

Student Academic Showcase

## **Mixed Methods Analysis of Perceived Gender Identity in Heterosexual and Lesbian Couples**

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### **Student Academic Showcase Abstract (150 Words)**

Despite wanting an independent identity we cannot deny that our perceived identity is heavily influenced by who our partner is. Our previous research found that black partners were perceived as significantly more black in intraracial couples (pictured with a black partner) than compared to interracial couples (Grembocki & Afful, 2019). We applied similar methodology to examine how an individual's perceived identity varies in lesbian relationships when manipulating gender expression via clothing and posture. Our 156 participants were randomly assigned a picture of a couple followed with a short vignette in order to rate compatibility, perceived gender identity, and heteronormative attitudes. A key finding in our results was that a masculine presenting woman (in same dress and posture) was perceived as significantly less masculine when pictured with a man compared to a feminine woman ( $t(45) = -4.1, p = .001$ ). These findings indicate that when relationships conform to gender norms, gender identity was polarized.

### **Method**

#### **Updated data: 156 participants (74% Women, 73% Caucasian, 54% Heterosexual)**

132 participants (74% Women, 74% Caucasian, 50% Heterosexual) were recruited through social media and the university participant pool. Participants were randomly assigned to view one of five pictures that included either a straight or lesbian couple. The pictures included the same models, only varying clothing and posture to manipulate gender expression. The five conditions were: (1) Straight Masculine/Feminine, (2) Straight Masculine/Masculine, (3) Lesbian Masculine/Feminine, (4) Lesbian Masculine/Masculine, and (5) Lesbian Feminine/Feminine. Participants read a short narrative about a fictitious couple and completed measures of perceived relationship compatibility, gender typicality of 5 gender stereotypical traits (e.g., aggressive, emotional), perceived gender identity on each partner (Feminine (0) to Masculine (100)), tolerance, and heteronormative attitudes (Habarth, 2014).

### **Results**

An ANOVA confirmed a significant difference in perceived compatibility in our 5 conditions ( $F(4, 151) = 3.31, p < .05$ ). Post-hoc tests indicated perceived compatibility was significantly lower in the straight couple with a masculine man and masculine presenting woman. This might be due to the picture appearing less authentic and not due to gender.

Perceived gender identity varied greatly depending on the partner's gender expression. For example, a female partner (in same dress and posture) was perceived as more feminine when pictured with a feminine female partner than a masculine female partner ( $t(45) = 1.7, p = .05$ ). The largest difference was with a masculine presenting woman, was perceived as significantly more feminine when pictured with man compared to a feminine female ( $t(45) = -4.1, p = .001$ ).

Additionally, the same male partner was perceived as more masculine when pictured with a feminine woman than compared to a masculine female ( $t(59) = 2.8, p < .01$ ).

Heteronormativity was negatively correlated to generalized tolerance (race and sexuality) ( $r = -.59, p < .001$ ) as well as assigning more stereotypical traits to partners ( $p$ 's  $< .05$ ).

### **Conclusions and Implications**

This research confirms that context (i.e., your partner's race, gender, and/or gender expression) influences not only perceived racial identity but also gender identity. There was strong evidence that perceived gender identity differs based on your partner's gender and gender expression. Heteronormative attitudes were also related to stereotypical associations. Taken together, these findings indicate that when relationships conform to gender norms (e.g., straight couple, masculine and feminine partners), gender identity was polarized. When couples did not conform to gender norms, perceived compatibility decreased.

### **References**

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- Doyle, C. M., Rees, A. M., & Titus, T. L. (2015). Perceptions of same-sex relationships and marriage as gender role violations: An examination of gendered expectations (sexism). *Journal of Homosexuality*, 62(11), 1576-1598. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2015.1073038>
- Grembocki, K. L. & Afful, S. E. (2019, March 8). *Is love actually black and white? Examining perceived racial identity and typicality in romantic relationships*. [Poster presentation] International Convention of Psychological Science, Paris, France.
- Habarth, J. M. (2014). Development of the heteronormative attitudes and beliefs scale. *Psychology & Sexuality*, 6(2), 166-188 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19419899.2013.876444>

### **Short Abstract (50 words)**

Perceived gender identity varied greatly depending on the partner's gender expression in ratings of sexual and gender minorities. Heteronormative attitudes were related to stereotypical associations. These findings indicate that when relationships conform to gender norms, gender identity was polarized. When couples did not conform to gender norms, perceived compatibility decreased.

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