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To cite this article: Mark Kiss, Todd G. Morrison & Kandice Parker (2019) Understanding the believability and erotic value of 'heterosexual' men in gay pornography, Porn Studies, 6:2, 169-192, DOI: [10.1080/23268743.2018.1559091](https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2018.1559091)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2018.1559091>



Published online: 25 Mar 2019.



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Understanding the believability and erotic value of ‘heterosexual’ men in gay pornography

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ABSTRACT

Gay pornography has traditionally utilized male performers who are coded as ‘heterosexual’ (e.g. stating they are straight) to perform gay sexual acts. However, research has yet to examine gay men’s perceptions of ‘straight’ men in sexually explicit material (SEM). The current article evaluates the perceived believability and erotic value of variables used to code a male performer as ‘heterosexual’ in gay SEM. In a first study, which was exploratory in nature, a sample of gay men ($N=56$) evaluated 53 variables on the dimensions of believability and erotic value. The 20 most salient indicators of heterosexuality were then examined by a larger sample of gay men ($N=214$). Results suggest that performers’ reluctance to engage in certain sexual acts is a believable indicator of heterosexuality. Variables that are often linked with masculinity and sexual satisfaction were accorded the most erotic value. Gay participants’ endorsement of traditional masculinity correlated positively with the belief that reluctance denoted heterosexuality and that ‘masculine’ attributes were erotic. Contrary to our predictions, few statistically significant associations were observed for internalized homonegativity. Limitations of the current research and avenues for future inquiry are elucidated.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 19 January 2018

Accepted 20 November 2018

KEYWORDS

Gay men; pornography; masculinity; heterosexual men; gay-for-pay; internalized homonegativity

Introduction

Although the term ‘gay pornography’ suggests sexually explicit material (SEM) containing sexualized representations of the male body, male masturbation, and/or two or more men engaged in sexual acts, this medium has historically focused on the desirability of heterosexual men¹ (Burger 1995; Escoffier 2009; Mercer 2017). The widespread expansion of accessible and anonymous SEM via the internet has served to highlight the intensity with which gay pornography relies on seemingly ‘heterosexual’ men for erotic value.

An informal analysis of the textual content of popular gay SEM websites (e.g. titles and descriptions of scenes, name of the website, and biographies of performers), identified by website traffic tracker Alexa (Sr8UpGayPorn.com 2018), suggests that many of these sites rely on heterosexually identified performers. Listed in order of most visited, the websites examined were as follows: (1) SeanCody.com; (2) Men.com; (3) RandyBlue.com; (4)

GayHoopla.com; (5) Corbinfisher.com; (6) Cockyboys.com; (7) ChaosMen.com; (8) BiLatinMen.com; (9) BrokeStraightBoys.com; and (10) NextDoorBuddies.com. These websites often include explicit indicators of performers' heterosexuality, such as the title of the website (e.g. 'Broke Straight Boys'), marketing taglines (e.g. 'ALL EXCLUSIVE content featuring mostly STRAIGHT GUYS exploring their sexuality and earning an education in hot, gay action!'; CorbinFisher.com), verbal statements during interviews or sexual acts, and textual descriptions of the scenes ('Straight boy Elijah Alexandrov goes balls deep into Scotty Marx'; RandyBlue.com). Moreover, previous literature asserts that producers of gay pornography generally prefer to cast models who appear to be heterosexual (Burke 2016).

The portrayal of heterosexually identified performers can be placed into one of four categories: 'bisexual or gay curious', 'gay-for-pay', 'coercion', and 'situational same-sex desire'.² The first, 'bisexual or gay curious', is present on popular gay SEM websites such as SeanCody.com and CorbinFisher.com which commonly depict (ostensibly) heterosexual men participating in male-on-male sex as a means of exploring their sexuality. On sites in this category, new performers will engage in a solo masturbation scene before eventually partaking in increasingly explicit gay sexual acts with other male performers in subsequent scenes (e.g. group masturbation, oral sex, and anal intercourse; Escoffier 2003, 2009). In a pre-interview, the heterosexually identified performers normally assert that they are nervous or excited to sexually experiment, while during post-sex conversation they state how enjoyable the experience was (often to their surprise). Before the sex scene, in lieu of or in addition to a brief interview, performers may be depicted as athletes or 'jocks' via their on-camera participation in typically heterosexually dominated sport activities (e.g. football or soccer) or playfully horsing around in manner that is generally associated with straight male friendships (e.g. rough-housing or push-up competitions). Their attire may consist of military camouflage or sports uniforms, again to situate the performers in an ostensibly heterosexual space. Furthermore, their 'straightness' is amplified by the performers' willingness – at least initially – to partake in a limited subset of gay sexual acts that exist within normative heterosexual schemas (e.g. receiving oral sex, penetrative anal sex; see Mercer 2012).

Another motif in popular gay pornography is the 'gay-for-pay' scenario. Gay-for-pay is a term used to suggest that the heterosexual performer is appearing in gay pornography for compensation (often monetary) because – on average – gay SEM pays male performers markedly better per scene in comparison to heterosexual pornography (Escoffier 2003). Gay pornographic websites such as BrokeStraightBoys.com and CzechHunter.com utilize storylines or scenarios suggesting, either explicitly or implicitly, that their male performers are strictly gay-for-pay and normally identify as heterosexual. Thus, these men are merely participating in gay SEM for money and implied debt relief. Although almost all pornographic performers appear in SEM in exchange for payment, gay-for-pay pornography stresses it is straight men's sole justification for their involvement. This sexual transaction serves to reverse the ingrained power dynamic whereby heterosexual men normally dominate gay men because the former are considered to embody the 'default' and 'natural' configuration of sexuality. The often-used pre-scene interviewer – in the form of a director, performer, or camera operator – asks increasingly sexual questions (e.g. 'What age did you first jerk off?') that lead to sexual requests (e.g. take off shirt, show ass/penis, masturbate, etc.) that serve to instil a palpable shift in authority. The performer often appears to be visibly uncomfortable with the process, but is, ultimately, obedient (Mercer 2012).

Generally, the performers' perceived level of desperation for monetary recompense, ascertained via the interview, constitutes their acceptance of performing sexual acts that are submissively 'gay' (e.g. receiving anal sex, receiving facial or anal ejaculation; Escoffier 2003, 2009). The performers may also be instructed to 'dirty talk' about what they are allowing to happen to them (Interviewer: 'What's happening right now?', Performer: 'I am getting fucked in the ass') or told to verbalize their enjoyment. These demands will sometimes elicit uncomfortable, reluctant responses from the 'straight' performers. Indeed, the level of sexual pleasure the heterosexual performer expresses during each sexual act typically varies. Certain websites (e.g. BrokeStraightBoys.com) portray the heterosexual men as sexually satisfied with their gay sexual experience, while others (e.g. DebtDandy.com) suggest the performers participated strictly for financial gain. On occasion, the performers appear to be embarrassed, uncomfortable, in pain, or lacking an erection, which implies their lack of pleasure. Also, some appear visibly upset after a scene or avoid discussing their experience in an impromptu post-coital interview. Czech-Hunter.com, for instance, chronicles the sexual adventures of 'Jiri and Honza'. Shot from the first-person using handheld cameras, they take turns perusing Prague for men in public places who are willing to participate in impromptu man-on-man sex acts for cash. The money is doled out in accordance with the perceived 'gayness' of the sexual acts. The camera man will count out the promised payment – in cash – within eyeshot of the performer to ensure he will be compensated appropriately. The visible stack of Czech Crowns placates the 'heterosexual' men so they are willing to receive/perform oral sex and accept receptive bareback anal sex with a complete 'stranger'. Despite the content of the website appearing to be obviously staged (i.e. most of the performers appear under differing aliases on numerous SEM websites based out of the Czech Republic), Czech Hunter aptly illustrates many of the typical gay-for-pay tropes. Performers are approached on the street and converse with the camera man awkwardly for upwards of 30 minutes. The interviewer slowly probes the performers by initiating mundane, light-hearted queries about their personal life that also gauges their inclination for being paid for gay sex ('Do you have a job?'). The conversation gradually becomes sexual in nature ('Do you have a big cock? You look like you do'), which inevitably segues to requests that are highly sexual in nature but will be monetarily compensated. Often, the content of the conversation touches on their resolute heterosexuality (e.g. 'Do you have a girlfriend?', 'None of your buddies will find out'). Scene descriptions on the website also tend to emphasize performers' straightness and need for additional income:

He wanted to prepare a nice dinner for his girlfriend to celebrate her birthday ... I think he would normally tell me to go away but he was a bit tipsy when I met him ... Alcohol always makes my job easier. Still, I had to reach very deep into my pocket.

In a similar vein to gay-for-pay, 'coercion' gay pornography removes the proposed incentive for a straight man to participate in gay sex in favour of varied degrees of force (Mercer 2012). For instance, YoungPerps.com specializes in SEM which caters to an audience that wants to see a straight man punished via gay sexual acts. The central theme of this website is seemingly heterosexual men being 'disciplined' for petty criminal offences such as shoplifting by performing oral sex and receiving bareback anal sex (read: high risk) from the store's security officer or manager. The performers are often portrayed as initially reluctant, but with the looming threat of police intervention are resigned to sexually pleasuring

another man. The video appears to be shot from the unnamed store's backroom security cameras which lends to the authenticity of the encounter. More insidious coercion pornography involves the simulated rape of performers, with this violation being used to code them as straight (e.g. [BoysHalfwayHouse.com](#)). Rather than affording a heterosexual man with a zero-sum choice (e.g. engaging in gay sex or being arrested for theft), [BoysHalfwayHouse.com](#) offers a variety of scenes that centre around a 'house manager' orally and anally raping male residents to punish wrongdoings such as smoking pot or being late for curfew. Performers presumably allow the rape because they do not want to be expelled from their housing. The site's description reads: 'Young 18 year old trailer trash and white trash rough trade exploited by older bareback. DILFs cum in mouth, on ass and humiliate and degrade boys for sex'. To achieve a documentary-style feeling, the videos are shot in first-person view ('gonzo' style) with smartphones or handheld cameras. The house manager, who is much older than the 'straight' performers (late 50s versus late teens to early 20s), often slaps, punches, and spits on the models who, in turn, are portrayed in pain or experiencing discomfort. Moreover, they are seldom shown with a visible erection which serves to emphasize their distress. The house manager often anally penetrates the performers bareback and ejaculates inside of them or on their face; both of which are practices that are purportedly humiliating for a heterosexual man to experience. After the sex has concluded, performers may assume a foetal position or quickly leave the room (usually after the house manager has struck the face of and verbally berated the performer).

Lastly, situational same-sex desire implies that certain heterosexually identified men will engage in same-sex behaviour in social institutions and situations that have a majority same-sex population (e.g. prison, frat house, the military, and boarding school: Kunzel 2002; Escoffier 2003). These encounters generally exaggerate the men's masculinity, with certain sites (e.g. [FraternityX.com](#), [ActiveDuty.com](#)) having performers high-five or verbally encourage one another as they perform same-sex sexual acts on often feminized bottoms whom they equally praise and derogate. For instance, [FraternityX.com](#) portrays multiple college-aged performers taking turns ('tag teaming') orally and anally penetrating an 'effeminate' bottom in a messy dorm room. The performers coded as heterosexual rarely perform sexual acts on each another; instead, the submissive bottom serves as their sole sexual outlet. Their straightness is conveyed by their speech (e.g. 'bro' or 'dude' to refer to one another), attire (e.g. sports jerseys and baseball caps), and behaviour (e.g. drinking beer, playing video games). The website description provides further evidence of the performers' heterosexuality:

We are an official Fraternity at a University in Arizona just outside of Phoenix ... A lot of people ask if we're gay or straight. Most of us only fuck dudes on camera. So we consider ourselves straight. We have plenty of girls and bitches to bang on the side.

Compared to the prior categories, situational same-sex desire is infrequently used to code performers as straight.

An obvious question is why do some gay men watch ostensibly heterosexual men engage in same-sex sexual activity? Moreover, do gay men find these tropes to be believable or to possess erotic value? To explore these questions, the topics of masculinity and internalized homonegativity as well as the ways these constructs may shape gay men's attitudes towards sex and their behaviours related to sexual attraction will be discussed.

A gradual attitudinal shift has occurred among some gay men who have begun to staunchly reject existing feminine gender stereotypes, and instead covet the traditional manifestation of masculinity that is often associated with heterosexual men (Clarkson 2006). Termed 'straight-acting', these gay men distanced themselves from stereotypical feminine traits, occupations, and appearances, and some also desired the company of other like-minded, straight-acting gay men (Kite and Deaux 1987; Messner 1997; Clarkson 2005; Burke 2016). For instance, researchers have argued that gay men's desire for straight-acting gay men is especially pronounced in the user-generated content on men seeking men dating/hook-up websites, apps, and personal advertisements in gay magazines/websites (Phua 2002; Eguchi 2009). Content analyses of these types of dating websites suggest that a large number of the users self-identified as 'straight-acting' (i.e. exhibited masculine 'working-class' traits) or stated explicitly their status as 'straight-acting' and desirous of the same for a partner (Bartholome, Tewksbury, and Bruzzone 2000; Clarkson 2006). The appeal of straight-acting gay men is evident in the user-generated profiles appearing on the popular gay hook-up app Grindr (i.e. in many profiles, only straight-acting or masculine men are deemed to be appropriate objects of desire: Shuckerow 2014; Rodriguez, Huemmer and Blumell 2016; Miller 2018). The exaltation of straight-acting men within gay culture has reconfigured gay men's attitudes about themselves and may play a role in shaping their erotic wants and needs. In addition, exposure to anti-gay, pro-heterosexuality messaging may normalize negative self-appraisals among some gay men. Additionally, gay men have often been considered to be less masculine than heterosexual men and, moreover, regarded as possessing stereotypical feminine attributes that extend to their demeanour, clothing choices, and careers (Taywaditap 2002; Kimmel and Mahalik 2005; Blashill and Powlishta 2009; Mitchell and Ellis 2011). In contrast, attitudes, beliefs, and personality traits pertaining to heterosexual men are largely situated in the realm of traditional, working-class masculinity (Herek 1986; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Often, the two concepts – masculinity and heterosexuality – are considered in tandem when discussing male gender norms and expectations, with greater evidenced masculinity inferring greater adherence to male heterosexual norms (Herek 1986; Bird 1996; Kilianski 2003; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

The exaltation of straight-acting gay men within gay culture has played a role in reconfiguring gay men's attitudes about themselves and in shaping their erotic desires. Primarily, the phenomenon of 'straight-acting' gay men may be intertwined with the concept of hegemonic masculinity (also referred to as traditional or normative masculinity). Hegemonic masculinity posits that men's masculinity, which is embodied by a constellation of characteristics (e.g. aggression, dominance, and lack of emotions) is a dominant, culturally constructed ideology that serves to marginalize those who do not adhere to its systems (e.g. feminine individuals; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Kimmel 2005). Western society implicitly expects men to interact with others in a manner that is congruent with hegemonic masculine behaviour (e.g. to restrain emotions, converse about sports, etc.: Borisoff and Merrill 1998; Eguchi 2009). Within gay culture, those who are straight-acting and behave in a manner consistent with the masculine ideal are 'real men' and 'everyday Joes', and closer to realizing heterosexual male norms. Consequently, gay men who do not (or choose not to) approximate the masculine ideal are considered to be 'fems', 'bitchy', or 'queens' (Clarkson 2006). The negative connotations of the labels used to describe gay men who are incongruent with or choose to challenge hegemonic

masculinity illustrate the explicit contempt that some gay men may have for their non-straight-acting counterparts. Therefore, distancing oneself from the potentially damaging effects of such labels may be used as a tool to decrease anxiety, increase social acceptance, and manage self-esteem (Meyer 1995). For example, researchers suggest that the greater men's resistance to aspects of traditional masculinity, the more likely they are to experience symptoms of psychological distress (Good et al. 2004; Liu, Rochlen and Mohr 2005). Furthermore, gay men who reject femininity in favour of masculinity tend to display elevated levels of homonegativity and anti-femininity (Wilkinson 2004; Sánchez and Vilain 2012). Some gay men, therefore, may choose to obey elements of traditional masculinity in an effort to avoid experiencing adverse psychological effects. Researchers have also indicated that both gay men and straight men were less likely to be labelled as feminine if they were in the presence of a man who had been labelled as masculine (Mitchell and Ellis 2011).

The normalization and acceptance of hegemonic masculinity and anti-feminine sentiments may have resulted in the intensified salience for gay men to appear to be masculine. According to Taywaditep (2002), the theory of masculine consciousness serves to elucidate the cognitive conflict experienced by gay men who are preoccupied with conforming to traditional masculinity. The concept was derived using two pre-existing psychological concepts: public self-consciousness; and self-monitoring. Public self-consciousness is a person's propensity to assess themselves within their social sphere as an object that can be evaluated by others in relation to social norms (i.e. hegemonic masculinity; Fenigstein, Scheier and Buss 1975; Taywaditep 2002). In comparison, an individual who self-monitors may believe it is entirely within their locus of control to craft and tailor a specific image of themselves through self-presentation (Snyder 1974). Thus, they must stringently modify their appearance and behaviour to adhere to traditional masculinity and actively combat femininity. The appearance of heterosexually coded performers in gay SEM may be particularly appealing to gay male viewers who covet traditional masculinity. It also may buffer these viewers from the psychological stressors that (potentially) accompany viewing less masculine men (read: 'gay' men) engage in same-sex sexual activity as this type of viewing experience renders salient a sexual identity these viewers problematize. Stated simply, the presence of cues denoting that a performer in gay SEM is rigidly masculine may be the ideal configuration for a gay man that shuns femininity. It is also possible that gay men evidencing greater levels of masculine consciousness are highly bigenderist and, thus, find normative cues of masculinity and heterosexuality to be more compelling and believable.

Lastly, many gay men begin their sexual discovery while 'in the closet'.³ Gay men and lesbian women generally use this tactic to negotiate perceived homonegativity and to gauge the potential level of acceptance their family, peer group, and employers/co-workers will show towards their sexual orientation (Schiemann 1995). The time spent 'in the closet' varies per person, with some individuals never 'coming out' of the closet (Hollis and McCalla 2013). Individuals' level of 'outness' also appears to be negatively associated with internalized homonegativity (i.e. the less 'out' a gay man is, the greater his negative attitudes towards his own sexuality; Herek et al. 1998). Meyer (1995) posits that negative social environments can result in minority stress; a concept which refers to conflict or disharmony between a member of a minority group and the dominant values of their social environment. When this type of stress is experienced by gay men

and lesbian women, it can be understood as internalized homonegativity (i.e. negative attitudes and behaviours that gay individuals adopt as a consequence of prolonged exposure to an anti-gay environment: Meyer 1995; Mayfield 2001). The concept of internalized homonegativity incorporates gay men's negative global attitudes towards same-sex desire, anxiety in terms of revealing their sexual orientation to peers or family, a lack of connection with other gay individuals, and, thus, discomfort with same-sex sexual activity (Newcomb and Mustanski 2010). In addition to the minority stress caused by an anti-gay environment situated in primarily heterosexual spaces, gay men's exaltation of masculinity, straight-acting, and anti-feminine ideals may also serve to produce a damaging atmosphere for some gay men. The resultant negative self-evaluation and perception of their same-sex desires may result in internalized homonegative attitudes.

The perceived believability of variables used to indicate performer heterosexuality may be intertwined with the theoretical factors that contribute to the overall erotic value of the pornographic content. These aforementioned cues, such as sexual exploration or the exhalation of straight men, may be salient to some gay men's lived experiences. For instance, gay men may have same-sex sexual encounters with men who are in the closet or exploring their sexuality but consider themselves to be exclusively heterosexual. Similarly, prior to their internal identification as being exclusively gay, some gay men may have previously labelled their sexuality as staunchly straight. In addition to this experiential linkage between pornography and believability, it is important to consider how individuals process the media content – in this case, gay pornography – that is consumed. Research has found that the believability of media has a relationship to transportation; the 'integrative melding of attention, imagery, and feelings', analogous to feeling lost in the media's content (e.g. narrative, themes, settings; Green, Brock and Kaufman 2004, 312). A greater sense of transportation has been shown to positively correlate with perceived realism; an individual's subjective evaluation of the media narrative's overall realism and believability (Green 2004; Green and Fitzgerald 2017). Therefore, the greater the viewer's sense that they have been transported by media, the more likely it is that these media will be deemed realistic and believable. In the case of gay pornography, transportation may be akin to the perceived erotic value of its content and the ensuing sexual feeling of being 'turned on'. Theoretically, erotic value may relate to the believability of certain variables used to code a performer as 'straight'. Specifically, if the viewer determines that the pornographic material has high erotic value, it is possible that they also will perceive certain aspects of the SEM scene to be believable. Additionally, a study examining typicality revealed that narratives which are judged as less conventional are more likely to be perceived as less believable and less persuasive (Shapiro and Chock 2004). Accordingly, the typicality of 'heterosexual' performers, and the variables used to code them as such, in gay SEM (S8UpGayPorn.com 2018) would lead to gay men judging these variables as believable.

Conversely, erotic value and believability may not be linked. Specifically, gay men's perceptions of the content of SEM may not be aligned with the intention of its creators. This assumption is supported by Leap's (2011) analysis of viewer commentary on the gay pornographic movie *Men of Israel* (2009). The researcher found that viewers inconsistently engaged with or acknowledged the believability of Israeli propaganda elements of the storyline. Rather, there was a myopic focus on the overall 'hotness' of the male performers. Other studies that examine gay men's understanding of SEM further indicate the ability of

viewers to discriminate between personal preferences, sexual fantasies, and their own realities. Galos et al (2015) surveyed 1390 adult men who have sex with men and found that the most important factors for gay SEM to be sexually appealing were the portrayal of sexual acts the participants would themselves partake in and the performer's intrinsic attractiveness; extraneous themes or storylines were least important. Leap (2014) similarly revealed that viewers tend to ignore representations of masculinity within gay SEM and primarily focus on whether the actors are alluring and expressing sexual pleasure. Vörös (2014) found that French gay men who engage with gay SEM containing barebacking (i.e. condom free anal sex) actively differentiate and negotiate the fantasy and reality elements between the pornographic content and their own lives. Statistics from the popular internet SEM video streaming site Pornhub indicate that realism and believability are not significant to a large percentage of viewers. In 2017, the most popular searched-for term was 'lesbian', followed by 'hentai' (i.e. a sexualized style of Japanese animation; Pornhub 2017). For gay men in 2017, the most popular search term was 'point-of-view', which is SEM where the viewer experiences the scene from the first-person viewpoint of the camera operator (Pornhub 2017). Therefore, the variables used to indicate the performer is straight may not be particularly believable, and, moreover, considered extraneous in comparison to the overall erotic value of elements contained in the SEM (e.g. performers and sexual acts).

It is important to note there are a number of plausible explanations for gay viewers' ostensible interest in heterosexually identified performers. For example, after years of oppression, some gay men may seek dominance over heterosexual men through the latter's sexualization and passive acceptance of gay sexual acts in gay SEM (i.e. gay-for-pay; Kaufman 1994). Therefore, gay pornography may serve to strip heterosexual men of their traditionally defined privilege and some gay men may find this denial of privilege sexually arousing. Lastly, gay men's interest in heterosexually defined performers may simply be attributed to sexual fantasy and lack any broader sociological or psychological significance (Morrison 2004).

Purpose

Few studies have investigated the variables used by the gay pornography industry to code performers as heterosexual. Also, the erotic value and believability of these codes have yet to be examined. It is important to further our understanding of how gay men perceive prevalent themes in gay pornography because media consumption can have social consequences (e.g. perpetuating stereotypes) and elucidate attitudes towards certain social groups (e.g. heterosexual men; Ward 2003; Slater 2007).

In Study 1, we addressed this omission by examining a broad spectrum of variables that are employed in gay pornography to indicate a performer is heterosexual. Due to a higher than expected attrition rate, we conducted a follow-up study using a larger sample of gay men (Study 2).

Study 1

Utilizing an online survey, participants completed a questionnaire that measured the erotic value and believability of numerous variables used to code a performer in gay SEM as 'heterosexual'.

Method

Participants

Gay male participants ($N = 56$) were recruited through poster advertisements distributed at various centres, dance clubs, and sexual health clinics focused on gay men in Vancouver, Calgary, Saskatoon, and Toronto. Of the 156 participants who logged onto the survey, 86 completed less than 50% of the study, two were female, and 12 did not identify as gay. Thus, 100 participants were discarded. The average age of participants was 28.66 (standard deviation = 6.82) years, with a large proportion (48.2%) stating that their current relationship status was single.

Procedure

Participants were provided with a web address to the questionnaire which was hosted on FluidSurvey. Before commencing, participants were asked to complete a consent form that indicated their involvement was completely anonymous and voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any time without their data being included. Users were tasked with completing the demographics and 'Heterosexual' Believability and Erotic Value items. Once completed, participants were forwarded to a debriefing web page.

Measure

The 'Heterosexual' Believability and Erotic Value measure includes textual examples of 53 variables that are used in gay SEM to indicate the performer is heterosexual. The items were generated by completing an informal content analysis of the top gay pornography websites, according to Alexa and Google, which reported including 'heterosexual' performers. For the variable to be included in the questionnaire, it had to be commonplace in the scenes or content of the websites. A portion of the items generated were based on unambiguous indications of heterosexuality (e.g. 'During the sexually explicit scene, the performer requires pornography featuring women to play in the background in order to perform sexually'). Conversely, several variables were included that did not directly reference the performer's heterosexuality (e.g. 'The performer has an "average" body') but were frequently present in the scenes or content of targeted websites. This allows the researchers to ascertain whether less obvious but ordinary elements of the scenes also contribute to the perceived believability of the performer's 'heterosexual' status and, moreover, whether these elements are viewed as erotic. To illustrate, questions included explicit statements of heterosexuality ('The performer states that he has a girlfriend'), sexual behaviour ('During the sexually explicit scene, the performer is reluctant to perform oral sex on another man'), the scene's setting ('Prior to the sexually explicit scene, the performer is in an all-male area like a change room or fraternity house'), performer's appearance ('The performer has tattoos [e.g. religious, women's name, etc.]'), and textual indicants ('The website biography of the performer states that he is heterosexual').

The participants were required to rate both the perceived believability and the erotic value of each of the 53 variables using 10-point semantic differential scales (erotic value, 1 = not at all erotic to 10 = very erotic; believability, 1 = not at all believable to 10 = very believable). Sample items from the questionnaire are presented in [Appendix 1](#).

Results and discussion

In general, participants saw the variables used to imply that a performer in gay SEM is 'heterosexual' as largely unbelievable and encompassing low erotic value. Based on the mean score for each item, the variables that were perceived to be the most erotic were general in nature and did not explicitly tag the performer as 'heterosexual' (see Table 1). Rather, the variables that were rated as most erotic were visually based (e.g. a performer's general appearance) or indicated that the performer enjoyed his sexual experience. Performers' reluctance or inability to perform sexual acts appeared to be the most believable variable used to convey 'heterosexuality' (see Table 2).

The gay participants in Study 1 perceived the attributes used to explicitly connote 'straightness' as well as the attributes that are commonly present in gay SEM which uses 'heterosexual' performers to be both unbelievable and non-erotic. This finding, which is in contrast to the large portion of popular gay SEM websites that rely on heterosexually identified performers or employ other cues that (potentially) signify heterosexuality, raises an interesting question: if these cues are perceived as neither believable nor

Table 1. Study 1: 10 'most erotic' attributes of performers' in gay SEM.

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation
1. The performer is muscular	7.07	2.74
2. The performer has an 'average' build	6.82	2.77
3. Prior to the sexually explicit scene, the performer is in an all-male area like a change room or fraternity house	6.80	2.58
4. During the scene, the performer suggests he enjoyed his sexual experience with another man	6.66	2.86
5. The performer has a deep voice	6.63	2.67
6. The performer wears an entire or partial sports uniform	6.59	2.49
7. Prior to the scene, the performer is horsing around or play-fighting with another guy	6.52	2.57
8. Prior to the sexually explicit scene, the performer states that he always wanted to sexually experiment with another man	6.43	2.44
9. The performer has groomed body hair	6.41	2.73
10. The performer has tattoos (e.g. religious, woman's name, etc.)	6.39	2.49

Table 2. Study 1: 10 'most believable' indicators of performer's 'heterosexuality'.

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation
1. During the sexually explicit scene, the performer requires pornography featuring women to play in the background in order to perform sexually	5.52	2.74
2. After the sexually explicit scene, the performer states he did not enjoy his experience	5.50	2.77
3. During the sexually explicit scene, the performer is reluctant to be nude with another man	5.25	2.58
4. During the sexually explicit scene, the performer is reluctant to anally penetrate another man	5.23	2.86
5. During the sexually explicit scene, the performer is reluctant to perform oral sex on another man	5.13	2.67
6. During the sexually explicit scene, the performer is reluctant to touch another man	5.09	2.49
7. During the sexually explicit scene, while receiving anal sex, the performer provides physical cues (e.g. grits teeth, loses erection, pushes the top away, etc.) that suggest a lack of enjoyment	5.05	2.57
8. During the sexually explicit scene, the performer is reluctant to masturbate with another man	5.05	2.44
9. The performer obscures his face (e.g. wears sunglasses or a mask)	4.98	2.73
10. During the sexually explicit scene, the performer gives oral sex in a manner that suggests he does not enjoy it (e.g. stopping mid act, coughing or gagging, etc.)	4.93	2.49

erotic, then why are they so commonplace? Our findings suggest that 'heterosexual' performers may not possess additional erotic value outside of their sexually explicit interactions or the aesthetic quality of their appearance. For example, participants deemed variables such as 'Performer has a muscular body' to be highly erotic. This type of variable is general in nature; it does not *ipso facto* serve to code a performer as 'heterosexual'.

A central limitation of Study 1 is that, in an effort to provide an extensive list of possible indicators of performers' heterosexuality, the online survey turned out to be rather lengthy, which led to a non-completion rate of 55%. Assessing 53 variables on the dimensions of believability and erotic value (totalling 106 items) in conjunction with demographic items may have introduced fatigue or boredom. Therefore, to secure a larger sample, a follow-up study was conducted.

Study 2

The purpose of Study 2 was to gather a larger number of participants and substantially reduce the length of the 'Heterosexual' Believability and Erotic Value measure. By doing this, it was anticipated that the attrition rate observed in Study 1 would be reduced. Lastly, we felt it important to determine whether the believability and erotic value of 'heterosexual' performers in gay SEM are associated with the theoretical mechanisms identified in our literature review – specifically, masculine consciousness and internalized homonegativity. We predicted that greater endorsement of the perceived believability and erotic value of the variables indicating a performer is 'heterosexual' would be positively associated with greater masculine consciousness and greater internalized homonegativity. Also, in accordance with the results of Study 1, we anticipated that participants would perceive the variables used to code gay SEM performers as 'heterosexual' to be largely unbelievable and to possess low erotic value.

Method

Participants

Gay male participants ($N = 214$) were recruited through Amazon's online labour market Mechanical Turk (MTurk). MTurk allows researchers to hire 'workers' to complete tasks (HITS) on the basis of their qualifications or demographics. Research assessing the characteristics of MTurk samples suggests that data obtained from MTurk workers are acceptable and tend to be more varied than commonly utilized undergraduate participants (Mason and Suri 2012; Paolacci and Chandler 2014). The current study required workers who identified as gay, male, and were over 18 years of age. Workers who completed the online questionnaire package were compensated with 30 cents (US currency). To ensure the quality of the data was acceptable, a compliance question was inserted into the survey ('Please select Strongly Agree'). Out of 298 eligible participants who began the survey, 20 failed the compliance question and their responses were removed from final analysis (7% of respondents). Additionally, 60 respondents did not complete more than half of the survey (20% of respondents) and four respondents were not gay men (1% of respondents), thus they were removed.

The average age of participants was 29.35 (standard deviation = 7.52) years. In terms of relationship status, the most commonly selected response option was 'currently single'

(45.3%). Due to the online nature of the study and MTurk's international workforce, participants' location varied, but the majority of participants were situated in the United States, India, and the United Kingdom.

Procedure

MTurk workers who were eligible to participate in the study were provided with a web address to the FluidSurvey-hosted questionnaire package. Before commencing, participants were asked to review a consent form outlining basic ethical requirements for research with human participants (e.g. participants' anonymity was safeguarded; their involvement was voluntary and could be terminated at any time without penalty or consequence). Due to MTurk's compensation model, those who did not complete the survey forfeited remuneration because the 'job' was not completed successfully. Upon finishing the survey, participants were forwarded to a debriefing website and provided an MTurk completion code that would permit receipt of compensation.

Measures

'Heterosexual' Believability and Erotic Value (Revised). This measure includes textual examples of 20 variables that are used in gay SEM to indicate the performer is heterosexual. The items included in the revised version were those identified in Study 1 as having the highest mean scores on the indices for believability (10 questions) and erotic value (10 questions: see [Tables 1](#) and [2](#)). Thus, 40 questions in total were used (i.e. the erotic value of the 10 believability items was also assessed, as was the believability of the 10 erotic value items; see [Appendix 1](#)). Participants were required to rate perceived believability and erotic value using 10-point semantic differential scales (erotic value, 1 = not at all erotic to 10 = very erotic; believability, 1 = not at all believable to 10 = very believable). For further details on the scale items, please refer to Study 1.

Masculine Consciousness Scale. The Masculine Consciousness Scale (MCS; Taywaditep 2002) is an 18-item scale that measures gay men's endorsement of masculinity and their desire to appear 'straight-acting'. It uses a 10-point scale (1 = not at all true for me to 10 = definitely true for me) where higher scores suggest greater masculine consciousness and desire to appear straight. Sample items include 'When I hear my own recorded voice, I listen to see how masculine it sounds' and 'I want to be thought of as a regular, down-to-earth, masculine guy'. Taywaditep (2002) reports that the measure possesses excellent scale score reliability and the MCS demonstrated convergent validity with measures of internalized homonegativity.

Short Internalized Homonegativity Scale. The Short Internalized Homonegativity Scale (SIHS; Currie, Cunningham, and Findlay 2004) is a 12-item measure that assesses public identification as a gay man, social comfort with other gay men, and sexual comfort with gay men. The response format is a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) with higher scores denoting greater internalized homonegativity. Illustrative items include 'I am comfortable about people finding out that I am gay' and 'Most gay men cannot sustain a long-term committed relationship'. Currie, Cunningham, and Findlay (2004) report that the SIHS possesses satisfactory scale score reliability ($\alpha = 0.78$). In

terms of the measure's construct validity, scores on the SIHS correlated significantly with scores on a measure assessing reactions to gay men.

Results

Bivariate analysis

To assess whether items on the 'Heterosexual' Believability and Erotic Value (Revised) measure were deemed to be believable or erotic, a series of one-sample *t* tests were conducted using the Bonferroni adjustment to correct for multiple pairwise comparisons. Variables that are significantly greater than the scale midpoint (median = 5.5) are deemed to be believable or erotic.

Believability. Nine of the 20 items were significantly greater than the midpoint for believability. These items were: 'reluctant to touch another man'; 'reluctant to be nude with another man'; 'reluctant to masturbate with another man'; 'reluctant to perform oral sex on another man'; 'reluctant to anally penetrate another man'; 'provides physical cues that suggest a lack of enjoyment'; 'requires pornography featuring women'; 'states he did not enjoy his experience'; and 'gives oral sex in a manner that suggests he does not enjoy it' (see Table 3). Inspecting the content of these nine items suggests they tap into 'Believability via Reluctance or Inability to Perform'. Finally, of the remaining 11 items only two were significantly below the midpoint, suggesting that they were not perceived to be believable cues of performers' heterosexuality (see Table 3).

Erotic Value. Ten of the 20 items were significantly greater than the midpoint for erotic value. These items were: 'states that he always wanted to sexually experiment with another man'; 'enjoyed his sexual experience with another man'; 'wears an entire or partial sports uniform'; 'is horsing around or play-fighting with another guy'; 'is in an all-male area like a change room or fraternity house'; 'has a deep voice'; 'is muscular'; 'has an "average" build'; 'has groomed body hair'; and 'has tattoos' (see Table 4). Thematically, the 10 items that exceeded the scale midpoint appear to connote 'Erotic Value via Masculinity and Enjoyment'. Of the remaining 10 items, four were significantly below the scale midpoint, suggesting that these 'heterosexual cues' were not perceived to be erotic by the participants in our study (see Table 4).

Factor analysis

To ascertain the dimensionality of the nine believability and 10 erotic value items that were significantly above the scale midpoint, two exploratory factor analyses were conducted. As the questionnaire used a Likert-type response format, data were ordinal rather than interval. Unfortunately, the most frequently utilized statistical packages (e.g. SPSS) cannot conduct exploratory factor analyses with polychoric correlations, which are appropriate when data are ordinal. Thus, the R programming language was employed via an SPSS plug-in (see Basto and Pereira 2012). The dimensionality was tested using principal axis factor analysis, with oblique rotation (direct oblimin). To assist with factor retention, parallel analysis was utilized. This method is one of the most accurate in identifying the appropriate number of factors to retain (i.e. unlike other retention techniques such as

Table 3. Study 2: believability – one-sample *t* test for differences from item midpoints.

Item	Mean	Standard deviation	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
During the sexually explicit scene, the performer requires pornography featuring women to play in the background in order to perform sexually	6.57	2.57	6.07	<0.001*
During the sexually explicit scene, the performer is reluctant to touch another man	6.30	2.64	4.44	<0.001*
During the sexually explicit scene, the performer is reluctant to masturbate with another man	6.22	2.61	4.07	<0.001*
After the sexually explicit scene, the performer states he did not enjoy his experience with another man	6.13	2.72	3.37	<0.001*
During the sexually explicit scene, the performer is reluctant to be nude with another man	6.13	2.60	3.51	<0.001*
During the sexually explicit scene, while receiving anal sex, the performer provides physical cues (e.g. grits teeth, loses erection, pushes the top away, etc.) that suggest a lack of enjoyment	6.10	2.75	3.18	<0.001*
During the sexually explicit scene, the performer is reluctant to perform oral sex on another man	6.07	2.70	3.06	<0.001*
During the sexually explicit scene, the performer is reluctant to anally penetrate another man	5.98	2.79	2.79	<0.001*
During the sexually explicit scene, the performer gives oral sex in a manner that suggests he does not enjoy it (e.g. stopping mid act, coughing or gagging, etc.)	5.92	2.68	2.68	<0.001*
During the sexually explicit scene, the performer obscures his face to hide his identity (e.g. sunglasses, mask)	5.81	2.64	1.71	0.090
The performer has a deep voice	5.53	2.79	0.16	0.876
The performer has an 'average' build	5.30	2.63	−1.23	0.219
The performer is muscular	5.18	2.61	−1.78	0.076
Prior to the sexually explicit scene, the performer is in an all-male area like a change room or fraternity house	5.15	2.58	−1.99	0.048
The performer has tattoos (e.g. religious, woman's name, etc.)	5.15	2.54	−1.99	0.048
Prior to the sexually explicit scene, the performer is horsing around or play-fighting with another guy	5.12	2.60	−2.17	0.035
During the scene, the performer suggests he enjoyed his sexual experience with another man	5.04	2.79	−2.40	0.017
Prior to the sexually explicit scene, the performer states that he always wanted to sexually experiment with another man	5.04	2.79	−2.42	0.016
The performer wears an entire or partial sports uniform	4.88	2.65	−3.41	<0.001*
The performer has groomed body hair	4.70	2.59	−4.54	<0.001*

Note: Midpoint = 5.5, *N* = 214. Significant believability variables after Bonferroni-adjusted alpha to correct for multiple pairwise comparisons.

*Mean significantly differed from the midpoint ($\alpha = 0.005$).

the eigenvalue greater than one 'rule', parallel analysis seldom over-extracts or under-extracts; Çokluk and Koçak 2016).

To determine whether the data were appropriate for exploratory factor analysis, a number of indicators were used. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.93 and 0.89 for believability and erotic value, respectively; for both subscales, the determinant was 0.0001; and Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant for believability ($\chi^2 = 1858.92$, $p < 0.0001$) and for erotic value ($\chi^2 = 720.588$, $p < 0.0001$). Individual measures of sampling adequacy similarly were good (i.e. 0.80+) for all items.

Believability. The first eigenvalue generated by the real dataset was 6.52, which exceeded the eigenvalue created by the randomly created polychoric correlation matrices (1.43). The second eigenvalue for the real dataset was 0.83, which was lower than the eigenvalue associated with the random correlation matrices (1.28). Thus, based on the parallel analysis, a one-factor solution seemed viable. The range of the factor loadings was 0.76–0.89 (see Table 5).

Table 4. Study 2: erotic value – one-sample *t* test for differences from item midpoints.

Item	Mean	Standard deviation	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
During the scene, the performer suggests he enjoyed his sexual experience with another man	6.94	2.17	9.69	<0.001*
The performer is muscular	6.91	2.22	9.29	<0.001*
Prior to the sexually explicit scene, the performer states that he always wanted to sexually experiment with another man	6.94	2.29	8.58	<0.001*
Prior to the sexually explicit scene, the performer is in an all-male area like a change room or fraternity house	6.75	2.29	8.01	<0.001*
The performer has a deep voice	6.61	2.37	6.85	<0.001*
The performer has an 'average' build	6.46	2.02	6.93	<0.001*
Prior to the sexually explicit scene, the performer is horsing around or play-fighting with another guy	6.46	2.38	5.92	<0.001*
The performer has groomed body hair	6.26	2.35	4.74	<0.001*
The performer wears an entire or partial sports uniform	6.21	2.48	4.22	<0.001*
The performer has tattoos (e.g. religious, women's name, etc.)	6.00	2.22	2.93	<0.001*
During the sexually explicit scene, the performer is reluctant to anally penetrate another man	5.67	3.00	0.845	0.399
During the sexually explicit scene, the performer is reluctant to perform oral sex on another man	5.58	3.02	0.384	0.701
During the sexually explicit scene, the performer is reluctant to masturbate with another man	5.52	2.93	0.117	0.907
During the sexually explicit scene, the performer is reluctant to be nude with another man	5.41	2.87	-0.45	0.653
During the sexually explicit scene, the performer is reluctant to touch another man	5.28	2.87	-1.15	0.253
During the sexually explicit scene, the performer gives oral sex in a manner that suggests he does not enjoy it (e.g. stopping mid act, coughing or gagging, etc.)	4.88	3.09	-2.92	0.004*
During the sexually explicit scene, the performer requires pornography featuring women to play in the background in order to perform sexually	4.85	2.87	-3.31	<0.001*
During the sexually explicit scene, the performer obscures his face to hide his identity (e.g. sunglasses, mask)	4.68	2.62	-4.56	<0.001*
During the sexually explicit scene, while receiving anal sex, the performer provides physical cues (e.g. grits teeth, loses erection, pushes the top away, etc.) that suggest a lack of enjoyment	4.65	2.97	-4.19	<0.001*
After the sexually explicit scene, the performer states he did not enjoy his experience with another man	4.30	2.93	-5.99	<0.001*

Note: Midpoint = 5.5, *N* = 214. Significant believability variables after Bonferroni-adjusted alpha to correct for multiple pairwise comparisons.

*Mean significantly differed from the midpoint ($\alpha = 0.005$).

Table 5. Summary of exploratory factor analysis for 'heterosexual' believability items (*N* = 214).

Item	Believability factor loading
During the sexually explicit scene, the performer is reluctant to masturbate with another man	0.892
During the sexually explicit scene, the performer is reluctant to perform oral sex on another man	0.875
During the sexually explicit scene, the performer is reluctant to be nude with another man	0.868
During the sexually explicit scene, the performer is reluctant to touch another man	0.860
During the sexually explicit scene, the performer is reluctant to anally penetrate another man	0.855
During the sexually explicit scene, the performer gives oral sex in a manner that suggests he does not enjoy it (e.g. stopping mid act, coughing or gagging, etc.)	0.817
During the sexually explicit scene, the performer requires pornography featuring women to play in the background in order to perform sexually	0.765
During the sexually explicit scene, while receiving anal sex, the performer provides physical cues (e.g. grits teeth, loses erection, pushes the top away, etc.) that suggest a lack of enjoyment	0.762
After the scene the sexually explicit scene, the performer states he did not enjoy his experience	0.757

Table 6. Summary of exploratory factor analysis for 'heterosexual' erotic value items ($N = 214$).

Item	Erotic value factor loading
Prior to the sexually explicit scene, the performer is in an all-male area like a change room or fraternity house	0.715
During the scene, the performer suggests he enjoyed his sexual experience with another man	0.700
The performer wears an entire or partial sports uniform	0.679
Prior to the sexually explicit scene, the performer is horsing around or play-fighting with another guy	0.675
Prior to the sexually explicit scene, the performer states that he always wanted to sexually experiment with another man	0.639
The performer has a deep voice	0.612
The performer is muscular	0.579
The performer has groomed body hair	0.510
The performer has an 'average' build	0.506
The performer has tattoos (e.g. religious, woman's name, etc.)	0.470

Erotic value. The first eigenvalue generated by the real dataset was 4.38, which exceeded the eigenvalue created by the randomly created polychoric correlation matrices (1.45). The second eigenvalue for the real dataset was 1.03, which was lower than the eigenvalue for random correlation matrices (1.31). Thus, based on the parallel analysis, a one-factor solution was deemed to be acceptable. Factor loadings ranged from 0.47 to 0.72 (see Table 6).

Scale score reliability. The most commonly utilized estimate of scale score reliability is Cronbach's alpha, which represents the expected correlation between an actual test and a hypothetical alternative form of the same length (Carmines and Zeller 1979). However, Cronbach's alpha uses the tau-equivalent model which operates in accordance with a specific set of assumptions rarely met in psychological data (see Peters 2014). Thus, other forms of scale score reliability have been recommended in lieu of Cronbach's alpha, such as Theta. Ordinal Theta may be used to determine the scale score reliability of ordinal data, which the 'Heterosexual' Believability and Erotic Value (Revised) as well as the MCS and SIHS produce (Zumbo, Gadermann, and Zeisser 2007). The ordinal Theta scores for the current measures ranged from good to excellent: believability, $\Theta = 0.95$; erotic value, $\Theta = 0.86$; MCS, $\Theta = 0.97$; and SIHS, $\Theta = 0.83$.

Masculine consciousness and internalized homonegativity. Using the nine-item believability and 10-item erotic value measures established via principal axis factor analysis, the total scores for each of these indices were calculated and then correlated with total scores on the indices of masculine consciousness (MCS) and internalized homonegativity (SIHS). As predicted, scores on the MCS correlated positively with total believability scores ($r = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, gay participants evidencing a stronger desire to appear masculine and 'straight-acting' perceived as more believable the characteristics used to denote that a performer in gay SEM is heterosexual. The MCS also correlated positively with erotic value ($r = 0.34$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, gay men with a stronger desire to appear masculine found variables that connoted, in part, performers' masculinity to be more erotic.

While scores on the SIHS correlated positively with believability ($r = 0.27$, $p < 0.001$), the correlation with erotic value was statistically non-significant ($r = -0.02$, $p = \text{not significant}$). Thus, on average, gay participants evidencing greater levels of internalized

homonegativity perceived the characteristics used to denote a performer's (supposed) heterosexuality in gay SEM as more believable. However, contrary to our prediction, participants higher in internalized homonegativity did not regard these characteristics as more erotic.

Discussion

Contrary to the results of Study 1, and our hypotheses, participants in Study 2 deemed a variety of the variables designed to connote performers' straightness as believable and erotic. Out of 20 variables in total, nine were deemed to be believable signifiers of heterosexuality. These primarily focused on the performer's reluctance to be sexually intimate with another man. Indeed, only a single reluctance-based item did not differ significantly from the scale's midpoint: 'The performer obscures his face (e.g. wears sunglasses or a mask)'. This omission may be due to the considerable stigma and public judgement that are often associated with performing in pornographic material (Voss 2015). Thus, it is understandable that some men would shield their identity when appearing in gay SEM regardless of their sexuality or the sexual content of the scene. Of the remaining 10 variables, eight did not differ significantly from the scale midpoint. Examining the content of these items suggests that they encompass the performer's appearance, behaviour, and location. Despite this, categories such as 'situational same-sex desire' gay pornography heavily utilize these indicants to suggest the performers are heterosexual (e.g. 'play-fighting' with another guy; scenes in frat houses). Also, to a lesser extent, the category of 'bisexual or gay curious' uses a number of these variables as well. Our finding provides an additional strand of evidence in support of the idea that aspects of hegemonic masculine ideals have become normalized within the gay community and, thus, are no longer perceived as synonymous with heterosexual men. Items that conveyed the performer's enjoyment of gay sex were also deemed unbelievable. When contrasted with the levels of believability assigned to the reluctance items, one can conclude that some gay men believe that 'real' straight men would not find gay sexual activity to be enjoyable and, therefore, would resist engaging in sexual acts according to their perceived 'gayness'.

Interestingly, items deemed erotic were considered largely unbelievable. The items that were regarded as most erotic are regularly depicted in gay SEM which can be categorized as 'bisexual or gay curious'. For example, SeanCody.com, CorbinFisher.com, and Cocky-Boys.com rely on these variables (e.g. muscular performers, rough-housing, statements of enjoyment, eager to have sex with another man) to create an erotically charged scene where attractive, masculine performers take pleasure in gay sexual acts regardless of their sexuality. The ostensible popularity of these websites – SeanCody.com is the most visited gay porn website (S8UpGayporn.com 2018) – suggest that these variables have considerable erotic appeal for gay men.

Interestingly, many of the reluctance variables, while regarded as believable indicators of 'heterosexuality', were not regarded as erotic. The following had mean scores that were significantly below the scale midpoint: 'After the sexually explicit scene, the performer states he did not enjoy his experience with another man'; 'During the sexually explicit scene, the performer gives oral sex in a manner that suggests he does not enjoy it (e.g. stopping mid act, coughing or gagging, etc.)'; 'During the sexually explicit scene, the performer requires pornography featuring women to play in the background in order to

perform sexually'; 'During the sexually explicit scene, the performer obscures his face to hide his identity (e.g. sunglasses, mask)'; and 'During the sexually explicit scene, while receiving anal sex, the performer provides physical cues (e.g. grits teeth, loses erection, pushes the top away, etc.) that suggest a lack of enjoyment'. This finding is contrary to the recent observations that coercion or 'abuse porn' (i.e. staged rape, physical abuse) is becoming a desired and eroticized feature of mainstream gay pornography (Nielsen and Kiss 2015; Brennan 2017). Although most 'abuse porn' does not conclude with the performer explicitly stating they did not enjoy their experience, other indicators suggesting an absence of pleasure are used, such as the performer ending up in the foetal position or hastily leaving the 'set' when the sexual episode is over. The current study did not specifically query whether negative body language after the pornography scene is believable. More research is needed to delve into this topic; however, it is possible that, while porn sites specializing in coercion or simulated rape may be considered believable in terms of reinforcing the 'heterosexual' identity of their performers, the overall erotic value of this type of SEM may be limited. For example, in comparison to bisexual and gay curious websites, coercion websites are less visited, and thus less mainstream (S8UpGay-Porn 2018). This finding is in line with research which suggests that the believability and the erotic value of SEM may be disparate concepts (Leap 2011, 2014; Galos et al. 2015).

The results of the current study indicate that the elements standardly used in coercion SEM may possess low erotic value for an unknown number of gay men. This observation, however, raises an obvious question: if coercion and abuse pornography are growing in popularity, then why did our participants not regard these elements as erotic? It is possible that the increasing visibility of this type of SEM may be due to its perceived 'reality'. Scenes from this subgenre tend to be filmed in the first person; akin to the viewer experiencing the intensity of impromptu sex through a natural lens (viewpoint of top). The lighting and quality of the camera work is often mediocre to poor in comparison with typical SEM. This style of filming is akin to authentic amateur footage uploaded to tube sites which provide access to 'real' men having sex, rather than two pornographic actors hired to 'perform' (Nielsen and Kiss 2015). Unfortunately, the current study did not include variables that analyzed the perceived 'realness' of the pornographic scene. Future research may benefit from determining whether the perceived reality of this subgenre is viewed as erotic rather than the specific sexual content that it depicts. Lastly, it is possible that coercion/abuse SEM serves to cater to the desires of a very specific subset of gay men who are sexually excited by staged violence in pornography. Certain gay men may want to view SEM featuring romantic sex between two attractive gay performers, while others may like to see masculine 'heterosexual' men performing gay sexual acts – consenting or not.

The results of Study 2 serve to further elucidate gay men's perceptions of 'heterosexual' performers in gay pornography. As predicted, masculine consciousness was positively associated with the perceived believability and erotic value of variables that denote performers in gay SEM as being heterosexual. Researchers have observed that some self-reported masculine gay men strictly seek other masculine-acting gay men for sexual encounters (Clarkson 2006; Ward 2008; Lanzieri and Hildebrandt 2011). Thus, gay men's dating and hook-up behaviour may mirror what they deem to be erotic in gay pornography. The items that were endorsed as believable indicators of a performer's heterosexuality described the performer's reluctance to partake in gay sex acts. Gay men are often considered markedly more feminine than heterosexual men (Kimmel and Mahalik 2005;

Blashill and Powlisha 2009; Mitchell and Ellis 2011). According to the theory of masculine consciousness, men who covet their masculine identity and wish to maintain it (Taywadi-tep 2002) may believe that participating willingly – and publicly – in gay SEM would permanently label a man as ‘gay’, and consequently serve to feminize him. Therefore, the coercion of the performer via monetary incentives or implied force is the most believable explanation as to why a heterosexual man would betray – and consequently relinquish – his ‘innate’ masculinity. Future research will benefit by comparing the perceived erotic value of SEM variables that connote masculinity versus femininity (a muscular physique versus a skinny, twink-like physique). This type of comparison may allow researchers to ascertain whether ostensibly masculine variables are perceived to be more erotic than ostensibly feminine variables and, if so, whether this difference is more pronounced among certain groups of gay men. The current study serves to impart additional strands of evidence that gay men who endorse masculinity and ‘straight-acting’ behaviour find masculinity and masculine men (either gay or purportedly heterosexual) to be sexually desirable.

As hypothesized, internalized homonegativity was positively associated with the believability variables used to denote performers in gay SEM as being heterosexual. As with the association between believability and masculine consciousness, gay men who evidence greater internalized homonegativity may operate from the assumption that no ‘real’ heterosexual man would engage volitionally in same-sex sexual activity. In comparison to the ephemeral nature of masculinity, same-sex sexual activity – unless performed reluctantly – robs a performer of his heterosexual credentials. However, no statistically significant association was obtained between the perceived erotic value of these indicators and internalized homonegativity. Researchers have yet to delve into the relationship between internalized homonegativity and gay men’s perceptions of pornographic content. The current study identified a significant correlation between the SHIS and the MCS ($r = 0.57$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that gay men higher in internalized homonegativity also express a stronger desire to be masculine and, thus, possibly straight-acting. The non-significant association between internalized homonegativity and the perceived erotic value of indicators of heterosexuality may reflect this group of participants’ unwillingness to explicitly admit to finding same-sex sexual activity erotic. Furthermore, it is possible that the non-significant association stems from those higher in internalized homonegativity regarding same-sex sexual activity as unerotic because it renders salient a practice/identity they view as problematic.

Limitations

The current study shared some of the limitations articulated earlier (i.e. attrition occurred, as in Study 1, albeit at a much lower proportion: 55% [Study 1] versus 20% [Study 2]). However, Study 2 possessed a few unique challenges that should be noted. First, the overall generalizability of MTurk populations in psychological research has been questioned (Mason and Suri 2012). Research suggests that MTurk populations tend to be under 30 years of age, highly educated but underemployed, less religious, and more liberal than a general population sample (Paolacci and Chandler 2014). Therefore, the results of the current study should not be generalized to all gay men. Furthermore, the relatively high monetization (i.e. greater than 25 cents; Paolacci and Chandler 2014)

used in the current study may have increased its attraction to those seeking to complete high-paying tasks quickly to maximize their per-hour income. To combat this, strict filtering criteria were set in place, as well as a screening question to ensure high-quality data (e.g. 'Please select Strongly Agree for this item'). Such safeguards, however, do not guarantee all participants are equally conscientious. Secondly, we did not include an indicator of pornography consumption (i.e. 'How many days a week do you view gay pornography?'). Future research evaluating the believability and erotic value of features of pornography performers would benefit from measuring use of this medium. Higher or lower pornography consumption may moderate observed relationships (i.e. higher rates of consumption may attenuate the perceived erotic value of all elements of pornography). Lastly, correlational results do not indicate causation. Researchers may wish to investigate, experimentally, whether exposure to 'heterosexual' performers in gay pornography increases gay viewers' masculine consciousness.

Conclusion

Limited research is afforded to gay men and their perceptions of gay pornography. Consequently, gay men's sexual desire vis-à-vis this cultural artefact warrants scrutiny. It is clear that the gay pornographic industry uses 'heterosexually coded' men as objects of desire in the SEM they produce for (ostensibly) gay consumers. As pornography is a commercial enterprise, doing so would suggest that 'straight' men engaging in sex with men is sexually appealing to viewers. The results of our study, however, challenge this assertion. While items focusing on a performer's reluctance were perceived as believable indicators of 'heterosexuality', they were not accorded high erotic value. Instead, the characteristics that were most eroticized were variables that centred on having a general masculine appearance or the performer's enjoyment of gay sex. Moreover, as predicted, the believability of variables used to 'heterosexually' code performers in gay SEM appears to be greater among gay men who are higher in masculine consciousness and experience internalized homonegativity. Contrary to our hypothesis, however, the erotic value of these indicators was only associated with masculine consciousness.

With the seemingly limited erotic appeal of variables that code performers as 'heterosexual' in gay SEM, one must ask: are such tropes necessary to create a stimulating gay sex scene? A recent change in SeanCody.com, the most popular gay SEM website, may shed light on this query: the site recently removed textual biographies of its models (i.e. only the models' measurements remain). In the past, these profiles often included references to the performers' sexuality and their rationale for doing gay SEM. Previously, the primary reason provided by Sean Cody's producers and 'heterosexual' performers' participation in same-sex SEM was for monetary compensation (i.e. 'gay-for-pay'). The removal of such biographical details leaves the men's sexuality somewhat vague unless it is verbally affirmed during the pornographic scene. Furthermore, in recent scenes, the content of the interviews with the performers allude to gay sex being an enjoyable, masculine-affirming experience that the performers are excited to partake in and grateful to experience. Thus, we see a transition from the stringent adherence to predefined sexual orientations that is present in some gay SEM to those of bisexuality, sexual curiosity, and same-sex experimentation (Mercer 2017). This may serve to explain why the variables deemed most erotic in the current study focused on the performer's general appearance and

sexual enjoyment. SeanCody.com's popularity has not waned, suggesting that explicit proclamations of heterosexuality may not be salient to most gay consumers. This shift also may indicate the gradual lessening of the omnipresence of male heterosexual representations in gay SEM.

Notes

1. It is important to note that, in the current study, the term 'heterosexual' is used to suggest the performer is portrayed or identified as straight in the SEM. In his personal life, the performer may sexually identify as gay, bisexual, queer, and so forth. It is possible, however, that the illusion of heterosexuality in gay pornography may be as powerful as using 'genuinely' heterosexual performers.
2. The term 'homosexual' is considered inappropriate, due to its previous use in diagnosis of mental illness (Meyer 1995). Thus, we use 'situational same-sex desire' instead of 'situational homosexuality'.
3. Research estimating the proportion of gay individuals who are in the closet may only offer conservative estimates due to the nature of being in the closet. Those in the closet may be less likely or reluctant to participate in research that is focused solely on gay men due to their reservations about appearing gay.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Appendix 1

Sample believability and erotic value items

During the sexually explicit scene, the performer states that he has always wanted to sexually experiment with another man.

Do you believe the performer is heterosexual?

Do Not Believe | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Completely Believe

How erotic do you find it when the performer says he has always wanted to sexually experiment with another man?

Not At All Erotic | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Very Erotic

Prior to the sexually explicit scene, the performer is horsing around or play-fighting with another guy. Do you believe the performer is heterosexual?

Do Not Believe | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Completely Believe

How erotic do you find it when the performer horsing around or play-fights with another guy?

Not At All Erotic | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Very Erotic