

Journal of Homosexuality

ISSN: 0091-8369 (Print) 1540-3602 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/wjhm20

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To cite this article: CJ Bishop PhD Candidate , Mark Kiss BA Candidate , Todd G. Morrison PhD , Damien M. Rushe PhD Candidate & Jacqueline Specht BA (2014) The Association Between Gay Men's Stereotypic Beliefs About Drag Queens and Their Endorsement of Hypermasculinity, Journal of Homosexuality, 61:4, 554-567, DOI: 10.1080/00918369.2014.865464

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2014.865464

Accepted author version posted online: 18 Nov 2013.
Published online: 18 Nov 2013.

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Journal of Homosexuality, 61:554–567, 2014
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ISSN: 0091-8369 print/1540-3602 online
DOI: 10.1080/00918369.2014.865464

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The Association Between Gay Men's Stereotypic Beliefs About Drag Queens and Their Endorsement of Hypermasculinity

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To date, few researchers have investigated gay men's stereotypic beliefs about drag queens and the association between these beliefs and individual difference variables such as hypermasculinity. To address this omission, 118 men self-identifying as non-heterosexual completed an online survey consisting of an adjective checklist about drag queens and a psychometrically sound indicant of hypermasculinity. As predicted, participants who were more likely to endorse hypermasculine belief statements tended to perceive negatively valenced attributes as more characteristic of drag queens. Possible explanations for this relationship, limitations associated with the current study, and directions for future research are delineated.

KEYWORDS gay men, drag, femi-negativity, hypermasculinity, masculinity

Researchers have devoted considerable attention to documenting the stereotypes and prejudices that heterosexual individuals endorse about gay men. However, few studies have empirically evaluated the beliefs various

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subcultures within the gay community possess about each other. Drag queens, a gay subculture consisting of males who impersonate females for the purpose of entertainment, have received little quantitative attention. However, prior qualitative research has noted a complicated relationship between drag queens and other members of the gay community. In a study evaluating the subjective experiences of drag queens, Berkowitz, Belgrave, and Halberstein's (2007) participants reported feeling marginalized by gay men; yet they also believed they were respected performers in the gay community. Echoing the last point, Hopkins (2004) observed that successful drag queens experience a sense of power and normality from their performances as they are held in high regard by their fans and admirers. Such power and normality, however, are relegated to the setting where their drag performances take place and are appreciated.

Fournet, Forsyth, and Schramm (1988) reported that the gay male participants in this study were eager to distance themselves from drag queens because they believed this group was not representative of the gay community. However, although some individuals may consider drag queens to be unrepresentative of the gay community, others appear to regard the practice of drag as transgressing the rules placed on us to "perform" our gender within certain specifications (Schacht & Underwood, 2004). While there is agreement that drag queens' performances can be gender transgressive, they also may be perceived as misogynistic and antifeminist (Nixon, 2009). Thus, instead of drag queens serving as a figurehead for the gay community, they may be seen as increasingly anachronistic: A performance without any real connection or relevance to the concerns of gay and lesbian individuals in the early 21st century.

PROLIFERATION OF MASCULINITY IN GAY CULTURE

A shift in public attitudes toward gay men has been observed, with majority disapproval having been replaced by tolerance and, in some cases, even acceptance (Yang, 1997). However, negative stereotypes about, and prejudice toward, overtly feminine gay men is still common, with some of this negativity occurring within the gay community (Mitchell & Ellis, 2010). A masculine disposition ("straight acting") and anti-feminine attitudes have become desirable traits among some members of the gay community (Clarkson, 2006). As a result, drag queens have yet to experience the same level of acceptance as "straight-acting" gay men; indeed, some have expressed feeling minimized and discounted by a gay community that now seemingly prefers masculine ideals (Berkowitz & Belgrave, 2010).

The emergence of this "masculine ideal" may be traced to shifts in representation within the gay community. During the 1970s, a new movement surfaced wherein gay men started to embrace masculinity and "blue collar"

ideals (i.e., the so-called "clone" aesthetic; Clarkson, 2006). Termed *straight-acting*, this new subculture actively and publicly rejected stereotypically feminine gay male roles, traits, occupations, and physiques (Kite & Deaux, 1987; Messner, 1997). A number of explanations have been forwarded to account for the burgeoning popularity of "straight-acting" gay subculture. First, the HIV/AIDS epidemic of the early 1980s is believed to have emphasized masculinity because gay men did not want to be associated with a sick or frail image symptomatic of the disease (Signorile, 1997). Second, the gay rights movement shifted in focus from cultural transformation through sexual liberation to political and civil rights equality (Epstein, 1987; Escoffier, 1985; Gamson, 1995; Seidman, 1993). The emphasis of attaining parity with heterosexual individuals may have contributed to gay men adopting a more heterosexual demeanor. Last, it has been proposed that indirect childhood bullying communicated via heteronormative undercurrents within the classroom can result in gay males adopting a more masculine disposition in order to avoid ridicule and "fit in" (DesRoches & Sweet, 2008).

FEMI-NEGATIVITY

Femi-negativity[1] refers to the strategy of seeing someone's gender performance as "normal" or "abnormal" and serves as a tactic to isolate those who do not conform (Bailey, 1996; Clarkson, 2006; Lotto, 2006). Femi-negativity may play a role in the development of negative stereotypes about drag queens. Young boys are generally encouraged, by their parents and, later on, their peers to embrace masculine male gender roles (Witt, 1997). These boys are taught and encouraged to reject characteristics and activities considered to be feminine. Boys who violate the expectations of their parents and peers to be masculine are typically subjected to various forms of punishment (Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009). As such, femi-negativity could be indicative of some gay men attempting to simulate the heterosexual majority, which might lessen their likelihood of being the targets of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination (Skidmore, Linsenmeier, & Bailey, 2006).

MISUNDERSTANDING OF DRAG

A common misperception is that drag performers are mocking women and femininity. Some scholars have even compared drag to the blackface performances of the early 1900s and the negative stereotypes of Black people they portrayed (Kleiman, 1999). However, narratives of drag queens suggest that the "true" intention is not to deride women and femininity but, rather, to reveal and critique the performative nature of gender (Chinn, 1997). Unfortunately, these intentions do not appear to be evident to many

individuals (gay or straight). The belief that drag is misogynistic may further contribute to negative stereotypes about drag queens.

DRAG QUEENS' PERSPECTIVE TO GAY COMMUNITY

Butler (1990) argues that challenging masculinity through drag performance is more allowable onstage than offstage. Interviews with drag queens in the Miami Beach area support this argument (Berkowitz & Belgrave, 2010). While onstage, drag queen interviewees believed they were respected performers in the gay community. Participants stated that gay men recognize those drag queens who put on a good show and that some gay men look up to them as role models (Berkowitz & Belgrave, 2010). Likewise, gay men who hold drag performance in high regard will often deem drag queens as local celebrities (Schacht & Underwood, 2004).

However, offstage, drag queens often feel subjugated, segregated, and alienated from the gay community, believing their only service is that of entertainers (Berkowitz & Belgrave, 2010). For example, one of the participants in Berkowitz and Belgrave's study asserted that drag queens are not viewed as equals in the gay community but rather as "freaks."

Adding to the complexity of this situation are reports by some drag queens of the difficulties they experience finding a romantic partner. Respondents believed that their participation in drag performances had negative connotations that they are promiscuous or overly feminine. Some drag queens even go so far as not telling their partners they are drag performers until the relationship gets serious. These negative connotations seem to stem from other gay men being unable or unwilling to distinguish between a drag queen's onstage persona and who he is when not performing (Berkowitz, Belgrave, & Halberstein, 2007).

PURPOSE OF THE CURRENT STUDY

The present study will examine gay men's stereotypic and counter-stereotypic beliefs about drag queens. Based on the scant literature available, it is hypothesized that gay men to whom traditional masculinity is more important should evidence stronger endorsement of negative stereotypes about drag queens.

METHOD

Participants

One hundred and eighteen men participated in this study, with 104 self-identifying as gay, 11 as bisexual to some extent, and three as queer. The age

of participants ranged from 18 to 68 ($M = 28.2$, $SD = 11.2$). In total, 71 (60%) considered themselves religious to some degree, and 47 (40%) did not. Over half the sample reported having at least some postsecondary education (i.e., 32% reported completing some university or college, 22% reported obtaining an undergraduate university degree, and 16% reported having obtained a Master's or Doctorate degree). All participants were entered in a draw for a $50 gift card in exchange for their time.

Measures

Stereotype checklist

This measure included 52 stereotypic and 24 counter-stereotypic attributes based on those originally identified by Madon (1997) and refined on the basis of a pilot study (see below). Participants were asked to rate how characteristic they found each attribute to be of drag queens on a 5-point Likert scale. Response options included: 1 (*very uncharacteristic of drag queens*), 2 (*somewhat uncharacteristic of drag queens*), 3 (*no more characteristic of drag queens than of any other group within the gay community*), 4 (*somewhat characteristic of drag queens*) and 5 (*very characteristic of drag queens*). Space also was provided for respondents to add any attributes that they felt were characteristic of drag queens but had not been included on the checklist.

Valence measure

A 5-point scale (−2 = *extremely negative*; −1 = *negative*; 0 = *neutral*; 1 = *positive*; and 2 = *extremely positive*) was used to determine whether participants perceived each stereotype as positive or negative.

Auburn Differential Masculinity Inventory (ADMI-60)

The ADMI-60 contains 60 statements that denote stereotypical hegemonic masculinity (e.g., "When my partner struggles during sex it makes me feel strong"; Burk, Burkhart, & Sikorski, 2004). Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed/disagreed with each statement using a 5-point Likert scale: 0 (*strongly disagree*), 1 (*disagree*), 2 (*neutral*), 3 (*agree*), and 4 (*strongly agree*). Burk et al. provide evidence attesting to the scale's adequate construct validity and scale score reliability.

Procedure

Pilot Study

The checklist developed by Madon (1997) focused on gay male stereotypes; therefore, to ensure this list was appropriate for the targeted group (i.e.,

drag queens), a pilot study was conducted. Four gay men from differing backgrounds and ages, recruited through chain-referral (snowball) sampling, served as participants. They were asked to review Madon's checklist for suitability and to also provide any additional attributes they believed were descriptive of drag queens. For an item to be added or removed, agreement was required by at least two participants. Based on this criterion, the stereotypic attributes "hair dressers," "wear tight pants," "transvestites," "walk like girls," and "effeminate" were removed,[2] with "irritating," "offensive," "condescending," "embarrassing," "confused," "hilarious," and "dramatic" being added. The counter-stereotypic attribute "traditional" was removed and replaced with "entertaining."

Main Study

Prospective respondents were recruited via poster-based advertising around the campus of a Canadian University and at its Pride center. In addition, Web site links and poster advertising at other university Pride centers across Canada were employed. In order to maximize the number of participants recruited, chain-referral (i.e., snowball) sampling was used both in person and through the social networking Web site Facebook. Finally, Listserv recruitment was employed, with a link for the online survey distributed to Listserv members of a local GLBT organization and the Canadian Psychological Association's Section on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI).

After logging onto the survey website, participants were presented with a consent form that indicated the study was completely anonymous, voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any time without their data being included. Following the consent page, participants were asked to define the term *drag queen* within a text box. After submitting their response, a definition of *drag queen*, taken from the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2009), was provided to ensure that each participant responded to the subsequent items using the same operational definition. Next, participants answered basic demographic questions followed by the stereotype checklist/valence measure and the ADMI-60. Once complete, participants were asked to provide debriefing information. Finally, any participants interested in being entered in a draw for a gift card were asked to provide their personal information, which was stored separately. Overall, the survey took approximately 30 minutes to complete.

RESULTS

Frequency distributions were used to identify attributes that respondents perceived as stereotypic and counter-stereotypic of drag queens. As

recommended by Madon (1997), for an attribute to be labeled stereotypic, at least 60% of participants had to classify it as "very" or "somewhat" characteristic and less than 10% had to classify it as "very" or "somewhat" uncharacteristic. The converse was used to identify attributes as counter-stereotypic (i.e., < 10% "very/somewhat" characteristic; 60%+ "very/somewhat" uncharacteristic). The top 15 stereotypic and counter-stereotypic traits for drag queens are listed in Tables 1 and 2, respectively. On average, the stereotypic attributes were positively valenced ($M = 0.41$, $SD = 0.51$), and the counter-stereotypic attributes were negatively valenced ($M = -0.32$, $SD = 0.35$). One-sample t tests revealed that both values differed significantly from 0: stereotypic attributes, $t\ (105) = 6.66$, $p < .001$, and counter-stereotypic attributes, $t\ (101) = -13.30$, $p < .001$.

A multiplicative index (MI) was calculated by multiplying the mean endorsement for each stereotypic/counter-stereotypic attribute by its respective valence score; summing these products; and then dividing by 15 (the total number of attributes retained). MI values were generated ranging from −10 to +10. Scores moving from 0 to −10 suggest stronger endorsement of negatively valenced attributes, whereas scores from 0 to +10 reflect stronger endorsement of positively valenced attributes.

Given that the ADMI-60 was designed for heterosexual men, items were inspected to ensure their relevance to gay participants. Specifically, statements on the ADMI-60 were retained for analysis if their rates of agreement and disagreement were 30% or higher (i.e., the items had sufficient variability and responses to the items were not skewed). Nineteen items were kept (see Appendix A). A principal component analysis (PCA) then was used to

TABLE 1 Stereotypes Most Frequently Ascribed to Drag Queens ($N = 118$)

Attribute	SC	PES	Valence	MI
Outspoken	93%	4.47	−0.03	−0.13
Dramatic	91%	4.31	−0.10	−0.43
Sociable	91%	4.17	1.13	4.71
Enthusiastic	90%	4.16	0.96	3.99
Melodramatic	89%	4.42	−0.63	−2.78
Proud	87%	4.19	0.89	3.73
Talkative	87%	4.19	0.53	2.22
Well groomed	84%	4.04	1.11	4.48
Flirtatious	84%	4.25	−0.11	−0.47
Different	81%	3.91	0.42	1.64
Emotional	80%	4.14	−0.14	−0.58
Liberal	78%	3.92	0.69	2.70
Frank	78%	4.14	0.08	0.33
Individualistic	71%	3.80	0.69	2.62
Open about feelings	67%	3.73	0.66	2.46
MEAN		4.12	0.41	1.63
(SD)		(0.21)	(0.53)	(2.21)

Note. SC = Stereotype Checklist; PES = Personal Endorsement of Stereotypes (possible range 1–5); Valence (possible range −2 to +2); MI = Multiplicative Index (possible range −10 to +10).

TABLE 2 Counter-stereotypes Most Frequently Ascribed to Drag Queens ($N = 118$)

Attribute	SC	PES	Valence	MI
Unemotional	88%	1.90	−0.67	−1.27
Hunt animals	86%	1.75	−0.64	−1.12
Sloppy looking	86%	1.97	−0.83	−1.64
Conservative dress	85%	1.95	−0.03	−0.06
Close-minded	85%	2.08	−1.14	−2.37
Conservative personality	83%	2.03	−0.37	−0.75
Act macho	81%	1.78	−0.37	−0.66
Masculine	80%	1.74	0.25	0.44
Dainty	78%	2.04	0.17	0.35
Cruel	78%	1.88	−1.50	−2.82
Thin	75%	1.97	0.24	0.47
Old-fashioned	74%	2.12	−0.45	−0.95
Studs	70%	2.12	0.21	0.45
Athletic	69%	1.99	0.77	1.53
Like the status quo	67%	2.15	−0.37	−0.80
MEAN		1.96	−0.32	−0.61
(SD)		(0.13)	(0.60)	(1.17)

Note. SC = Stereotype Checklist; PES = Personal Endorsement of Stereotypes (possible range 1–5); Valence (possible range −2 to +2); MI = Multiplicative Index (possible range −10 to +10).

determine if the pool of items could be reduced further. Diagnostic tests such as the Kaiser-Myer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (.90) and Bartlett's test of sphericity (χ^2 [171] = 1195.59, $p < 0.001$) suggested the data were suitable for PCA. A one-component solution was identified (eigenvalue = 9.28; 48.81% variance accounted for), with component loadings ranging from .55 to .84. Cronbach's alpha for the 19 items was excellent (.94), with upper- and lower-bound confidence intervals suggesting that unsatisfactory levels of scale score reliability were unlikely to occur (95% CI = .92–.96). The mean score on the 19-items was 34.25 ($SD = 16.76$) indicating that participants evidenced low endorsement of hypermasculine belief statements.

To investigate the study's central hypothesis, correlations were computed between total scores on the 19-item hypermasculinity measure and stereotypic and counter-stereotypic MIs. The resultant r values were: −0.62, $p < 0.001$ and .30, $p = 0.005$. Thus, as gay participants' hypermasculinity increases so, too, does their endorsement of negatively valenced stereotypes about drag queens. Those evidencing greater hypermasculinity also are more likely to perceive positively valenced attributes as less characteristic of drag queens (i.e., more counter-stereotypic).

DISCUSSION

The present investigation revealed that, on average, attributes rated as stereotypic of drag queens were positively valenced, while those rated as

counter-stereotypic were negatively valenced. Further, as predicted, gay male participants who subscribed to traditional views of masculinity evidenced negative beliefs about drag queens in two ways: (1) ascription of negatively valenced characteristics and (2) non-ascription of positively valenced characteristics.

Given previous literature (e.g., Berkowitz et al., 2007), one might anticipate that most of the stereotypes gay men hold about drag queens would be perceived as negative. A potential explanation for the finding that attributes regarded as most stereotypic received positive valence ratings resides in the "celebrity" status accorded to some drag queens—within the gay community as well as within broader mainstream society (e.g., RuPaul). Many of the characteristics attributed to drag queens relate to their onstage personas (e.g., outspoken, enthusiastic, talkative, and frank) and are characteristics that might be admired in any public figure.

Another possible explanation for positively valenced stereotypes may relate to the increased visibility of drag queens in mainstream media, since contact with gay men—be it real, imagined, or via mass media (i.e., parasocial), leads to reductions in prejudice (Herek & Capitiano, 1996; Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2005; Turner, Crisp, & Lambert, 2007). For example, Schiappa et al. (2005) randomly assigned participants to a control condition (lecture on public speaking) or experimental condition (80-minute program featuring Eddie Izzard, a well-known transvestite comic). Participants completed an "Attitudes toward Transvestites" (ATT) measure pre- and post-intervention. As expected, scores on the ATT significantly increased, denoting less prejudice, for those in the experimental group. No statistically significant change occurred for those in the control condition. It is possible that a similar phenomenon takes place regarding gay men's beliefs and feelings about drag queens. Even if the gay men in the current study had little or no physical interaction with drag queens, they have probably encountered them, to some extent, through media (e.g., "RuPaul's Drag Race"). Such parasocial contact may facilitate a reduction in negative stereotypes about drag queens.

The finding that gay men who endorse hegemonic masculinity hold negative stereotypes about drag queens seems broadly analogous to previous research on heterosexual men. Past studies have demonstrated that heterosexual men who subscribe to masculine views typically hold negative attitudes toward gay men (Davies, 2004). These men often have overtly sexist attitudes, disapprove of feminism, and adhere to traditional views regarding male sexuality. They tend to view gay men as having cross-gender attributes and mannerisms, and this forms the basis for their prejudice (Herek, 2004). In a similar manner, gay men who subscribe to masculine views may hold negative stereotypes about drag queens because they violate the gender norms and traditional views of sexuality they endorse.

Previous research has demonstrated that hypermasculinity, or the desire to be a "real man," can be both psychologically and physically damaging for gay men. In past studies, hypermasculinity among gay men has been associated with serious health risk behaviors, including HIV infection (Hamilton & Mahalik, 2009; McInnes, Bradley, & Prestage, 2009), lower-quality relationships (Wade & Donis, 2007), negative feelings about being gay (Sánchez, Westefeld, Liu, & Vilain, 2010), and male same-sex intimate violence (Kay & Jeffries, 2010). The current study offers evidence that hypermasculine attitudes may be damaging to the gay community collectively. If one subgroup within this community negatively stereotypes another, it will be more difficult to combat the negative stereotyping of gay persons by the heterosexual majority.

There are a number of possible theoretical explanations for the finding that overtly masculine gay men hold negative stereotypes about drag queens. Herek's (1987) functional approach to attitudes provides one useful framework for examining the results. Herek hypothesized that individuals rely on three primary functions in their appraisal of others: experiential-schematic, defensive, and self-expressive. With regard to the current study, the experiential-schematic function would help gay men understand previous or imagined interactions with drag queens. The self-expressive function would serve participants with an opportunity to communicate views consistent with their own values and those of their peer group. Finally, the defensive function would help to distance unwanted stimuli that could elicit discomfort with participants' own sexuality, such as drag queens' violation of gender norms. For example, an overtly masculine gay man may: (1) have little or no interaction with drag queens (experimental-schematic function); (2) have a peer group consisting largely of other overtly masculine gay men (self-expressive function); and (3) distance himself from the behavior of drag queens (defensive function). Through these three functions, overtly masculine gay men may come to negatively stereotype drag queens.

Future research in this area should include continued qualitative studies of drag queens' perceptions of the gay community and their sense of inclusion or exclusion. Despite being subject to negative stereotypes from masculine gay men, it is possible that drag queens still maintain a sense of belonging within the gay community. A more detailed examination of the reasons for endorsement of positive or negative stereotypes about drag queens would also be useful. For example, is there a relationship between internalized homonegativity and endorsement of negative stereotypes about drag queens? Also, the behavioral implications of subscribing to negative stereotypes could be examined. Although masculine gay men hold negative stereotypes about drag queens, are these stereotypes associated with prejudice or discrimination against members of this group?

A limitation to this study is that a convenience sample was used in which most participants were young adults and affiliated with gay and

lesbian centers. Given that these men have grown up in a society characterized by increased tolerance and understanding of homosexuality, their stereotypes about drag queens may differ appreciably from older participants or those less integrated with the gay community. Second, the majority of participants were residents of a fairly rural Canadian province and, consequently, may have had limited exposure to drag queens. The potential implications of contact with this social category in terms of the stereotypes endorsed or rejected are unknown. Third, the measure of hegemonic masculinity that was used was not designed specifically for gay men. The 19-item version that we created had sufficient variance in terms of item agreement/disagreement and excellent scale score reliability. The confirmation of predicted associations between scores on the hypermasculinity scale and endorsement of negatively valenced stereotypes (and rejection of positively valenced counter-stereotypes) also attests to the measure's construct validity. However, it is recommended that researchers wishing to examine hypermasculinity and attitudes toward drag queens employ a measure that is content valid for gay men (e.g., Fishgrund, Halkitis, & Carroll, 2012).

Despite these limitations, the current study demonstrates that drag queens are subject to a range of negatively valenced stereotypes, particularly by gay men who subscribe to traditional hegemonic masculinity. Future research should focus on the socialization of young gay men, and the processes by which they acquire these stereotypes and perceive them as negatively valenced. Abundant research demonstrates that gay men are subject to a range of negative stereotypes from the wider world (e.g., Herek, 2000). It seems somewhat ironic, therefore, that a substantial proportion of our gay sample attributed negative stereotypes to other members of their community. Efforts to ameliorate this situation would not only be of benefit to those men who engage in drag but to the gay community at large.

NOTES

1. The term *femi-negativity* has been used instead of *femi-phobia* since any negative attitudes and prejudice directed toward overtly feminine gay men cannot always be identified as a phobic response. As a broader term, femi-negativity better captures all forms of negativity directed toward overtly feminine gay men.

2. Due to an oversight, the attribute "warm-hearted" was not included in the questionnaire package.

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APPENDIX A

Items Selected from ADMI-60

1. I think gay men who cry are weak.
2. I don't feel guilty for long when I cheat on my boyfriend/husband.
3. There are two kinds of men: the kind I date, and the kind I would marry.
4. I like to tell stories of my sexual experiences to my male friends.
5. If a man struggles while we are having sex, it makes me feel strong.
6. If someone challenges me, I let them see my anger.
7. Many men are not as tough as me.
8. I value power over other people.
9. If a man puts up a fight while we are having sex, it makes the sex more exciting.
10. I prefer to watch contact sports like football or boxing.
11. I like to brag about my sexual conquests to my friends.
12. I can date many men at the same time without commitment.
13. I don't mind using physical violence to defend what I have.
14. I would initiate a fight if someone threatened me.
15. If some guy tries to make me look like a fool, I'll get him back.
16. I consider myself quite superior to most other men.
17. If another man made a pass at my boyfriend/husband, I would want to beat him up.
18. Sometimes, I have to threaten people to make them do what I want.
19. If I exercise, I play a real sport like football or weight-lifting.