the researchers' use of this measurement provides some insight that indicates that those participants who identified less of their self-concept with gendered stereotype traits, tended to feel less negative attitudes toward sexual minorities.

Herek (1988) conducted a study that focused on how gender and other variables related to attitudes toward sexual minorities in a college undergraduate sample. Herek (1988) found that males consistently held more negative attitudes toward sexual minorities than females. Interestingly, more tolerant attitudes toward sexual minorities were associated with people who held a belief that they did not fit a stereotype of masculinity or femininity.

Thus far, the research reveals that one of the most consistent findings is that males had more negative attitudes than females toward sexual minorities. Herek (1986) has suggested that negative attitudes toward LGB serve to develop and maintain gender and sexual identity among heterosexual men. All things considered, the findings suggest that we must consider not only the biological sex but also how traditional gender roles and gender-role conformity contributes to negative attitudes toward LGB people.

More recent research implies similar findings. Cotten-Huston and Waite (2000) conducted a study to determine predictors of anti-homosexual attitudes in college students. Amongst other variables, these researchers assessed gender, gender-role orientation, and gender-role attitudes. Gender was defined as biological sex. Gender-role orientation was defined and measured using the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1974), which classifies people into one of four gender role types: androgynous, feminine, masculine, and undifferentiated. Gender-role attitudes was defined and measured using the Attitude Toward Women Scale (AWS; Spence & Helmreich, 1979), which assesses attitudes and beliefs regarding the rights and roles of women in society.

Cotten-Huston and Waite (2000) did not find gender or gender role orientation to be predictive of attitudes. However, they did find that person's gender-role attitudes significantly predicted attitudes toward sexual minorities. The authors noted that the study suffered from attrition and they speculated that any homophobic male people might have declined to participate due to the topic matter involving sexual minorities. They further speculated that this attrition rate might have accounted for the lack of significant findings regarding the impact of gender and gender-role orientation. Nonetheless, their findings align with previous research that indicates

that those who held more traditional sex role beliefs had more negative attitudes toward LGB people (Kite & Deaux, 1986; Whitley, 1987).

Chonody, Siebert, and Rutledge (2009) examined the attitudes of college students toward gays and lesbians. More specifically, these researchers were looking to see how a human sexuality course, with specific interventions, might also change the participant's attitudes. The general finding was that males scored significantly higher in negative attitudes than females at pretest. However, the scores for males changed more at posttest, which is potentially due to having more space for the change to occur. These findings continue to support that males had more negative attitudes toward sexual minorities than the females.

Some authors speculate that these findings of males with negative attitudes toward LGB people could be attributed to men potentially attaching more stereotypical gender-role characteristics or norms to their self-concept or identity as a whole. Thus, men might feel more threatened by sexual minorities who tend to subscribe less to the stereotypical gender-role norms (Whitney, 1987).

Although many studies have shown males to have more negative attitudes toward sexual minorities than females (Kite, 1984; Herek, 1984), the largest difference has generally been in attitudes specifically toward gay males (see Kite, 1984, 1994; Herek 1994). Findings in gender differences toward lesbians are present, however, less consistent. Lesbians tend to rank after gay men in regards to negative attitudes received from heterosexual people (Herek, 1994; Kerns & Fine, 1994).

Overall, research has shown that males had more negative attitudes toward LGB persons than females (Gurwitz & Marcus, 1978; Herek, 1984, 1988; Kite & Deaux, 1986; Whitney, 1987; Cotten-Huston and Waite, 2000; Chonody, Siebert, and Rutledge, 2009). Additionally,

there has been little research that finds no differences between male and female attitudes toward LGB (Oliver & Hyde, 1993). All things considered, these findings suggest that future research is needed and that we must consider not only the biological sex, but also to the amount of traditional gender roles and/or gender-role conformity, which appears to contribute the most to the negative attitudes.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this review was to investigate the influence that gender self-confidence has on knowledge and attitudes toward LGB people. The foregoing survey of research shows that, although heterosexual people commonly demonstrate negative attitudes toward LGB people, gender largely impacts a person's attitude toward LGB persons. The literature suggests that heterosexual males tend to experience more negative attitudes toward LGB people than females. However, the literature also discloses a general theme that men who subscribe more to traditional gender role tend to hold more negative attitudes toward LGB persons when compared with women (Cotton-Huston & Waite, 2008; Kite & Deaux, 1986; Whitley, 1987; Whitley, 2001). Further, some researchers suggested that these negative attitudes toward LGB serve to develop and maintain heterosexual male's gender and sexual identity (Herek, 1986). Another hypothesis could be that negative attitudes toward LGB people held by traditional gender role conforming men has to do with male privilege and fear of losing it. Perhaps, traditional gender roles serve to secure males' privilege in society.

The literature on attitudes toward LGB people often defines traditional gender roles and gender stereotypes in similar ways (Kite & Deaux, 1986; Herek, 1988; Cotton-Huston & Waite, 2000), utilizing vague terminology or terminology that assumed masculinity or femininity based on social constructs rather than personal constructs of what individuals deem as their felt gender

(Hoffman, Borders, & Hattie, 2000). As evident in the increasing visibility of women in powerful roles in the work force, we can see that times are changing in regard to traditional gender roles. As society continues to grow and changes its views regarding gender and traditional gender roles, we must consider how research will keep up with the constant evolution. To do so, we must utilize constructs that capture the essence of a person's gender, like that of gender self-confidence (Hoffman, Borders, & Hattie, 2000).

Utilizing such modern measures will help future research to paint a clearer picture on whether or not males truly hold more negative beliefs toward LGB people. Or, if these negative attitudes, when held by the heterosexual male who holds traditional male gender roles, are behaviors that are exhibited in response to not understanding the flexibility in gender roles within the LGB community.

As the research on attitudes toward LGB people has shifted to include more affirming views, as evident in the Worthington et al. (2005) modern conceptualization of knowledge and attitudes toward LGB people, we also see a shift in the research on gender with the Hoffman, Borders, & Hattie (2000) modern conceptualization of gender self-confidence. Taken together, these pieces illuminate the evolving and dynamic relationship regarding gender and attitudes toward LGB people.

Perhaps, the more comfortable people are within themselves regarding their gender, the less they will rely on traditional or stereotypical descriptors of their masculinity and femininity. More specifically, as heterosexual males begin to experience more flexibility in their gender expression and less confinement by societal pressure to express their gender in stereotypical ways, presumably their attitudes toward LGB people may shift as well. Moreover, as all people of all genders begin to determine their own conceptualizations of what it means for them to be a

gendered person, that is having strong levels of gender self-confidence, perhaps we will see a shift in the literature revealing less negative attitudes toward LGB persons, who have commonly been known to subscribe less to restrictive traditional gender roles.

### **Literature Gaps**

Although there is much research related to gender and attitudes toward LGB people, the specific intersection of gender self-confidence with knowledge and attitudes toward LGB people has never been explored. Research that explores gender and attitudes toward LGB could improve the literature by focusing on creating clearer definitions in regards to what exactly is being measured for gender. Additionally, there has been little research that incorporates measurement tools that capture more dynamic and affirmative attitudes toward LGB people, like that of the LGB-KASH scale.

### **Future Research**

Based on the gaps within the existing literature, future research on gender and attitudes toward LGB people should make a strong effort to clearly define its gender variable(s). Future research on attitudes toward LGB people should consider utilizing a construct that could better reveal the evolving and the more affirmative attitude trends that are occurring toward LGB people. Last, the author found no research that specifically explored how gender self-confidence specifically impacts the knowledge and attitudes toward LGB (LGB-KASH) people and thus, future research should examine these two variables.

### **Implications**

Research on how a heterosexual people's gender self-confidence impacts their knowledge and attitudes toward LGB people has several implications. First, as LGB civil rights and other issues continue to be a mainstream focus, it will be important for heterosexual people to

understand how their own attitudes might come into play (i.e., voting against or for an LGB civil rights measure). Second, LGB people face much discrimination in environments where discussions regarding gender and attitudes toward LGB people could be conducted, such as in high school and college settings. Thus, teachers and educators may benefit from a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between gender self-confidence and knowledge and attitudes toward LGB people. Third, counselors and therapists would also benefit in working with clients that are either LGB or heterosexual in teasing out how this relationship might play a role in their client's gender identity and or feelings toward their sexuality. Overall, further research has implications for a better understanding of how gender self- confidence impacts attitudes toward LGB people. And most importantly, how these variables connect to a reduction of homonegativity and heterosexism.

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