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Implications of Mating Motives for Social Contagion Concerns and the Avoidance of Lesbians and Gay Men

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IMPLICATIONS OF MATING MOTIVES FOR SOCIAL CONTAGION CONCERNS
AND THE AVOIDANCE OF LESBIANS AND GAY MEN

By

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ABSTRACT

Given the important role of contact in improving attitudes toward outgroup members, it is necessary to examine factors that reduce majority group members' likelihood of having contact with minority group members. Recent research illustrates the role of social contagion concerns (i.e., heterosexuals' concerns that contact with lesbians and gay men will result in being misidentified as homosexual) in heterosexuals' desire to avoid lesbians and gay men. One potential consequence for heterosexuals who are misidentified as homosexual is the potential loss of mating opportunities. The current work examined the role that mating motives play in social contagion concerns and heterosexuals' desires to avoid lesbians and gay men. Consistent with predictions, heterosexual participants whose mating goals were not being met reported greater contagion concerns than participants whose mating goals were being met (Study 1). Further, when mating motives were manipulated, heterosexual participants whose mating motives were activated reported a greater desire to avoid contact with a hypothetical gay/lesbian roommate than control participants (Study 2). This desire to avoid was especially pronounced in heterosexuals with high levels of general contagion concerns. The implications of these findings for inter-orientation contact are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Extensive evidence points to the importance of quality contact between members of different social groups for improving intergroup attitudes (see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). However, there can be many barriers preventing contact from occurring and these barriers can differ depending on the groups in question. Traditionally, the majority of research has focused on contact between members of groups with typically visible group identities, such as groups determined by race, ethnicity, or gender. However, unlike these identities, sexual orientation is a concealable identity. As a concealable identity, it is possible for heterosexuals to be misidentified as gay or lesbian. Thus, different and additional factors may play a role in heterosexuals' desires to avoid contact with lesbians and gay men. For example, Buck, Plant, and Zielaskowski (2011) examined one such barrier preventing some heterosexuals from having contact with lesbians and gay men: Social contagion concerns. These are concerns that heterosexuals have that they will be mistakenly identified as gay or lesbian should they associate with lesbians and gay men. The current work expands on Buck et al.'s (2011) findings and examines the role that mating motives play in contributing to social contagion concerns.

Social Contagion Concerns

Sexual prejudice has traditionally been conceptualized as moral condemnation of homosexuality, homosexual behavior, and gay men and lesbians (see Kite and Whitley, 1996). However, recent research suggests that this conceptualization of sexual prejudice is incomplete and that to more thoroughly understand heterosexuals' desire to avoid gay men and lesbians, we must also consider that sexual orientation is a concealable identity (Buck et al., 2011).

As a concealable identity, sexual orientation isn't readily apparent from a person's appearance and, thus, it is possible for a heterosexual individual to be misidentified as gay or lesbian. Research suggests that one factor that can increase such miscategorization of sexual orientation is associating with gay and lesbian individuals. For example, Sigelman et al. (1991) found that when a male target whose sexual orientation was not explicitly disclosed was seen voluntarily associating with a gay man, prejudiced individuals reported that the target had stereotypically gay traits and likely engaged in homosexual behaviors. Thus, it is possible for heterosexual individuals who associate with gay men and lesbians to be misperceived as gay or lesbian. Recently, Buck and colleagues (2011) demonstrated that some people report being

highly concerned about such misclassification as gay or lesbian. These concerns about potential miscategorization as a member of a stigmatized outgroup were termed social contagion concerns.

Buck et al. (2011) found that above and beyond traditional sexual prejudice, heterosexuals who possessed higher levels of social contagion concerns experienced more anxiety and a greater desire to avoid interacting with a same-sex lesbian or gay interaction partner than heterosexuals lower in contagion concerns. These findings suggest that social contagion concerns have real implications for heterosexuals' likelihood of having contact with lesbians and gay men. Given the vital role of contact in promoting positive attitudes toward outgroup members (see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), it is important to examine the factors that impact these social contagion concerns and influence their implications on intergroup relations. Thus, the current work focuses on a factor that may exacerbate social contagion concerns in the hopes of providing insight into the development of these concerns and the functions that they may serve.

In considering factors that may influence social contagion concerns, it is helpful to reflect upon the negative implications that face heterosexuals who are misperceived as gay or lesbian. The consequences of miscategorization vary depending on whether the observer is a member of one's outgroup (i.e., is gay or lesbian) or ingroup (i.e., is heterosexual). If a gay or lesbian individual of the same sex misperceives a heterosexual as gay or lesbian, then he or she could face awkward interactions, have to disabuse the interaction partner of the misperception, and possibly even have to reject romantic advances. In contrast, if other heterosexuals misperceive a heterosexual as gay or lesbian, he or she could face stigma and discrimination as a member of a devalued outgroup.

Fears about being the target of stigma and discrimination are understandable given current attitudes toward lesbians and gay men in the United States. Although heterosexuals' attitudes toward lesbians and gay men have become more positive over the last few decades (Yang, 1997), many heterosexuals still endorse negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay men (Gallup, 2008). Prejudiced attitudes are not the only form of negativity that lesbians and gay men face. Approximately half of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) respondents in a national poll reported that they had experienced verbal harassment as a result of their sexual orientation and approximately 20% of those polled reported experiencing a crime against their person or property (Herek, 2009). Thus, heterosexuals' concerns about being misperceived as gay or

lesbian out of fear of being targets of stigma and discrimination appear to be warranted. Further, research on stigma by association indicates that even associating with lesbians and gay men can lead heterosexuals to be evaluated more negatively by heterosexual observers (Neuberg, Smith, Hoffman, & Russell, 1994).

An additional consequence of being misperceived as gay or lesbian, and the focus of the current work, involves the distress that being misclassified as gay or lesbian will decrease one's chances of finding a heterosexual mate. That is, being misperceived as gay or lesbian by members of the opposite sex could have detrimental effects on heterosexual people's mating opportunities by negatively affecting their ability to attract mates. A heterosexual who is misperceived as gay or lesbian by opposite-sex heterosexuals is essentially removed from the heterosexual mating pool. The desire to find a romantic and sexual partner is a fundamental human motivation of central importance to most people. Being misperceived as gay or lesbian could threaten this important goal. Thus, desires to find an opposite-sex mate could contribute to and compound any existing social contagion concerns. The elevation of these concerns could, in turn, lead to the avoidance or denigration of individuals and situations that would make misclassification more likely.

Mating Motives

Passing on one's genes to future generations is of the utmost concern to many people. Inherent to the ability to do so is the satisfaction of many other goals, such as finding desirable mates (Kenrick, Neuberg, Griskevicius, Becker, & Schaller, 2010). Kenrick, Maner, Butner, Li, Becker, and Schaller (2002) suggest that choosing a mate is one of the chief concerns that humans face. Indeed, people spend huge amounts of time and energy making themselves attractive to others, securing mates, and maintaining relationships. Since finding a mate and reproduction are of central importance to humans, it follows that this fundamental motivation would influence a variety of cognitive processes, and mounting research indicates that this is the case. For example, priming mating-related goals have been found to increase attention to potential mates and romantic rivals (Maner, Gailliot, Rouby, & Miller, 2007). Research also indicates that priming mating motives increases men's perceptions of sexual arousal in opposite-sex targets (Maner et al., 2005).

Given the central roles of mating and finding a mate, it is likely important to many heterosexuals to be seen as potential and available mates to attractive opposite-sex people.

However, heterosexuals face a potential barrier to being seen as viable potential mates if they are miscategorized as lesbian or gay. As noted previously, because sexual orientation isn't necessarily apparent, heterosexuals may wish to avoid the possibility of being misperceived as gay or lesbian by a potential mate. Some heterosexuals perceive that associating with lesbians and gay men increases this risk (Buck et al., 2011). Therefore, heterosexuals who are highly motivated to find an opposite-sex mate might be particularly likely to avoid contact with lesbians and gay men out of concern that they will be misperceived as lesbian or gay. Thus, mating motives could contribute to contagion concerns and the resulting intergroup biases.

A very different set of predictions would come from considering some theories of prejudice and intergroup conflict. Specifically, realistic group conflict theory (Levine & Campbell, 1972) offers a framework that provides a different set of hypotheses regarding the impact of mating motives on heterosexuals' responses toward same-sex lesbians and gay men. In their theory, Levine and Campbell (1972) proposed that prejudice could stem from situations in which we perceive outgroup members as competitors for scarce resources. Prejudice toward outgroups is theoretically heightened in situations where the outgroup is in direct competition for a valued and scarce resource. Given the importance of mating, attractive opposite-sex mates could be considered one of the scarcest and most highly-prized resources to heterosexuals. Based on realistic group conflict theory, one would predict that heterosexuals would prefer associating with lesbians and gay men of the same sex, particularly when mating motives are activated. Same-sex lesbians and gay men are not interested in attracting the mates that heterosexuals are (i.e., opposite-sex partners) and therefore, these lesbians and gay men are not sources of competition. Thus, when mating motives are activated, then the desire to avoid same-sex gay and lesbians should, if anything, decrease relative to control.

In the current studies I was able to test these two quite different hypotheses to more fully understand the role that mating motives play in understanding some heterosexuals' desire to avoid contact with lesbians and gay men. Specifically, I was able to examine the relative importance of the negative implications that could arise for heterosexuals who are miscategorized as lesbian or gay compared to the gains that accompany decreases in competition for mates.

Current Work

In the current work, I examined the impact of mating goals on heterosexuals' social contagion concerns and desire to avoid contact with lesbians and gay men. To examine this relationship, in Study 1, I compared social contagion concerns in a group of individuals whose mating goals weren't being met (i.e., individuals not in romantic relationships) with those of individuals whose mating goals were being met (i.e., individuals in romantic relationships). I hypothesized that individuals whose mating goals were not being met would have higher levels of social contagion concerns than individuals whose mating goals were being met.

In Study 2, I experimentally tested whether activating mating motives would affect heterosexuals' desires to avoid lesbians and gay men. Participants wrote about times they were sexually aroused (mating motives condition) or times they were happy (control condition) and then responded to hypothetical contact with a same-sex roommate who was heterosexual or gay/lesbian. Of interest were the effects of priming mating motives on the desire to avoid the gay/lesbian roommate. I hypothesized that participants whose mating motives were primed would have a greater desire to avoid the gay/lesbian roommate than participants in the control condition. I further predicted that the desire to avoid contact with the lesbian/gay roommate would be especially pronounced in heterosexuals with high levels of general contagion concerns.

STUDY 1

If social contagion concerns are influenced by mating goals, then heterosexuals whose mating goals aren't being met should have heightened levels of social contagion concerns. One group of individuals whose mating motives are not being met is those not currently in a romantic relationship. These individuals should be especially concerned about being misclassified as gay or lesbian because the potential costs of such misclassifications can be quite damaging. Specifically, if a heterosexual is misclassified as gay or lesbian, he or she will not be considered as a potential mate by opposite-sex heterosexuals. In contrast, individuals who are in romantic relationships are having their mating goals met and, therefore, should be relatively unconcerned about missing out on mating opportunities. Thus, misclassification as gay or lesbian is likely to be more of a concern for heterosexuals who are not in a romantic relationship than those in a relationship.

To take a preliminary look at the association between contagion concerns and mating goals, I analyzed data from a large number of participants who reported their levels of contagion concerns and relationship status.

Method

Participants

Respondents were 501 introductory psychology students (61% female, 81% White, 8% Hispanic, 7% Black, 3% Asian/Pacific Islander, 3% other) who participated in exchange for course credit.

Procedure

Participants reported whether they were single ($n = 286$), in a relationship ($n = 215$), or married ($n = 6$) and completed a measure of social contagion concerns as part of a large prescreening questionnaire. For the following analyses, we compared participants who reported being single to those who said they were married or in a relationship.

Materials

Fear of social contagion was assessed via four items using the brief version of the scale from Buck et al. (2011). Responses were made on a rating scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), reverse scored where necessary, so that higher scores indicated more contagion concerns (e.g., "If I had to interact with a homosexual person of my same gender, I would worry

that he or she would flirt with me,” “If I was hanging out with a homosexual person, I would worry that other people would think I was a homosexual, too,” $\alpha = .87$).

Results

Participants' responses were examined using a 2 (relationship status: single versus in a relationship) X 2 (gender: male versus female) ANOVA. The interaction between relationship status and gender was not significant, $p > .41$. However, both gender and relationship status independently predicted contagion concerns. Men ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 1.37$) reported higher levels of contagion concerns than women ($M = 1.98$, $SD = 1.32$), $F(1,497) = 74.29$, $p < .001$, $d = .61$.

More importantly, consistent with predictions, participants who were single ($M = 2.53$, $SD = 1.33$) reported higher levels of contagion concerns than participants who were in a relationship ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 1.42$), $F(1,497) = 5.07$, $p < .05$, $d = .21$.

Discussion

Results from this study offer preliminary support for the supposition that fear of social contagion is related to mating motives. Specifically, individuals whose mating goals are not being met (i.e., individuals who are not in a romantic relationship) reported higher levels of contagion concerns than individuals whose mating goals are being met (i.e., individuals who are in a romantic relationship). Thus, it appears that contagion concerns may be more salient for those who are not having their mating goals met. As a result, those who have strong mating motives may be more likely to avoid contact with lesbians and gay men in order to avoid being misperceived as gay or lesbian. Although the findings from the current study suggest that the effect of mating motives on contagion concerns is small, the effect is impressive given that social contagion concerns are relatively stable. These findings indicate that significant life factors, such as relationship status, can influence these concerns. While informative, the results of this study do not allow us to make a causal link between mating motives and the avoidance of lesbians and gay men. Therefore, in the next study, I sought to manipulate mating motives and examine the impact of this manipulation on the desire to avoid contact with lesbians and gay men.

It is also worth noting that our findings that men possessed more contagion concerns than women are wholly in line with previous work on contagion concerns (Buck et al., 2011). Further, research on sexual prejudice in general consistently finds that men are higher in sexual prejudice than women (see Kite & Whitley, 1996).

STUDY 2

In the current study, I examined the role that mating motives play in the desire to avoid contact with lesbians and gay men by experimentally manipulating mating motives. Participants either wrote about times they were sexually aroused or happy. This procedure has been used successfully in the past to prime mating motives (see Maner et al., 2007). This control condition has the benefit of being similarly affectively valenced with the experimental condition. Participants then responded to a scenario about hypothetical contact with a same-sex roommate who they were told was either heterosexual or gay/lesbian. I hypothesized that participants who responded to contact with a gay/lesbian roommate would report a greater desire to avoid this individual when their mating motives had been activated than when these motives were not activated. In contrast, mating motives were not expected to influence responses to contact with a heterosexual roommate.

I was also interested in contagion's role as a moderator in this relationship. I predicted that priming mating motives would have a particularly strong impact on the desire to avoid contact with a gay or lesbian roommate for participants with high levels of general contagion concerns. Specifically, participants who reported a general concern that contact with lesbians or gay men would result in being misperceived as lesbian or gay were expected to be particularly likely to want to avoid contact with the hypothetical roommate when their mating motives had been activated. Participants who were not generally concerned about social contagion were expected to have relatively low levels of interest in avoiding their roommate whether mating motives were activated or not.

Further, I was interested in the influence of contagion concerns above and beyond traditional sexual prejudice. Sexual prejudice has typically been conceptualized as general moral condemnation of homosexuality, homosexual behavior, and lesbians and gay men (see Kite and Whitley, 1996). However, research has found that social contagion concerns may be better at predicting the desire to avoid lesbians and gay men than traditional measures of sexual prejudice (Buck et al., 2011). Therefore, in the current study, I included a measure of moral condemnation of homosexuality as well a measure of general sexual prejudice to examine the independent influence of these individual differences on the desire to avoid lesbians and gay men.

Method

Participants

Respondents were 118 introductory psychology students (61% female, $M_{age} = 18.90$) who completed the current study in exchange for course credit. Due to computer issues, race information of participants was not obtained. Nine participants who identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual also completed the procedures but were not included in any analyses. Twelve additional participants completed the procedure but were excluded from analyses because they either incorrectly recalled their roommate's sexual orientation on the manipulation check ($n = 10$) or were assigned to the happy prime condition and wrote about times they were sexually aroused ($n = 3$).

Procedure and Design

Participants completed two ostensibly unrelated studies. Participants were told the first study investigated the effects of thinking about past experiences on mood and were randomly assigned to either the mating motives prime condition or control condition. In the mating motives condition, participants wrote about four or five times they felt sexual arousal and wrote in detail about the one situation that made them feel the most sexual desire for another person. Participants in the control condition wrote about four or five times they felt happy and wrote in detail about the one situation that made them feel the happiest. This procedure has been used successfully in the past in order to manipulate the activation of mating motives (Maner et al., 2007). After the priming procedure, participants completed the PANAS.

Participants were then told that they would be participating in a second study, which involved imagining interactions with others and providing impressions of these individuals. Participants were presented with a brief scenario asking them to imagine they had moved into a new apartment with a roommate they had never met before. The gender of the roommate was always matched to the participant's gender. Participants were randomly assigned to have either a gay/lesbian or heterosexual roommate. After reading the scenario, participants reported their desire to avoid contact with their roommate. At the end of the study, participants completed measures assessing their general social contagion concerns, moral condemnation of gay men and lesbians, and general sexual prejudice. Finally, participants were debriefed, thanked, and dismissed.

Materials

To assess their affect, participants completed the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). This scale consists of ten items assessing positive affect (e.g., interested, proud; $\alpha = .87$) and ten items assessing negative affect (e.g., nervous, afraid; $\alpha = .82$). Higher scores indicate higher levels of affect. Included in this measure was an item assessing participants' level of sexual arousal to serve as a priming condition manipulation check.

Participants then completed seven items assessing their desire to avoid contact with their imagined roommate (e.g., "If I saw my roommate on campus, I would avoid him/her," "If I saw my roommate sitting alone on campus, I would ask him/her to come sit with me and my friends;" $\alpha = .88$). Responses were given on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), reverse scored where necessary. Higher scores indicate an increased desire to avoid interacting with the roommate.

Participants also completed Buck et al.'s (2011) scales assessing social contagion concerns (long version) and moral condemnation of homosexuality. Responses were given on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Items were reverse scored where necessary. Higher scores indicate higher levels of social contagion concerns or moral condemnation of homosexuality. Social contagion concerns were assessed via ten items (e.g., "If I was hanging out with a gay man/lesbian, I would worry that other people would think I was a gay man/lesbian, too," "If I was working closely with a gay man/lesbian, I would want him/her to know I was straight," $\alpha = .90$). The moral condemnation subscale consists of four items (e.g., "According to my personal morals, homosexuality is wrong," "The growing acceptance of homosexuality indicates a decline in American morals," $\alpha = .88$). To assess general sexual prejudice, participants completed Herek's (1998) ten-item Attitudes toward Gay Men and Lesbians Scale (ATLG). This scale consists of two five-item measures assessing attitudes toward lesbians (ATL; e.g., "Lesbians just can't fit into our society") and gay men (ATG; e.g., "Sex between two men is just plain wrong"). Because participants always responded to contact with a same-sex roommate, I focused on female participants' attitudes toward lesbians (female participants $\alpha = .76$) and male participants' attitudes toward gay men (male participants $\alpha = .92$).

Lastly, as a manipulation check, participants were asked to recall the gender and sexual orientation of their roommate. Participants then provided demographic information, were debriefed, and dismissed.

Results

To assess whether I had successfully primed mating motives, I analyzed participants' level of sexual arousal as reported on the PANAS using an independent samples *t*-test. The results indicate that participants in the sexual arousal condition ($M = 1.95$, $SD = 1.13$) were significantly more sexually aroused than participants in the control condition ($M = 1.29$, $SD = .65$), $t(112) = -3.82$, $p < .001$, $d = .72$.

To examine the effect of the conditions on affect, I conducted multiple regression analyses examining the effects of the priming conditions on both the positive and negative subscales of the PANAS. Results indicate that the priming condition had no effect on positive affect, $F(1, 110) = .65$, $p = .42$, or negative affect, $F(1, 110) = .91$, $p = .34$. As would be expected, given that the roommate's sexual orientation was manipulated after the PANAS scores were measured, the sexual orientation of the roommate did not influence affect or interact with priming condition, $F_s(1, 110) < 1$, $p_s > .57$

To assess whether priming mating motives influenced the desire to avoid a gay, but not heterosexual, roommate, I regressed avoidance scores from the roommate scenario on priming condition, roommate condition, and the interaction between the two conditions. In order to examine the effects of the experimental conditions over and above the effects due to moral condemnation of homosexuality and gender, moral condemnation and gender were included as covariates. Because it is the most conservative case, the results are presented controlling for moral condemnation and gender but the results are highly similar in pattern and magnitude if either of the covariates is removed. It is also worth noting that all reported analyses on the desire to avoid contact with the roommate were also run controlling for relevant ATLG scores. All results were similar in size and direction when controlling for ATLG scores.

As would be expected based on previous research in sexual prejudice, there was a significant effect of moral condemnation of homosexuality, $\beta = .48$, $t(110) = 6.35$, $p < .001$, and a marginally significant effect of gender, $\beta = .14$, $t(110) = 1.84$, $p = .07$, with higher prejudiced participants and men reporting a greater desire to avoid contact with the roommate than lower prejudiced participants and women. The analysis also revealed a main effect of priming such

that participants in the sexual arousal condition wanted to avoid their roommate more than participants in the happiness condition, $\beta = .15$, $t(110) = 2.04$, $p = .04$. Results also indicated a main effect of roommate sexual orientation with participants who responded to contact with a gay roommate wanting to avoid their roommate more than participants who responded to contact with a heterosexual roommate, $\beta = .25$, $t(110) = 3.34$, $p = .001$. However, these main effects were qualified by the predicted interaction between priming condition and sexual orientation of the roommate, $\beta = .16$, $t(110) = 2.14$, $p = .03$. To examine this interaction, I examined the effects of the priming condition in the gay/lesbian and heterosexual roommate conditions separately.

When considering contact with a gay or lesbian roommate, participants in the sexual arousal condition reported a greater desire to avoid contact with the roommate than participants in the control condition, $\beta = .29$, $t(110) = 2.96$, $p = .004$. However, in the heterosexual roommate condition, there was no difference in the desire to avoid between participants in the sexual arousal and control conditions, $\beta = -.03$, $t(110) = -0.25$, $p = .80$ (see Figure 1). In addition, participants in the control condition did not differ in their desire to avoid their roommate as a function of the sexual orientation of the roommate, $\beta = .08$, $t(110) = 0.78$, $p = .44$. However, as with all analyses this was after controlling for participant gender and moral condemnation. In contrast, participants in the mating motives prime condition reported a greater desire to avoid their roommate if he/she was gay or lesbian than if he/she was straight, $\beta = .40$, $t(110) = 3.84$, $p < .001$.

Implications of Contagion Concerns. I conducted a follow up analysis to examine whether participants with high levels of contagion concerns were particularly sensitive to the mating motives prime. Previous work indicates that contagion concerns tend to be relatively stable and not influenced by situational manipulations (Buck et al., 2011). Consistent with this, regression analyses examining the effects of the conditions on contagion concerns revealed no significant effect of the priming condition, $\beta = .05$, $t(112) = 0.53$, $p = .60$, or the roommate condition, $\beta = .01$, $t(112) = 0.07$, $p = .95$. The interaction between the priming condition and roommate condition was also not a significant predictor of contagion concerns, $\beta = -.04$, $t(112) = -0.40$, $p = .69$.

To examine the role of contagion concerns as a possible moderator of reactions to the gay/lesbian roommate, I conducted multiple regression analyses to examine the effects of the interaction between priming condition and contagion scores on avoidance scores. I was

interested in the effects of contagion concerns above and beyond those of gender and moral condemnation, so I again included both of these variables as covariates. Results indicated that contagion concerns significantly predicted avoidance such that higher levels of contagion concerns were associated with a greater desire to avoid the lesbian or gay roommate, $\beta = .23$, $t(108) = 2.78$, $p = .01$. However, this main effect was qualified by the hypothesized interaction between priming condition and contagion concerns, $\beta = .25$, $t(108) = 3.60$, $p < .001$.

To examine this interaction, I ran simple slopes analyses at high and low levels of contagion concerns. For participants with high levels of contagion concerns (1 SD above the mean), participants in the sexual arousal condition reported a greater desire to avoid the gay/lesbian roommate than participants in the control condition, $\beta = .54$, $t(108) = 4.75$, $p < .001$. In contrast, for participants with low levels of contagion concerns (1 SD below the mean), there was no difference in avoidance for participants in the sexual arousal and control conditions, $\beta = .05$, $t(108) = 0.40$, $p = .69$.

Discussion

Results from this study indicate that activating mating motives has the capacity to increase heterosexuals' desire to avoid lesbians and gay men. Specifically, heterosexual participants whose mating motives were activated reported a heightened desire to avoid their same-sex gay or lesbian roommate compared to heterosexuals whose mating motives were not activated. However, there was no difference in the desire to avoid a same-sex heterosexual roommate based on whether or not participants' mating motives were activated. Further, participants whose mating motives had been activated reported a greater desire to avoid the gay or lesbian roommate compared to the heterosexual roommate. However, in the control condition, the roommate's sexual orientation did not affect the desire to avoid this individual.

Further analyses indicated that this increase in the desire to avoid the gay or lesbian roommate was only present in heterosexuals with high levels of general social contagion concerns. Specifically, heterosexuals high in social contagion concerns whose mating motives were activated expressed increased desires to avoid contact with lesbians and gay men. In contrast, when heterosexuals low in contagion concerns had their mating motives activated, these participants did not show this elevation in the desire to avoid lesbians and gay men. These findings indicate that not all heterosexual people experience an increased desire to avoid contact with lesbians and gay men when their mating motives are activated. It is only those

heterosexuals who tend to possess social contagion concerns regarding contact with lesbians and gay men who experience an increase in avoidant intentions when their mating motives are activated. This suggests that for heterosexuals who are high in contagion concerns, the activation of their mating motives heightened concerns about the implications of being misclassified as gay or lesbian. While these individuals have heightened general concerns about being misperceived as gay or lesbian, it appears that the activation of their mating motives results in an increased desire to avoid gay men and lesbians to avoid the potential for misclassification and the resulting loss of mating opportunities.

These findings are counter to what would be predicted by realistic group conflict theory (Levine & Campbell, 1972). Specifically, because same-sex lesbians and gay men are not competitors for a heterosexual's potential mates, realistic group conflict theory would predict that heterosexuals whose mating motives were activated would report less of a desire to avoid same-sex lesbians and gay men than heterosexuals whose mating motives were not activated.

It is also worth noting that the current effects of mating motives on participants' desire to avoid contact with a same-sex lesbian or gay man were found above and beyond the effects of participant's gender, moral condemnation of homosexuality, and general sexual prejudice. Consistent with Buck et al.'s (2011) findings, the results of the current study indicate that integrating contagion concerns into the consideration of inter-orientation interactions provides a more complete understanding of heterosexuals' desire to avoid lesbians and gay men. The current work also expands upon Buck et al.'s (2011) findings and sheds light on the previously unexamined role that mating motives play in understanding some heterosexuals' desires to avoid contact with lesbians and gay men. Specifically, it was only heterosexuals with general contagion concerns whose mating motives were activated who reported a heightened desire to avoid their gay or lesbian roommate.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of the current work was to examine the roles that mating motives and social contagion concerns play in heterosexuals' desire to avoid gay men and lesbians. Results from Study 1 indicate that social contagion concerns are influenced by mating goals. Specifically, heterosexuals whose mating goals were not being met had higher levels of social contagion concerns than heterosexuals whose mating goals were being met. These findings support the hypotheses that since being misidentified as gay or lesbian can be quite damaging to heterosexuals' ability to attract mates, those heterosexuals whose mating goals are not being met should be especially concerned about being misidentified as gay or lesbian.

In Study 2, I expanded on these findings to examine the role that mating motives play in the desire to avoid gay men and lesbians by experimentally activating mating motives. Results from this study indicate that heterosexuals whose mating motives were activated expressed a greater desire to avoid a same-sex gay/lesbian roommate than participants whose mating motives were not activated. Further, the desire to avoid contact with the lesbian/gay roommate was especially pronounced in heterosexuals with high levels of general contagion concerns whose mating motives had been activated. These findings suggest that, for heterosexuals high in contagion concerns, the activation of mating motives increases the desire to avoid same-sex gay men and lesbians in order to prevent possible misidentification as lesbian or gay. Thus, the findings across these studies provide evidence that mating motives do indeed contribute to social contagion concerns and intergroup bias.

The findings from the current work are inconsistent with what would be predicted by realistic group conflict theory (Levine & Campbell, 1972). Given that same-sex lesbians and gay men are not in competition with heterosexuals for scarce resources (i.e., mates), this theory would predict that activating heterosexuals' mating motives would reduce the desire to avoid same-sex gay men and lesbians relative to heterosexuals whose mating motives were not activated. However, the current work illustrates that even in situations when mating motives were activated – a time when heterosexuals should most desire the presence of few or no competitors – heterosexuals who were generally concerned about being misidentified as gay or lesbian most wanted to avoid contact with lesbians and gay men. This suggests that heterosexuals' fears about being misidentified as gay or lesbian play a significant role in

decisions to avoid lesbians and gay men, even when associating with members of these groups would seemingly put heterosexuals at a competitive advantage. Thus, it appears that for heterosexuals, the negative consequences that could arise as a result of being misidentified as gay or lesbian outweigh the potential gains of having fewer competitors for mates.

It is also worth noting that the effects of the priming condition and social contagion concerns reported in Study 2 were found above and beyond participant's gender, moral condemnation of homosexuality, and traditional sexual prejudice. As discussed previously, the vast majority of work examining sexual prejudice has focused on heterosexuals' moral condemnation of homosexuality (see Kite and Whitley, 1996). Although understanding this aspect of sexual prejudice provides important information about heterosexuals' attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, the current work indicates that exclusively focusing on heterosexuals' moral condemnation of homosexuality does not fully account for some heterosexuals' responses toward and desire to avoid lesbians and gay men.

The findings from the current studies further suggest that in order to increase intergroup contact, it would be useful to address these social contagion concerns, especially in situations in which heterosexuals' mating motives might be activated. For example, some heterosexual ally groups utilize the slogan, "Straight but not narrow." While this slogan allows heterosexuals to unambiguously state their heterosexuality – which may serve to decrease social contagion concerns – the emphasis on sexual orientation may inadvertently activate mating motives. Thus, these slogans may have unexpected negative implications.

Limitations and Future Directions

The experimental design of Study 2 enabled me to examine the causal roles that mating motives and contagion concerns play in heterosexuals' desires to avoid same-sex lesbians and gay men. However, heterosexuals' mating motives could be activated in various everyday situations and this activation could result in heightened contagion concerns and avoidance of gay men and lesbians. Situations in which mating motives are salient include dating situations and various environments in which people are motivated to find mates, such as bars and clubs. It could be the case that in these situations, there is an underlying emphasis on obtaining mates, which could lead heterosexuals to be particularly concerned about being misidentified as gay or lesbian. It is also possible that the presence of other individuals in a situation could contribute to a heterosexual's contagion concerns. For example, the presence of desirable and available

opposite-sex individuals, in contrast to same-sex individuals or less desirable/available opposite-sex individuals, could increase contagion concerns. Specifically, a heterosexual would want to ensure that attractive and available opposite-sex individuals in particular knew that he or she was heterosexual and, therefore, a potential mate. Heterosexuals' contagion concerns could be further increased if the attractive opposite-sex observers are strangers since these individuals do not have past information relevant to sexual orientation to draw upon.

It could be the case, as the results of Study 2 suggest, that these everyday situations in which heterosexuals' mating motives could be activated increase avoidance of gay men and lesbians only in heterosexuals who are high in general contagion concerns. However, it is also possible that these situations are powerful enough to increase the avoidance of gay men and lesbians regardless of heterosexuals' levels of general contagion concerns. These possibilities should be explored in future work.

The results of Study 1 indicate that there are also characteristics specific to individuals that contribute to contagion concerns (e.g., relationship status). However, it is likely that there are other individual differences that could contribute to contagion concerns. For example, heterosexuals' sociosexual orientation or general interest in finding a mate could influence contagion concerns. People who are sexually unrestricted tend to be interested in sexual relationships with numerous partners. Since these individuals are interested in attracting numerous partners, it could be the case that they are high in contagion concerns because there are more potential partners to whom they must identify themselves as heterosexual. People also differ in the extent to which they are interested in finding a long-term mate or romantic partner and it is likely that these individuals would also be high in contagion concerns as a way to indicate to potential mates that they are heterosexual.

Future work should also examine whether the activation of mating motives increases state contagion concerns; that is, concerns about being misperceived as gay or lesbian in a given situation. These state contagion concerns could mediate the effect of mating motives on avoidance. Specifically, activating heterosexuals' mating motives could lead to increased concerns about being misidentified as gay or lesbian by observers in the current situation. These heightened state contagion concerns could, in turn, lead to an increased desire to avoid gay men and lesbians.

The current work focused on the implications of mating motives and contagion concerns on heterosexuals' desire to avoid gay men and lesbians, but it is likely that these factors influence other aspects of intergroup responses and behavior. For example, future work should investigate the roles that mating motives and contagion concerns have on heterosexuals' denigration of lesbians and gay men. Denigrating members of a group is one effective way to establish oneself as not a member of that group to others. Thus, it is possible that some heterosexuals may denigrate lesbians and gay men as a way to establish themselves as heterosexual to observers. Future work should also examine the roles that mating motives and contagion concerns play in heterosexuals' public support of gay rights. Since sexual orientation is a concealable identity, some heterosexuals may be concerned that publicly supporting gay rights will lead others to misidentify them as gay or lesbian. Sadly, this could have implications for people's perceptions of whether there is general support for such rights, which could further lead to people being silent about their support. Contagion concerns should also be considered in the realm of bullying behaviors. Not only could contagion concerns prevent some heterosexuals from putting an end to others' bullying of gay and lesbian adults and adolescents, it could also be a factor that makes participating in bullying more likely.

The current work only focused on one negative outcome that heterosexuals could face if they are miscategorized as gay or lesbian (i.e., the potential loss of mating opportunities); however, there are other negative consequences of being miscategorized as gay or lesbian. As discussed previously, if a heterosexual is misidentified as gay or lesbian by a same-sex gay or lesbian individual, the heterosexual could possibly be in situations in which he or she has to reject romantic advances. This potential for romantic advances could be particularly provoking for some individuals depending on what their morality is based. According to Moral Foundations Theory (Haidt & Graham, 2007), some individuals are concerned with violations to purity or sanctity. Such violations include things that are perceived to be disgusting and unnatural (Graham, Nosek, Haidt, Iyer, Koleva, & Ditto, 2011). Graham et al. (2011) found concerns about purity/sanctity were related to attitudes toward homosexuals such that individuals who were concerned with purity/sanctity reported negative feelings about homosexuals. Further, Cottrell and Neuberg (2005) found that gay men elicited feelings of disgust in their participants. Given the emphasis on disgust in the purity/sanctity foundation of morality (Graham et al., 2011) and the association of gay men with feelings of disgust (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005), it is possible

that some heterosexuals are concerned about threats to their purity from lesbians and gay men. Specifically, heterosexuals who are high on the purity/sanctity foundation of morality may fear contamination or other threats to their purity should they be misidentified as lesbian or gay by same-sex lesbians or gay men and then be approached with romantic intentions by these individuals. Thus, these heterosexuals may have heightened contagion concerns stemming from concerns about being the target of unwanted romantic advances.

In addition, some heterosexuals could also be concerned that being misperceived as gay or lesbian could result in being the target of discrimination and stigma from other heterosexuals. Heterosexuals who are high in general sexual prejudice, who live in communities with strong antigay norms, or who have witnessed prejudice or antigay harassment or crimes could be particularly likely to be concerned about being miscategorized as gay or lesbian due to concerns of being the target of stigma and discrimination. The prevalence of antigay harassment and violence (Herek, 2009) indicates that these concerns about safety are warranted and need to be addressed accordingly. While it is possible that living in communities with strong antigay norms could understandably increase contagion concerns due to threats to safety, living in communities with egalitarian norms toward gay men and lesbians could reduce contagion concerns. Future research should examine the effects of making egalitarian group norms salient on social contagion concerns. It is possible that if heterosexuals with contagion concerns perceive that both attractive opposite-sex individuals and members of their own gender ingroup espouse positive attitudes toward lesbians and gay men, then social contagion concerns could be alleviated.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current work illuminates the role that seemingly unrelated goals can play in intergroup relations. Activating mating motives appears to exacerbate some heterosexuals' desires to avoid contact with lesbians and gay men. Specifically, heterosexuals high in general social contagion concerns whose mating goals were activated reported a heightened desire to avoid contact with a same-sex lesbian or gay roommate. Given the crucial role that contact plays in improving intergroup relations (see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), it is important to understand these concerns and the functions they serve in the hopes of discovering strategies to mitigate their effects and make intergroup interactions more likely.

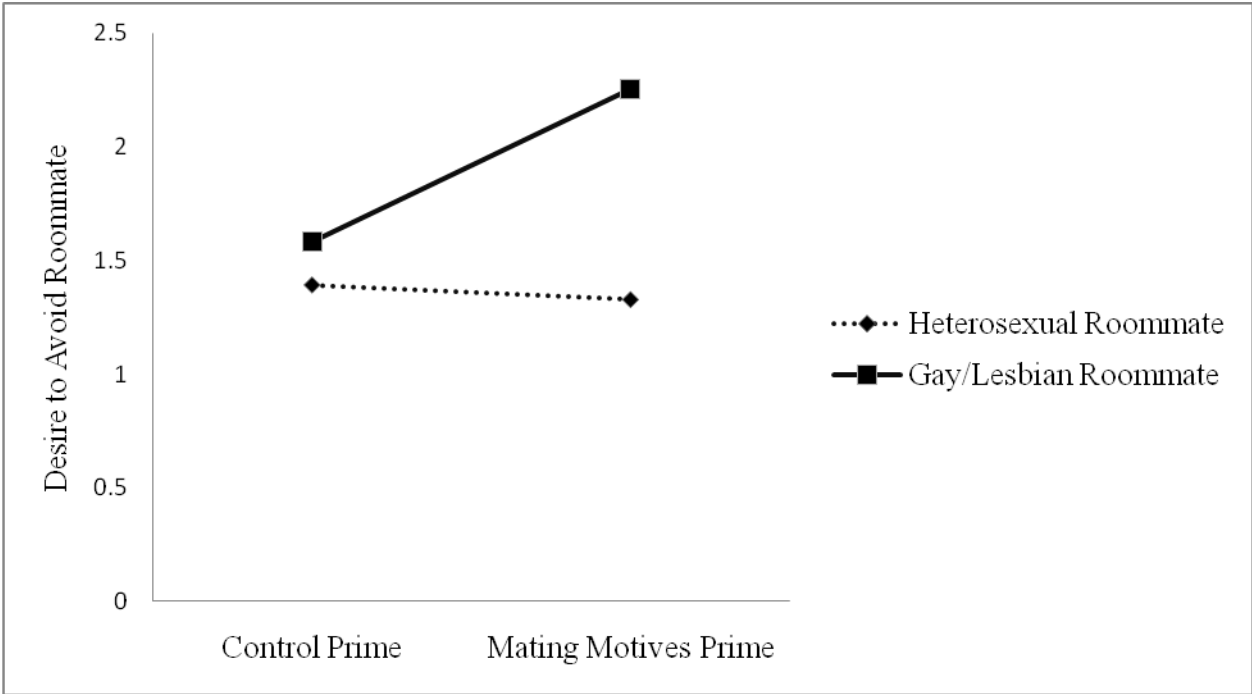


Figure 1. The effect of priming condition and roommate’s sexual orientation on the desire to avoid contact with the hypothetical roommate when controlling for participant’s gender and moral condemnation of homosexuality.

APPENDIX A

COPY OF HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL FORM

APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 10/20/2010

To: Katherine Zielaskowski

Address: 4301

Dept.: PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT

From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair

Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research

Avoidance of sexual minorities

The application that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the research proposal referenced above has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Committee at its meeting on 10/13/2010. Your project was approved by the Committee.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals, which may be required.

If you submitted a proposed consent form with your application, the approved stamped consent form is attached to this approval notice. Only the stamped version of the consent form may be used in recruiting research subjects.

If the project has not been completed by 10/12/2011 you must request a renewal of approval for continuation of the project. As a courtesy, a renewal notice will be sent to you prior to your expiration date; however, it is your responsibility as the Principal Investigator to timely request renewal of your approval from the Committee.

You are advised that any change in protocol for this project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee prior to implementation of the proposed change in the protocol. A protocol change/amendment form is required to be submitted for approval by the Committee. In addition, federal regulations require that the Principal Investigator promptly report, in writing any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the Chair of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protection. The Assurance Number is IRB00000446.

Cc: Elizabeth Plant, Advisor

HSC No. 2010.4996

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I freely and voluntarily and without element of force or coercion, consent to be a participant in the research project entitled "Writing about Past Experiences." This research is being conducted by Kate Zielaskowski, a graduate student in the Department of Psychology at Florida State University working with Dr. Ashby Plant, Professor in the Department of Psychology at Florida State University. I understand that the purpose of this research project is to understand how we think about previous experiences. I understand that if I participate in the project, I will be asked to answer questions about some of my attitudes and beliefs. I also understand that some of these questions may pertain to topics that are sensitive in their nature. Sensitive topics may include, but are not limited to, questions about my sexual history, attitudes about people from other social groups, and feelings of self-worth.

I understand that I must be at least 18 years of age in order to participate. The total time commitment would be about 30 minutes and I will be compensated by receiving ½ credit point. I understand that my participation is totally voluntary and I may stop participation at any time. If I decide to stop participation, I will still be entitled to the credit point. All my answers to the questions will be confidential to the extent allowed by law. I understand that the responses I provide today will be linked back to data collected at the beginning of the semester but that once the data is matched up, all links to my name will be destroyed. In addition, my name will not appear on any of the results. No individual responses will be reported. Only group findings will be reported. I understand that the data will be stored in A306, which is a locked room in the new psychology building. In addition, all paper materials will be destroyed by October 2018 and all electronic data will be destroyed by October 2020.

I understand that there is a possibility of a minimal level of risk involved if I agree to participate in this study. I might experience anxiety or frustration when completing some of the questionnaires and tasks. I understand I will be asked to interact with another person, which can sometimes be stressful for some individuals. The research assistant will be available to talk with me about any emotional discomfort I may experience while participating. I am also able to stop my participation at any time I wish.

I understand that there are benefits for participating in this research project. First, I may gain insight into how interactions with others can affect decisions. Also, I will be providing researchers with valuable insight into this issue.

I understand that this consent may be withdrawn at any time without prejudice, penalty, or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I have been given the right to ask and have answered any inquiry concerning the study. Questions, if any, have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that I may contact Kate Zielaskowski, Florida State University, Department of Psychology, Psychology building room A305, [REDACTED] or Dr. Ashby Plant, Florida State University, Department of Psychology Room 306, [REDACTED] for answers to questions about this research or my rights. Group results will be sent to me upon my request. If I have questions about my rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if I feel I have been placed at risk, I can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, Institutional Review Board, through the Office of the Vice President for Research, at [REDACTED].

I have read and understand this consent form.

(Participant Signature)

(Date)

(Participant Name – Please print)

FSU Human Subjects Committee Approved on 10/18/10. Void after 10/12/11. HSC# 2010.4996

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I freely and voluntarily and without element of force or coercion, consent to be a participant in the research project entitled "Imagined Interactions." This research is being conducted by Kate Zielaskowski, a graduate student in the Department of Psychology at Florida State University working with Dr. Ashby Plant, Professor in the Department of Psychology at Florida State University. I understand that the purpose of this research project is to understand how we perceive others when we first meet them. I understand that if I participate in the project, I will be asked to answer questions about some of my attitudes and beliefs. I also understand that some of these questions may pertain to topics that are sensitive in their nature. Sensitive topics may include, but are not limited to, questions about my sexual history, attitudes about people from other social groups, and feelings of self-worth.

I understand that I must be at least 18 years of age in order to participate. The total time commitment would be about 30 minutes and I will be compensated by receiving 1/2 credit point. I understand that my participation is totally voluntary and I may stop participation at any time. If I decide to stop participation, I will still be entitled to the credit point. All my answers to the questions will be confidential to the extent allowed by law. I understand that the responses I provide today will be linked back to data collected at the beginning of the semester but that once the data is matched up, all links to my name will be destroyed. In addition, my name will not appear on any of the results. No individual responses will be reported. Only group findings will be reported. I understand that the data will be stored in A306, which is a locked room in the new psychology building. In addition, all paper materials will be destroyed by October 2018 and all electronic data will be destroyed by October 2020.

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I have read and understand this consent form.

(Participant Signature)

(Date)

(Participant Name – Please print)

FSU Human Subjects Committee Approved on 10/18/10. Void after 10/12/11. HSC# 2010.4996

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Katherine Zielaskowski graduated with a B.A. in psychology from the College of Saint Rose in May of 2006, and an M.S. in Experimental Psychology from Central Michigan University in August 2009. She is currently enrolled in the Social Psychology doctoral program at Florida State University under the direction of Dr. E. Ashby Plant. Her research interests include prejudice and stereotyping with a focus on prejudice reduction.