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Beyond the Superordinate Categories of “Gay Men” and “Lesbian Women”: Identification of Gay and Lesbian Subgroups

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ABSTRACT
Nation-wide opinion polls and social scientific studies indicate that evaluations of gay men and lesbian women have become increasingly favourable. These positive trends do not explain the widespread discrimination experiences being reported. To assist researchers in investigating attitudes towards gay and lesbian persons, the current research examines whether there are multiple “types” that are identifiable and salient. Two Canadian studies (Ns = 67 and 206) were conducted to establish the presence of gay and lesbian subgroups. Using subgroups generated by Study 1 participants, community and student sub-samples selected those they perceive to exist. Results indicated that, for gay men, the subgroups Drag Queen and Flamboyant emerged, as did Butch for lesbian women. Amongst students, Closeted and Feminine also emerged for gay men, as well as Feminist and Tomboy for lesbian women. These findings have implications for contemporary research on gay- and lesbian-related attitudes and the methodology used to assess them.

KEYWORDS
Gay; lesbian; attitudes; subgroups; stereotypes

Introduction
Discrimination against gay and lesbian persons is reported frequently within health care settings, family relationships (Jewell, McCutcheon, Harriman, & Morrison, 2011), and governmental service-providing sectors (Mattocks et al., 2015). Critically, instances of victimization and abuse are prevalent not only within adult sexual minority populations but are evidenced when sampling sexual minority youth as well. In surveys of both Canadian (Morrison, Jewell, McCutcheon, & Cochrane, 2014; Saewyc et al., 2007; Taylor & Peter, 2011) and American (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012) high school students, over half of the sexual orientation minority students surveyed reported hearing the homonegative comments “that’s so gay,” “faggot,” and “dyke,” and being verbally harassed by other means. Approximately 10–20% of the students also reported being targets of physical and sexual violence (e.g., evidenced by reports of gay and
lesbian students being physically abused, threatened with a weapon, and sexually assaulted). Swim, Pearson, and Johnston (2007) emphasize that the discrimination experienced by sexual minority children often occurs regularly. Of the 69 sexual minority youth who were asked to keep a diary of their discrimination experiences during a one-week period, results indicated that, on average, lesbian and gay students experienced two homonegative incidents in the form of homonegative verbal comments (e.g., hearing anti-gay jokes) and homonegative behaviours (e.g., exclusion, rude gestures, and/or fear of being outed).

Survey data illustrate a decidedly more “liberalized” attitudinal trend toward gay men and lesbian women than research focusing on their discrimination experiences. Data from the General Social Survey (GSS) in Canada revealed that, from 1988–2006, opposition to same-sex marriage decreased by 19 percentage points (Baunach, 2012). American polling data (i.e., Gallup 1977–2011; and the 2000 National Election Study) showed decreases of a similar magnitude in the following domains: support for adoption by same-sex couples, policies tackling job discrimination against sexual minorities, and service by sexual minority persons in the military (Hicks & Lee, 2006).

The trend toward greater “liberalization” has been echoed in myriad academic studies, particularly amongst those using valid indicators (i.e., psychometrically sound scales) of global acceptance of sexual minority persons. For instance, Altemeyer (2001) assessed Canadian university students’ attitudes toward sexual minority individuals in 1984 and then repeated the assessment in 1998. As noted, scores on the Attitudes toward Homosexuals Scale (ATHS; Altemeyer, 1988) hovered around the ATHS midpoint in 1984; yet, decreased substantially fourteen years later. Recent studies (e.g., Hirai, Winkel, & Popan, 2014; Stotzer, 2009) that have employed the Attitudes toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale (ATLG; Herek, 1988), a gold standard measure in the field of attitudinal homonegativity, have shown vast improvement from the degree of prejudice documented 20 years earlier. Finally, even for studies assessing contemporary forms of bias toward gay and lesbian individuals using “modern” measures of homonegativity (where attitudes are not a function of moralistic or religious objections to homosexuality) evidence similar decrements. Since Morrison and Morrison (2003) first published their seminal research on the development and validation of the Modern Homonegativity Scale (MHS), wherein Canadian students’ scores on the MHS were situated above the midpoint signifying their endorsement of a “subtler” form of homonegativity, studies published almost a decade later (e.g., McDermott & Blair, 2012; Morrison & Morrison, 2011) now situate Canadian participants’ scores below the MHS midpoint. To further understand the discrimination experiences of sexual minority persons during a time of attitudinal liberalization, researchers have begun to consider what
additional complexities may exist that affect attitudes towards these evaluative targets.

Research on cognition (e.g., Brewer, Dull, & Lui, 1981; Eckes, 1994; Park, Ryan, & Judd, 1992; Richards & Hewstone, 2001) indicates that “perceivers process group-related information at multiple levels, ranging from the broader (i.e., overall category) to more specific (i.e., subgroup) levels” (Brambilla, Carnaghi, & Ravenna, 2011, p. 101). It is logical to intuit, therefore, that individuals may possess unique attitudes toward different “types” of gay men or lesbian women, wherein some subgroups might evoke primarily positive attitudes, and others might evoke negative ones. Importantly, if these distinct groups become obscured when researchers use superordinate categories (e.g., the generic terms “gay men” and/or “lesbian women,” terms found within almost every anti-gay or -lesbian measure), interpretations of study results may be skewed at best, or flawed at worst. Indeed, superordinate categories of sexual minorities (e.g., “effeminate” gay men or “butch” lesbian women) may be suppressed.

On the basis of a comprehensive review of the literature, we could locate only three studies that have examined whether subgroups of sexual minorities exist, with one of the three focusing on gay men, and the other two focusing on lesbian women. In their study on gay male subgroups, American researchers Clausell and Fiske (2005) contend that attitudes toward sexual minorities might be complicated by the existence of subgroups (i.e., a smaller subset of people with similar identifiers within a larger overarching group), which the authors first hypothesized to exist after observing gay men’s neutral position within a map of the Stereotype Content Model (SCM). In order to determine what subgroups of gay men might exist, Clausell and Fiske (2005) conducted a preliminary study with 44 American undergraduate students from Princeton University. Participants were instructed to identify attributes of gay men and then to sort them into subgroups, a process that resulted in 73 separate subgroup terms being recorded. The researchers retained subgroups that were generated by at least 10% of the sample, which were (in descending order): “in the closet,” “flamboyant,” “feminine,” “crossdresser,” “gay activist,” “hyper-masculine,” “body-conscious,” “artistic,” “leather/biker,” and “straight-acting.” To understand the perceptions associated with each subgroup, Clausell and Fiske (2005) then surveyed an additional 40 undergraduate students from Princeton University. Specifically, participants were asked about the warmth and competence of each subgroup using a measure derived from the SCM, and constructed originally by Fiske et al. in 2002. Using hierarchical cluster analysis, Clausell and Fiske found that the 10 subgroups that had been generated in their initial study were clustered into three distinct groups. Results indicated that, the majority of the groups fell within the high competence-low warmth (HC-LW; i.e., “body-conscious,” “straight acting,” “in the closet,” “artistic,”
“hyper-masculine,” and “activist”) and low competence-high warmth (LC-HW; i.e., “flamboyant” and “feminine”) quadrants. In accordance with the authors’ hypotheses, the “leather/biker” and “crossdresser” subgroups fell within the most derogated low competence-low warmth (LC-LW) quadrant area.

One year later, in 2006, Geiger, Harwood, and Hummert conducted a study to identify subgroups of lesbian women. Unlike research by Clausell and Fiske (2005) in which the SCM was used, the authors took a cognitive perspective to theoretically frame their study and asserted that individuals may hold multiple stereotypes about a given group (e.g., Brewer et al., 1981; Hummert, 1990). As such, Geiger et al. (2006) expected to find that individuals possess both positive and negative subgroups of lesbian women. In the first stage of their two-phase study, Geiger et al. (2006) instructed 61 students from a mid-western American university (i.e., the University of Missouri) to generate traits that they associated with the superordinate category “lesbian.” After removing derogatory terms (e.g., “whore-bag”) and combining synonymous descriptors (e.g., “manly” with “male-like”), 94 distinct traits were generated. In the second phase, 63 different undergraduate students were instructed to sort the traits generated by participants in Phase 1 into groups that represented “types” of lesbians, and were instructed to generate names for each lesbian subgroup based on the traits ascribed. A hierarchical cluster analysis revealed that participants’ categorizations resulted in two higher-level clusters; namely, positive traits and negative traits. Four subgroups of lesbian women fell within the positive cluster: “lipstick lesbian,” “career-oriented feminist,” “soft-butch,” and “free-spirit.” Likewise, four subgroups comprised the negative traits cluster, which were “hypersexual,” “sexually confused,” “sexually deviant,” and “angry butch.” In addition, Geiger et al. (2006) interpreted a strong-weak dimension in which the subgroups associated with sexuality were perceived as “weak,” and the “butch” and “feminist” categories were positioned closest to the “strong” pole.

Complementing the earlier studies of 2005 and 2006 by Clausell and Fiske and Geiger et al., respectively, Italian researchers Brambilla et al. (2011) conducted the first study examining the presence of lesbian subgroups outside the American states of Missouri and New Jersey. Using the SCM as a theoretical and methodological framework, the researchers instructed 32 Italian undergraduate students to list subgroups of lesbian women and provide the most salient characteristics for each subgroup they listed. Adopting a criterion that the subgroups must be mentioned by at least 15% or 10% of the sample (a slightly more stringent percentage than that employed by Causell and Fiske in 2005), the study resulted in the identification of four lesbian subgroups; namely, “butch,” “feminine,” “closeted,” and “outed.” Following the subgroup generation process, Brambilla et al. (2011)
assessed 70 Italian students’ ratings of either the four established subgroups or the superordinate category “lesbian woman” on indicators of warmth and competence. Of the subgroups generated, “feminine” and “outed” lesbians fell in the HC-HW quadrant, “butch” lesbians were positioned in the HC-LW quadrant, and “closeted” lesbians were in the LC-LW area. Importantly, the results indicated that the superordinate category of “lesbian woman” was situated in the middle of the warmth and competence SCM space.

Evident across the only three subgroup-generation studies conducted so far, is the tendency for participants to construct subgroups that relate to gender conformity and gender non-conformity. For instance, of the ten subgroups documented by Clausell and Fiske (2005), at least half (i.e., “hyper-masculine,” “flamboyant,” “feminine,” “crossdresser,” and “leather/biker”) reflect perceptions around gender roles. Of the four groups that clustered in Brambilla et al.’s study, two (i.e., “feminine” and “butch”) relate to gender role characteristics, as do three (i.e., “lipstick lesbian,” “soft-butch,” and “angry butch”) of the eight highlighted by Geiger et al. (2006). As hypothesized by Clausell and Fiske (2005), participants were expected to rely on gender roles when stereotyping sexual minority persons such that subgroups that replicated feminine gender roles (i.e., “feminine,” “flamboyant,” and “crossdresser”) were to be rated similarly to the ratings observed for the general social category “women.” This hypothesis was supported insofar as both the subgroups perceived as “feminine” and “women” were found in the LC-HW quadrant. The subgroups that were consistent with masculine gender roles (i.e., “hyper-masculine,” “straight-acting,” “leather/biker,” and “in-the-closet”) were expected to fall within the HC-LW space in a pattern similar to that found for the general social category “men.” The authors’ hypotheses were largely supported on this front as well. Other research (e.g., Blashill & Powlishta, 2009; Glick & Fiske, 1996) further provides support for the relationship between gender role beliefs and sexual prejudice, as well as the centrality of heterosexuality on gender stereotyping. To conclude, although the relationships between gender roles and the stereotyping of gay men and lesbian women cannot account for all of the subgroups that have been generated, it appears that gender roles are a factor in, and potentially a driving force behind, heterosexual persons’ evaluations of and attitudes toward subgroups of gay men and lesbian women. Consequently, a key objective of the present study is determining the salience of perceived gender role characteristics for participants and any linkages with the gay and lesbian subgroups generated.

**Present study and incremental advances**

The current study will address the following four exploratory research questions: (1) What contemporary subgroups of gay men and lesbian women are
identified by Canadian-born heterosexual individuals; (2) Will photographs lead to the identification of additional subgroups over and above what can be generated without prompts; (3) Are the identified subgroups related to gender role characteristics; (4) Does level of modern homonegativity affect the awareness of subgroups that are perceived to exist within a Canadian context? A cognitive perspective, as used by Geiger et al. (2006), was adopted for the theoretical framework guiding the present study. This framework contends that individuals may hold multiple stereotypes about a given group (Brewer et al., 1981; Hummert, 1990). Different stereotypes may be activated depending on the characteristics of the situation or target. Based on this framework, we expect that both positive and negative subgroups would be generated for the overarching categories of gay men and lesbian women. However, in the present study, similar to Geiger et al. (2006), the valence (i.e., positive or negative) of the descriptions provided for the generated subgroups were not collected, and, therefore, drawing conclusions related to what attitudes and stereotypes are associated with the subgroups are not possible.

The present study will supplement the small body of research on subgroups of gay men and lesbian women. To date, each of the three extant studies in the area (i.e., Brambilla et al., 2011; Clausell & Fiske, 2005; Geiger et al., 2006) identified subgroups for one overarching group only; for instance, Clausell and Fiske (2005) examined subgroups of gay men, and Geiger et al. (2006) and Brambilla et al. (2011) focused on subgroups of lesbian women. In the present study, we identify the subgroups generated empirically for both gay men and lesbian women across two studies, and include this design feature in order to allow for their initial documentation, as well as comparison and contrast. Further, since all three of the studies conducted to date have examined the subgroups of gay men or lesbian women from the perspective of university students, researchers’ ability to generalize beyond a student perspective is questionable. In the present study, we extend our investigation to include non-university participants (for Study 2); thus, documenting for the first time, the subgroups generated by those outside a post-secondary milieu.³

The current study also will be the first to use a Canadian sample to identify subgroups of gay men and lesbian women. Canadian laws (Rayside, 2008) and public opinion surveys (Andersen & Fetner, 2008) indicate that Canadians have comparatively more liberal attitudes toward sexual minorities than a country such as the United States. Indeed, Adam (1995) outlines five factors that differentiate Canadians from Americans in terms of their attitudes toward sexual minority persons. These are: 1) fewer Canadians identify as evangelical Protestants; 2) more Canadians are unionized; 3) Canada is multicultural (rather than a “melting pot”); 4) Canada has a stronger history of social democracy; and 5) Canada has a weaker militaristic tradition. Adam (1995)
suggests that these factors are associated with improved attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women and have likely influenced governmental and legal decisions in regards to sexual minority persons. Given these cultural differences, it is possible that a set of subgroups for gay men and lesbian women that is distinct from the subgroups found earlier by Clausell and Fiske (gay men; 2005) and Geiger et al. (lesbian women; 2006) will be observed.

In terms of intra-study differences, Study 1 entails participants generating all possible subgroups of gay men or lesbian women they could think of, and then providing all possible traits they believed strongly characterized each of the subgroups generated. Importantly, after initially generating all possible subgroups, participants were then shown photographs of men or women to elicit any additional subgroups that they may have been unable to think of at the time without a prompt. Based on the results of Study 1, a master list of subgroups was created for use in Study 2. The current study therefore uses a two-step approach, which offers the most rigorous methodological approach to generating subgroups of gay men and lesbian women to date because it reduces the reliance on memory retrieval. For instance, the subgroups generated in other studies (i.e., Brambilla et al., 2011; Clausell & Fiske, 2005; Geiger et al., 2006) were contingent on participants’ memory retrieval abilities at a particular moment within the course of a study. It is possible that participants may be unable to think of subgroups with which they are familiar “on the spot” and consequently provide suboptimal responses. To counteract retrieval biases, we utilize photographs in Study 1 in order to produce the most exhaustive pool of possible subgroups for use in Study 2. According to Deocampo and Hudson (2010), using photographs to prompt responses is a valid method for increasing participant recall. It should also be mentioned that it is most often strangers who display aggression toward sexual minority persons (Mason, 1993). Since strangers have only a person’s appearance or limited behavioural cues to rely on when classifying a person as a sexual minority or member of a particular sexual minority subgroup, incorporating a photograph of a presumed sexual minority person was considered essential in order to provide participants with similar circumstances for subgroup classification.

Study 1

The purpose of Study 1 was to create a master list of potential subgroups of gay men and lesbian women that can assist in the identification of subgroups that are salient to heterosexual Canadians.

Participants

In total, 67 undergraduate students were recruited from the University of Saskatchewan psychology participant pool and received bonus course
credit for their participation. Participants were 47 (70.1%) women and 20 (29.9%) men. They ranged in age from 18 to 42 ($M = 21.04$; $SD = 4.53$) and the majority self-identified as Caucasian ($n = 50$; 74.6%) and heterosexual ($n = 59$; 88.1%). Participants were randomly assigned to complete the study about either gay men ($n = 33$) or lesbian women ($n = 34$).

**Procedure and materials**

This study was conducted on the University of Saskatchewan campus. Students signed up to participate via the psychology participant pool website and received bonus course credit. On their arrival to the researcher’s laboratory, participants were given an informed consent sheet to read and sign. It was explained to students that their participation was voluntary and that the purpose of the study was to establish perceived subgroups of gay men and lesbian women. In Phase I, participants were presented with paper-and-pencil Subgroup Generation Forms, which instructed participants to “list any and all subgroups of gay men that you think exist in society.” It was noted that “these subgroups do not need to reflect [their] own opinion, but rather should reflect societal stereotypes or associations with which [they] are familiar.” They were also asked to list five adjectives they felt were most associated with each of the subgroups generated. Participants were asked to generate subgroups that they think exist from a society’s perspective to reduce socially desirable responding (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). This tactic is also used in other subgroup generation studies (Clausell & Fiske, 2005; Geiger et al., 2006). Participants filled out one Subgroup Generation Form per subgroup that they listed. Participants were randomly assigned using a random number generator to complete the study for either gay men or lesbian women.

After completing the Subgroup Generation Forms, participants moved to a computer terminal for Phase II. At the computer terminal, participants were presented with 50 photographs of men (if they generated subgroups of gay men) or 50 photographs of women (if they generated subgroups of lesbian women) and were asked to categorize them on the basis of the subgroups they had generated by typing the subgroup name into an open-ended text box under the photographs. Participants were provided with their Subgroup Generation Forms to refer back to when completing the computerized task. The researchers selected the 50 photographs of men and 50 photographs of women using Google Image Search. It was believed that the presentation of photographs might trigger participants to think of additional subgroups that they were unable to without assistance. Participants were given the opportunity to propose additional subgroups in Phase II if the photographs prompted them to think of others that were not generated in
Phase I. If additional subgroups were proposed, participants completed another Subgroup Generation Form for each of the new subgroups.

The presentation of visual stimuli would be similar to participants encountering a stranger they believe to be a sexual minority person. In these situations, they would classify the stranger using visual appearance cues. Past research (i.e., Brambilla et al., 2011; Clausell & Fiske, 2005; Geiger et al., 2006) on subgroups of gay men and lesbian women were used to guide the selection of photographs. That is, the subgroup labels (e.g., “flamboyant” and “butch”) were entered into the search engine, as well as the general search terms “gay,” “lesbian,” and “homosexual,” and different combinations of the subgroup labels and general terms. Colour photographs showing men and women from the area above the waist, groin, or knee and facing forward were selected. Photographs depicting celebrities, fashion models, or those containing multiple people or people who were in a state of undress were disqualified. The photographs were cropped so that only the area above the waist, groin, or knee was visible, and the backgrounds were edited to be uniformly white. Some search terms (e.g., “leather/biker”) generated many qualifying photographs and, in those cases, the photographs that were considered to best fit the criteria (i.e., facing forward, depicting only the waist, groin of knee-up area) and that required the least additional editing (i.e., cropping, changing the background colour to white) were selected.

As the final task, participants responded to four demographic questions (i.e., age, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation) on the computer terminal. Participants were then debriefed by being provided information about the study's purpose (i.e., establishing possible subgroups of gay men and lesbian women). The study took approximately 30 minutes to complete.

**Analysis**

To ascertain the subgroups of gay men and lesbian women, two coders independently classified the generated subgroups into categories. The coders were provided with the following instructions to guide their coding:

- **Step 1:** Group identically named subgroups together (e.g., butch, butch) —while ensuring that associated adjectives do not imply distinct subgroups (e.g., Queen: elegant, royal, graceful, reserved, poised vs. Queen: sassy, flamboyant, effeminate, eccentric, loud).
- **Step 2:** Group synonymously named subgroups together (e.g., manly, masculine)—while ensuring that the associated adjectives do not imply distinct categories. Select the subgroup name, of the synonymous terms, that best exemplifies the category.
Step 3: Examine associated adjectives for overlap between subgroups with different names (e.g., one subgroup might be called “Feminine,” while another group might be called “Lipstick” but may have “Feminine” as an associated adjective)—determine if these subgroups should be classified together and choose the subgroup name that best exemplifies the category.

Step 4: Examine remaining subgroups for conceptual overlap. Use your discretion to determine if subgroups should be categorised together. Again, select the subgroup name that best exemplifies the composite category.

Step 5: Ensure that subgroups that have the same participant number are not classified in the same category.

Note: every subgroup should be classified into a category (either with other subgroups or by itself)—all categories should be given a name.

These steps were completed to create a manageable list of conceptually distinct subgroups for use in the subsequent study. The approach used in the current study was similar to that used by Geiger et al. (2006) in their identification of traits describing lesbian subgroups. Following the independent coding, the coders compared their results. Any differences in opinion between the two coders were resolved through discussion. The inter-rater reliability for identically-labelled subgroups was 47.3%. In most cases, the subgroups were categorised similarly but were given different names (e.g., drag queen vs. crossdresser, hippie vs. free-spirited). When these similarly labeled names were considered as a match between coders, the inter-rater reliability increased to 82.1%. To resolve these conflicts, the subgroups were labelled with the word used most frequently by participants.

Results and discussion

Participants who completed the study in relation to subgroups of gay men generated between 2 and 10 subgroups each. A total of 184 subgroups were generated across all participants. The mean number of subgroups generated was 5.58 (SD = 2.25), with a mean of 3.88 (SD = 1.83) subgroups generated prior to the presentation of photographs, and a mean of 1.70 (SD = 1.38) subgroups generated afterward. The coding process revealed that 51 distinct subgroups were generated. The top five generated subgroups included: flamboyant (n = 30; 90.9%), drag queen (n = 15; 45.5%), masculine (n = 13; 39.4%), feminine (n = 11; 33.3%), and normal (n = 7; 21.2%).

Participants who completed the lesbian version of the study generated between 2 and 9 subgroups, with 182 subgroups being generated in total. On average, participants generated 5.35 (SD = 1.94) subgroups, with a mean of 3.71 (SD = 1.61) subgroups being generated before the presentation of
photographs, and a mean of 1.65 ($SD = 1.41$) subgroups being generated after the photographs were presented. The independent coders determined that participants generated 38 distinct subgroups of lesbian women. The top generated lesbian subgroups included: butch ($n = 26; 76.5\%$), feminine ($n = 14; 42.4\%$), free-spirited ($n = 14; 42.4\%$), tomboy ($n = 11; 32.4\%$), feminist ($n = 8; 23.5\%$), and promiscuous ($n = 8; 23.5\%$).

The results of Study 1 support the notion that individuals perceive subgroups of gay men and lesbian women beyond these overarching categories. On average, participants perceived approximately five to six subgroups for each sexual minority group. The inclusion of photographs, a tactic that had not been employed in existing sexual minority subgroup studies, to trigger the generation of other subgroups was helpful, with an average of 1.65 and 1.70 additional lesbian and gay subgroups, respectively, being cited after the presentation of photographs.

**Study 2**

The purpose of Study 2 was to identify subgroups of gay men and lesbian women that are salient to heterosexual Canadian undergraduate students and members of the general public.

**Participants**

Data from two groups of participants were collected and analyzed separately. Firstly, 106 students (80 women, 26 men) were recruited through the introductory psychology participant pool and a general university-wide student participant pool. They ranged in age from 17 to 50, with a mean age of 21.79 ($SD = 6.13$). The majority self-identified as White (81.1%, $n = 86$), with 4.7% ($n = 5$) identifying as Aboriginal and East Asian, 3.8% ($n = 4$) as South Asian, 2.8% ($n = 3$) as mixed origin and .9% ($n = 1$) as Black and Southeast Asian.

A general Canadian population sample also was recruited to verify the generalizability of the subgroups identified by the student sample. In total, 100 heterosexual, Canadian adults (52 women, 48 men) were recruited from the sample vendor, Ekos. The general population sample ranged in age from 24 to 79, with a mean age of 31.64 ($SD = 15.04$). Again, the majority self-identified as White (87.0%, $n = 87$), with 5.0% ($n = 5$) identifying as Aboriginal, 3.0% ($n = 3$) as East Asian and mixed origin, and 1.0% ($n = 1$) as Black and other. Half of the participants responded from Ontario (50.0%; $n = 50$), 16.0% ($n = 16$) from British Columbia, 10.0% ($n = 10$) from Alberta, 8.0% ($n = 8$) from Saskatchewan, 4.0% ($n = 4$) from Manitoba, 3.0% ($n = 3$) each from New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, and 2.0% ($n = 2$) from Quebec and Newfoundland.
Participants were randomly assigned to complete the study about gay men ($n = 55$ students; $n = 49$ general population) or lesbian women ($n = 51$ students; $n = 51$ general population). Participants recruited through the psychology participant pool were awarded course credit; those recruited through the general university pool received five dollars; and Ekos panel members voluntarily participate in research with no remuneration. Only participants identifying as heterosexual were included in the analysis. While individuals of any sexual orientation could participate in Study 1, the goal of Study 2 was to establish subgroups that were salient for heterosexual individuals; thus, it was the perspective of heterosexually-identifying persons that were documented and analyzed. It also should be mentioned that only Canadian-born participants were included in the analysis as it was critical that the subgroups be salient in a Canadian context.

**Materials**

**Master list of subgroups**

To create a large and comprehensive list of possible subgroups, the master list combined the subgroups generated in Study 1 as well as subgroups generated by the first author and five experts in the field of gender and sexuality who were invited to contribute. Similarly to the instructions from Study 1, these individuals were directed to generate any and all subgroups of gay men and lesbian women that are perceived by members of society to exist. They were informed that the subgroups do not need to reflect their own opinions, but rather should reflect subgroups with which they are familiar. For the gay men master list, 51 subgroups were taken from Study 1 and 46 additional subgroups generated by the first author and the content experts, to yield a total of 97 subgroups. For the lesbian master list, 31 additional subgroups were generated to add to the 38 subgroups from Study 1, for a total of 69 subgroups. The subgroups were listed alphabetically.

**Homonegativity**

The Modern Homonegativity Scale (MHS; Morrison & Morrison, 2003) was used to assess participants’ homonegativity. The MHS is a 12-item scale that measures modern or covert negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women (e.g., “Many lesbians [gay men] use their sexual orientation so that they can obtain special privileges”). Two parallel versions exist, with one measuring attitudes toward gay men (MHS-G) and the other measuring attitudes toward lesbian women (MHS-L). Participants completed the version that corresponded to their assigned condition (i.e., if they were selecting subgroups of gay men they completed the MHS-G, and if they were selecting subgroups of lesbian women they completed the MHS-L). A 5-point Likert scale was used ($1 = \text{strongly disagree}; \ 5 = \text{strongly agree}$) and total scores
could range from 12 to 60. Higher scores represent greater endorsement of modern homonegative attitudes. The MHS has been identified as a psychometrically sound measure (Morrison, Kenny, & Harrington, 2005; Morrison & Morrison, 2003; Morrison, Morrison, & Franklin, 2009). In the present study, Cronbach’s alpha for the MHS-L was .85 (CI = .78-.91) and .95 (CI = .92-.97) for the student and general population sample, respectively. Cronbach’s alpha was .83 (CI = .76-.89) and .94 (CI = .91-.96) for the MHS-G for the student and general population sample, respectively.

**Procedure**

Data collection with students was conducted in-person, while the general population sample completed the study entirely online. In-person participants were directed to a computer station to complete the study. All participants were presented with an informed consent sheet, which explained their rights as participants and indicated that the purpose of the study was to understand perceived subgroups of gay men and lesbian women. After providing their consent, participants were presented with the gay men or lesbian women version of the master list. Participants completed only one version to ensure that the selection of subgroups of one sexual orientation group would not influence the other. Participants were instructed to check off any subgroup with which they believed represented subgroups perceived within society. These instructions were provided to reduce socially desirable responding (i.e., participants not selecting certain subgroups because they do not want to appear to personally endorse them). The intention was to identify subgroups that are perceived to exist within their social world. After selecting the subgroups, they were then prompted to provide a definition of the subgroups that they selected. This component was incorporated into the methodology as a check to ensure that people truly understood what the subgroup was that they were selecting. Finally, participants responded to the MHS-G or MHS-L (corresponding to the condition they were in for the master list) and six demographic questions (i.e., age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, country of birth, native tongue).

**Results**

In the gay men condition, student participants selected between 3 and 68 subgroups, with a mean number of 14.11 (SD = 12.74) subgroups selected. The general population participants selected between 1 and 31 subgroups (M = 7.67; SD = 7.66) for the gay men condition. In the lesbian condition, the student sample selected between 2 and 32 subgroups, with a mean selection of 10.59 (SD = 7.85) subgroups, while the general population sample chose between 1 and 24 subgroups (M = 5.88; SD = 4.45). T-tests revealed that the student sample selected significantly more gay, t(102) = 3.08, p = .003,
Participants’ definitions were reviewed for accuracy by three independent coders using a list of definitions created prior to their independent reviews. The coders discussed and agreed upon the definitions for the subgroups based on participants responses in Study 1 and through consultation with sexual minority community members and content experts. Upon an examination of participants’ definitions, the coders determined that in the gay men condition, *Club Kid* and *Partier* should be collapsed into one category, as well as *Drama Queen, Queen*, and *Flamboyant; Feminine and Femme; and Masculine and Macho*. Participants’ definitions for these categories were nearly identical, while still being perceived as correctly defining the constructs. In the lesbian women condition, the coders recommended that *Activist* and *Feminist* be merged into a single category; as well as *Alpha* and *Dominant;* the three categories of *Bulldyke, Dyke* and *Butch;* and finally, *Feminine, Femme,* and *Lipstick*. These categories were merged for all subsequent analyses and the label that was selected most commonly by participants was used. The coders categorized the definitions as either correct or incorrect. An interrater reliability analysis using the Fleiss’ Kappa statistic (i.e., used to assess inter-rater reliability between three or more raters; Fleiss, Nee, & Landis, 1979) was performed. The analysis revealed a Fleiss’ Kappa of .61 for the coding of the gay men subgroup definitions and .67 for the coding of the lesbian women subgroups definitions provided by the student sample, and .74 and .70 for the general population sample, respectively. These scores denote substantial agreement among the three coders (Landis & Koch, 1977).

The review revealed that approximately 78.1% of definitions in the gay condition were correct, and 78.9% in the lesbian condition were correct for the student sample. In the general population sample, 69.1% of definitions in the gay condition and 68.2% in the lesbian condition were deemed accurate, respectively. When considering the number of correct definitions by participant, the student sample achieved an average of 78.7% definitions correct for the gay condition and 78.6% correct for the lesbian condition. The general population group achieved 76.2% and 74.7% correct, respectively. Independent t-test analyses revealed that these scores did not significantly differ from one another for either the gay condition, \( t(78) = 0.531, p = .597 \), or the lesbian condition, \( t(89) = 0.957, p = .341 \).

A criterion of at least 50% was chosen *a priori* as the threshold by which the sample was required to select and accurately define a subgroup in order for it to be considered salient. Brambilla et al. (2011) and Fiske et al. (2002) retained subgroups generated by at least 15% of the sample; however, this study uses a recognition approach (i.e., selecting subgroups from a pre-existing list), as opposed to subgroup generation (i.e., generating the subgroups spontaneously on one’s own). As such, the more stringent 50% cut-
off used in the present study was deemed appropriate because it would ensure that the subgroups are salient to many people. Among the student sample, for the gay men group, four subgroups exceeded the 50% criterion; specifically, Flamboyant (identified as a subgroup and accurately defined by 65.5% [n = 36] of participants), Drag Queen (56.4%; n = 31), Feminine (56.4%; n = 31), and Closeted (50.9%; n = 28). Among the general population sample, Drag Queen (55.1%; n = 27) and Flamboyant (51.0%; n = 25) surpassed the 50% cut-off. While not attaining the 50% criterion, Feminine (28.6%; n = 14) and Closeted (24.5%; n = 12) were the next highest recognized and accurately defined subgroups among the general population sample, along with the Bear subgroup (24.5%; n = 12).

For the lesbian women group, three subgroups exceeded the criterion among the student sample; specifically, Feminist (72.5%; n = 37), Butch (68.6%; n = 35), and Tomboy (56.9%; n = 29). Among the general population sample, only Butch (52.9%; n = 27) qualified as a salient subgroup; the next highest rated subgroups from the general population, however, mapped onto the student responses of Feminist (31.4%; n = 16) and Tomboy (27.5%; n = 14). The Closeted subgroup (25.5%; n = 13) also was rated highly among the general population sample as compared to other lesbian women subgroups. Aside from the subgroups that were identified as meeting the criterion (i.e., 50% or more), all other selected subgroups fell below 33% endorsement, suggesting that the final subgroups were particularly salient for respondents. See Tables 1 and 2 for a list of the number of respondents who selected and correctly defined each of the subgroups.

Student participants in the gay male subgroup condition had a mean MHS-G score of 24.3 (SD = 7.09) and a range of 13 to 43, while the student participants in the lesbian women subgroup condition had a mean MHS-L score of 26.4 (SD = 7.52) and a range of 13 to 44. Among the general population sample, participants’ scores on the MHS-G ranged from 13 to 60 and had a mean of 31.9 (SD = 12.80). On the MHS-L, scores ranged from 12 to 59 and had a mean of 31.7 (SD = 12.71). To determine if scores on the MHS differed by sample or sexual orientation condition, a 2 (sample: student or general population) x 2 (orientation: gay or lesbian) ANOVA was conducted. Prior to conducting the analysis, normality was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. These tests were found to be significant (p < .001). Upon visual inspection, it was evident that the data were positively skewed. Additionally, to assess the assumption of homogeneity of variance, Levene’s test was examined and found to be significant (p < .001). To address these violations, the data were subjected to an inverse transformation. Following the transformation, Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were still significant (p < .001); however, Levene’s test was no longer significant (p = .393). Given that it has been argued that ANOVA is robust to violations of normality when the sample size is large.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroups</th>
<th>Student Sample (N = 55)</th>
<th>General Population Sample (N = 49)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency of subgroup</td>
<td>Frequency of subgroup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>being correctly defined</td>
<td>being correctly defined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>after selection</td>
<td>after selection</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flamboyant</td>
<td>36 (65%)</td>
<td>Drag Queen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drag Queen, Feminine</td>
<td>31 (56%)</td>
<td>Flamboyant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closeted</td>
<td>28 (51%)</td>
<td>Feminine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proud</td>
<td>18 (33%)</td>
<td>Closeted, Bear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual, Different</td>
<td>17 (31%)</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homo</td>
<td>14 (25%)</td>
<td>Straight acting, Twink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activist, Artistic</td>
<td>13 (24%)</td>
<td>Homo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funny</td>
<td>12 (22%)</td>
<td>Bottom, Club kid, Gym rat, Leatherman, Masculine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor, Bitchy</td>
<td>11 (20%)</td>
<td>Activist, Actor, Artistic, Cruiser, Different, Theatric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractive, Confident, Masculine</td>
<td>10 (18%)</td>
<td>Amateur porn producers/performers, Dominant, Friend, Normal, Outcast, Power bottom, Promiscuous, Proud, Rice queen, Stylish, Top</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom, Club kid, Outcast</td>
<td>9 (16%)</td>
<td>Arts student, Bitchy, Chubby chaser, Daddy, Damaged, Diseased, Ethnic fetishizer, Gaymer, Neat freak, Pedophile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts student, Bear, Friend, Preppy, Straight acting, Top</td>
<td>8 (15%)</td>
<td>Aboriginal, Attractive, Black, Bug chaser, Cub, Domestic, Excludes ethnic minorities, Funny, Gift giver, Homophobic, Jailbait, Nerdy, Otter, Preppy, Professional, Smoker, Submissive, Typical, White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy, Queen, Theatric</td>
<td>7 (13%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gym rat, Hipster, Jock, Latino, Leatherman, Promiscuous, Twink, Weak, White</td>
<td>6 (11%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daddy, Helpful, Neat freak, Nerdy, Normal, Professional, Submissive</td>
<td>5 (9%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amateur porn producers/performers, American, Asian, Black, Dominant, Teenage</td>
<td>4 (7%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body modifier, Cub, Damaged, Father, Homewrecker, Pedophile, Polygamist, Power bottom, Typical</td>
<td>3 (5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal, Bro, Chubby chaser, Cruiser, Domestic, Gaymer, Goth, Homophobic, Jailbait, Masochist, Otter, Thug, Twunk</td>
<td>3 (4%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subgroups</td>
<td>Frequency of subgroup being correctly defined after selection</td>
<td>Subgroups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist</td>
<td>37 (73%)</td>
<td>Butch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butch</td>
<td>35 (71%)</td>
<td>Feminist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomboy</td>
<td>29 (57%)</td>
<td>Tomboy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>16 (31%)</td>
<td>Closeted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Androgynous</td>
<td>14 (27%)</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free spirited, Transgender</td>
<td>13 (25%)</td>
<td>Free spirited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpha</td>
<td>12 (24%)</td>
<td>Dyke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative, Closeted, Hipster</td>
<td>11 (22%)</td>
<td>Androgynous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts student, Feminine</td>
<td>10 (20%)</td>
<td>Feminine, Queer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drag king, Drama queen, Flamboyant, Lezboi, Punk</td>
<td>9 (18%)</td>
<td>Baby dyke, Straight acting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athlete, Biker</td>
<td>8 (16%)</td>
<td>Athlete, Aboriginal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant, Goth</td>
<td>7 (14%)</td>
<td>Alpha, Alternative, Arab/Middle Eastern, Asian, Black, Drag king, Flamboyant, Professional, Pushy, Uncertain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguous, Body modifier, Open, Uncertain</td>
<td>6 (12%)</td>
<td>Attention seeker, Dominant, Hidden, Lezboi, Mother, South Asian, White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention seeker, Musician</td>
<td>5 (10%)</td>
<td>Attention seeker, Dominant, Hidden, Lezboi, Mother, South Asian, White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual, Promiscuous, Straight acting, White</td>
<td>4 (8%)</td>
<td>Biker, Body image, Latino, Model, Punk, Submissive, Transgender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian, Baby dyke, Black, Confidant, Mother, Pushy, Smoker, Troublemaker</td>
<td>3 (6%)</td>
<td>Caregiver, Reserved, South Asian, Substance user</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caregiver, Reserved, South Asian, Substance user</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
<td>Aboriginal, Arab/Middle Eastern, Body image, Bottom, Chapstick, Fashion, Hidden, Jailbait, Masochist, Prisoner, Submissive, Top</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal, Arab/Middle Eastern, Body image, Bottom, Chapstick, Fashion, Hidden, Jailbait, Masochist, Prisoner, Submissive, Top</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(Maxwell & Delaney, 2004), the analysis was conducted using the transformed data despite significant tests of normality. The analysis revealed a significant main effect for Sample, $F(1, 202) = 8.14, p = .005, \eta^2 = .04$, with the general population respondents ($M = 31.80, SD = 12.69$) having significantly higher MHS scores than the student sample ($M = 25.28, SD = 7.34$).

Finally, seven $t$-tests were conducted for the student sample and three for the general population sample to determine if the selection of subgroups was contingent on level of modern homonegativity. Yes/no scores (0 = no; 1 = yes) as to whether the term was considered a subgroup was the independent variable and scores on the MHS was the dependent variable in the analyses. The results were non-significant ($p > .05$) for all analyses, suggesting that participants recognised the existence of these highly selected subgroups regardless of their level of homonegativity.

**Discussion**

The present study offers evidence for the existence of perceived subgroups within the overarching social categories of “gay men” and “lesbian women.” Based on the subgroup generation task in Study 1, in which participants generated an average of 3.88 and 3.71 subgroups without any prompting, and an additional 1.70 and 1.65 subgroups after photographs of men or women were presented, it can be inferred that Canadian heterosexual students acknowledge the perceived existence of gay and lesbian subgroups within society. Using the subgroups created in Study 1, Study 2 participants, which included an undergraduate student sample and a national general population sample identified those that they believe exist at the societal level. The use of both a “spontaneous generation” task and a “recognition” task to identify salient subgroups was an important departure from the existing subgroup generation studies (i.e., Brambilla et al., 2011; Clausell & Fiske, 2005; Geiger et al., 2006). These studies required participants to generate their own subgroups using recall. Cognitive theorists (e.g., Craik & McDowd, 1987; Yonelinas & Jacoby, 1994) suggest that generation tasks are more difficult than recognition tasks because the former requires the initial recall of information. With the recognition task, participants were able to select from a list of numerous potential subgroups. As such, the subgroups that emerged as most salient were not limited by participants’ recall ability.

Another departure from past studies was the selection of a more stringent cut-off criterion for the identification of “salient” subgroups. This cut-off criterion refers to the percentage of participants needed to select the subgroup for it to qualify as a viable one. Clausell and Fiske (2005) used a 10% criterion and Brambilla et al. (2011) employed a 15% cut-off. A much larger criterion of 50% was employed in the present study to ensure that the
subgroups would be salient enough to individuals to be generalizable beyond the present study. The sizeable gap (upwards of 18 percentage points) between the subgroups exceeding the 50% cut-off and those that fell below supports the selection criterion that was chosen and reinforces the likelihood that the selected subgroups are salient to Canadians.

For the gay men condition, the student sample generated four subgroups and the non-student sample generated two. In descending order, the subgroups exceeding the 50% criterion were: Flamboyant, Feminine, Drag Queen, and Closeted for the students, and Drag Queen and Flamboyant for the non-students. In the lesbian women condition, student participants generated three subgroups that met the criterion and the non-student sample generated one. In descending order, the subgroups for the student sample were Feminist, Butch, and Tomboy. Only Butch was selected by the non-student sample. All four of the gay men subgroups were among the 10 that emerged in Clausell and Fiske's (2005) study. When comparing the emergent lesbian subgroups to those reported by Geiger et al. (2006), they were captured if you consider Tomboy to be similar to their “Soft Butch” category and Butch as equivalent to their “Angry Butch” subgroup. Had a lower criterion been used in the present study, all the subgroups generated from previous research would have emerged, with the exception of the sexuality-focused subgroups (i.e., hypersexual, sexually confused, and sexually deviant), which appeared not to be salient subgroups of lesbian women for either sample.

It is worth noting that had a criterion lower than 50% been selected for the general population sample, the subgroups would have mapped identically on to those generated by the student sample. That is, the top four gay men subgroups and the top three lesbian subgroups were identical for the two samples. This provides strong support for the saliency of these subgroups. It is possible that a student sample may have a more varied understanding of sexual minorities and that explains why additional subgroups emerged as salient among this sample. Researchers (e.g., Herek & Capitanio, 1996; Herek & Glunt, 1993) have found that younger and more educated individuals are more likely to report greater contact with sexual minorities. As such, they may have been exposed to a greater diversity of gay and lesbian persons. Future research, however, is needed to determine why the subgroups that were identified as perceived subgroups emerged over others. In particular, a qualitative inquiry is needed that explores how people perceive subgroups of sexual minorities, how these perceptions are developed, and what judgments are used to categorise sexual minorities.

There are a few limitations related to the subgroups that emerged as salient among participants that are worth noting. For instance, it should be acknowledged that the master list was presented to participants alphabetically. As such, it is possible that alphabetically earlier subgroups may have been selected more often, while alphabetically later subgroups may have been
selected less often and been affected by fatigue due to the high number of subgroups. Additionally, participants may have perceived some of the subgroups on the master list similarly (e.g., *Top* and *Dominant*). If some subgroups were perceived to cluster together and participants opted to select only one from the cluster, a lower endorsement level for some subgroups may have resulted. Researchers should consider replicating Study 2 by randomizing the master list and by either including a follow-up question related to potential subgroup clusters or including explicit instructions to participants to select *all* subgroups they perceive to exist even if they seem redundant. Lastly, all subgroup generation studies are limited by the historical, geographical, and cultural context in which the studies are conducted. For this study in particular, given that the samples were predominantly White and the photographs used to increase the comprehensiveness of the subgroup master list were White, it is possible that the subgroups that emerged represent a racially homogenous subsection of gay and lesbian culture.

There are a number of inferences that can be made as a result of the subgroups that emerged. Perceived gender role characteristics appear to be an important determinant of gay and lesbian subgroups. Three of the gay subgroups (i.e., *Drag Queen*, *Feminine*, and *Flamboyant*) and two of the lesbian subgroups (i.e., *Butch* and *Tomboy*) relate directly to violations of socially assigned gender roles. That is, drag queens, feminine, and flamboyant gay men are ascribed feminine characteristics; butch and tomboy lesbian women are considered to have masculine traits. It is only the *Feminist* lesbian woman subgroup and the *Closedet* gay man subgroup that were not ascribed gender role traits or appearance indicators. Arguably though, the behavioral attributes (e.g., strong, independent, self-sufficient, aggressive) that were used to describe *Feminist* could be categorized as masculine traits (Bem, 1974). Also, Clausell and Fiske (2005) noted that their “in the closet” subgroup was rated similarly to the other masculine/agentic subgroups and, like the general category of “men,” fell within the HC-LW quadrant of the SCM.

Interestingly, a subgroup that would be considered “feminine” did not emerge among lesbian women using the recognition approach in Study 2. Few researchers have addressed the invisibility of feminine lesbian women. An exception is Walker (1993), who provides an in-depth commentary on the invisibility of “femme” lesbian women. She notes that butch lesbian women are often represented as “the authentic lesbian” (p. 881), while femme lesbian women are able to “pass” as heterosexual and are, therefore, perceived as not experiencing the same extent of marginalisation and even not truly desiring other women. Ciasullo (2001) approaches the topic of (in)visibility from a different perspective by arguing that it is actually butch lesbian women who are invisible, particularly within mainstream media, but that feminine lesbian women are represented as not *true* lesbians. Ciasullo notes that “the mainstream lesbian body is … made into an object of desire
for straight audiences through her heterosexualization, a process achieved by representing the lesbian as embodying a hegemonic femininity” (p. 578). She also argues that lesbian women are rarely portrayed in sexual acts with women and as such are also “de-homosexualized.” While adopting a different approach, Ciasullo’s (2001) and Walker’s (1993) perspectives are complementary and support the failure of a feminine subgroup to emerge in the present study. It is possible that heterosexual individuals, while inundated with depictions of feminine lesbian women in mainstream media, may dismiss feminine lesbian women as “real” lesbians or as a group that would not be populous enough to warrant a subgroup designation. Moreover, the omission of an explicit Masculine gay man subgroup also supports the tendency for individuals to stereotype gay men as feminine and lesbian women as masculine (Blashill & Powlishta, 2009).

Of the subgroups that did emerge as salient for the participants, none were related to their scores on the Modern Homonegativity Scale (Morrison & Morrison, 2003). Regardless of participants’ own negativity (or positivity) towards gay men and lesbian women, they recognize the same subgroups as being perceived to exist by society. This finding may suggest that certain stereotypes about gay men and lesbian women are pervasive and widely known despite participants not personally endorsing them or believing they exist. Future research should determine if there are other factors that may relate to whether individuals believe that the identified subgroups are perceived to exist by society. Given that no subgroup was unanimously selected, it is possible that there are variables that may be associated with participants’ recognition of certain gay and lesbian subgroups. The identification of these factors could help in developing interventions to dispel stereotypes and misconceptions about sexual minority persons.

As another important step in understanding the subgroups that emerged as salient in the present study, researchers should assess the content and valence of the attitudes that people have towards the subgroups. While the current study used rigorous methods to identify subgroups, it did not assess how they are perceived. Research from Clausell and Fiske (2005), Brambilla et al. (2011), and Geiger et al. (2006) suggest that all of the subgroups that emerged in the present study could be ranked along a hierarchy from positive to negative. For instance, in Clausell and Fiske’s study of gay men, “in the closet” gay men were rated most positively, while “crossdressers” were rated most negatively. In Geiger et al.’s study of lesbian women subgroups, “career oriented feminists” were rated positively, while “angry butch” was rated negatively. Based on the evidence from these preliminary subgroup studies, it would be expected that the subgroups that are perceived as “gender role violators” would be relegated to the lowest tier of the subgroup hierarchy.

Important, too, is for researchers to evaluate how the subgroups are rated in comparison to the overarching social categories of “gay man” and “lesbian
woman,” to determine their degree of difference or alignment. Given that these are the categories that are primarily assessed in research examining attitudes towards sexual minority persons, it would be valuable to determine if some of the subgroups map onto the attitudes toward the overarching category. This would assist researchers to determine if individuals are more likely to think of one subgroup over another when asked to evaluate the superordinate group. An existing framework, such as the SCM (Fiske et al., 2002), could be used to guide such an investigation, both to identify the relative attitudes toward each group and to assess if such a theoretical and methodological approach would be valid for the generated subgroups. Past research using the SCM (i.e., Brambilla et al., 2011; Clausell & Fiske, 2005) suggests that perceptions of gay and lesbian subgroups result in their positioning across the SCM quadrants; however, the framework’s validity assessing attitudes towards gay and lesbian subgroups within a Canadian context and with a general population sample has yet to be evaluated. Alternative theories and frameworks could potentially spawn from an increased understanding of attitudes towards the subgroups of gay men and lesbian women, particularly when considering the different results that emerged across the two samples (i.e., students vs. general population).

As can be seen from conducting the same study with two separate populations, an identical number of subgroups are not necessarily going to emerge across difference samples. Although the seven subgroups that emerged for the student sample were all recognized by many of the participants in the general population sample, only three of the seven reached the 50% threshold. Moving forward, researchers should examine variables such as familiarity or contact with sexual minorities, education levels, geographic area, and age to determine if these differences may result in the recognition of additional gay and lesbian subgroups. For instance, urban centers such as Toronto or Vancouver, where there is greater social diversity, may potentially yield additional subgroups from a student sample than the present study, which was conducted in a medium-sized urban centre. Despite these potential limitations in generalizability, the advance of the sexual minority subgroup generation research into a non-student sample is an important step in understanding how gay men and lesbian women are perceived. The present study is indeed the first to identify subgroups of gay men and lesbian women from a national sample. The findings from the two samples largely supported one another as well as many of the subgroups in the extant literature.

**Conclusion**

As the first Canadian study to identify subgroups of gay men and lesbian women that are salient among both a student sample and a general population sample, the present study provides a good launching point to begin
Canadian research that goes beyond the superordinate categories of gay men and lesbian women. These overarching categories are possibly masking a different reality about the attitudes that exist toward sexual minority persons. If attitudes differ based on the perceived subgroup that a sexual minority person is classified into then it is important that these attitudes are being accurately assessed, with the ultimate goal to develop interventions that could reduce prejudice and discrimination toward gay men and lesbian women. Moving forward, researchers should consider using the subgroups that have been identified in the present study to assess attitudes toward sexual minority persons and should conduct research that would lead to a deeper understanding as to how these subgroups are developed and the role they play in the prejudice and discrimination that is directed at gay men and lesbian women.

Notes

1. The SCM is a model that enables one to position social groups on a map according to the dimensions of perceived “warmth” and “competence.” In 2002, Fiske et al. found that gay men fell in the centre of the warmth X competence space, which signified neutral perceptions toward gay men relative to other social groups. The position of gay men seemed at odds with the well-documented stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination reported by this social group.

2. To date, there have been no rigorous examinations of the psychometric properties of the measure associated with the SCM that assesses a particular social group’s or subgroup’s warmth and competence.

3. Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010) pointed out the gross reliance on Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) samples in psychological research. Through a comparative review of studies on key psychological and behavioral variables (e.g., reasoning styles, fairness, categorization and inferential induction) they determined that WEIRD samples are not particularly representative of the overall human population. The researchers note that American undergraduate students, in particular, constitute the bulk of the WEIRD samples employed in research. It is anticipated that our general population sample will be demographically more variable than an undergraduate student population, and therefore, more representative of the wider population.

4. The results of Google Image Searches vary by several factors, which effect the reproducibility of photograph selection in the present study. McEvoy (2015) has noted seven factors that can affect search results that will be generated by Google Image Search. They include: 1) device (e.g., desktop, tablet) used when searching, 2) personal search history, 3) being logged in to a Google account, 4) geographic location, 5) browser type, 6) Google-generated ads on the page, 7) the type of search (i.e., minor keyword can drastically alter results). Undoubtedly, image results will also change over time.

5. Only photographs that depicted men and women who appeared to be young adults or middle-aged were selected, as well as only photographs of Caucasian individuals. Variations in these demographic features could potentially produce attitudinal effects independent of, or in interaction with, sexual orientation (Woody, 2013); therefore, efforts were made to keep age and race similar across photographs.
6. Ekos is a Canadian research vendor who provides access to samples of online survey respondents. Ekos recruits participants to their panel through random digit dialing of Canadian telephone numbers. Participants are informed of available surveys through an email issued by Ekos and they are not remunerated for their participation.

7. Being Canadian-born was an inclusion criterion for Study 2 as many of the international students in the authors’ university participant pool are first-year students who have lived in Canada for less than 6 months. This was not considered enough time to be adequately exposed to culturally-specific gay and lesbian subgroups.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

References


