ABSTRACT

MASCULINITY MATTERS: PERCEPTIONS OF ONE’S OWN GENDER STATUS AND THE EFFECTS ON PSYCHOSOCIAL WELL BEING AMONG GAY MEN

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Gay men have a unique relationship with masculinity. The manner in which gay men view their gender in a heterosexist context (i.e., Perceptions of One’s Own Gender Status, “POOGS”) may explain individual differences found in psychological health among both feminine and masculine gay men. In this study, four factors that make up POOGS are 1) connection to the gay community, 2) perceived negative attitudes toward effeminacy, 3) exposure to heterosexist discrimination, and 4) one’s own masculinity.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the hypotheses that 1) POOGS will predict symptoms of depression, anxiety, stress, and satisfaction with life, and 2) that these relationships will be moderated by internalized heterosexism. Participants were non-heterosexual men (N=179), who were recruited from national LGBTQ organizations, a local festival, and using snowball sampling, followed a link to an anonymous online survey.

Four hierarchical linear regressions were conducted to test hypotheses. Exposure to heterosexist microaggressions was associated with elevated stress and anxiety. For masculine gay men, involvement with the gay community was related to increased stress and anxiety, while for less masculine gay men, involvement with the gay community decreased stress and anxiety. Internalized heterosexism was related to decreased satisfaction with life, and increased depression, anxiety, and stress.

Though many gay men are able to successfully manage the stigma that accompanies their sexual and gender role orientations, others are occluded by harmful beliefs and messages, which are often imparted by individuals who are respected and loved. These individuals need help in deciphering ways to neutralize these powerful messages.