Progression of Femmephobia in the LGBTQ+ Community

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All around, men are raised not to be a "sissy", "gay", or a "faggot". Gay men are, then sculpted by a masculinity framework that, from their early years, will not fully accept them. In an attempt to be accepted, gay men often try to make up for their homosexuality through the performance of masculinity centered on suppression of the feminine. Femmephobia, in this context, is the suppression or rejection of feminine features. In the LGBTQ+ community, femmephobia is driven by the media and masculinity factors that are manifested in standards of attractiveness, but can also be broken down by media outlets that combat these ideas. Media has shaped gay men's perception of body image, standards of beauty, and have led to the progression of femmephobia within the community as a mode of restoring their masculinity that would not accept them. The introduction of alternative ideas of masculinity and gender perception are necessary for creating an inclusive form of masculinity that would promote a greater acceptance of all, and reduce femmephobia in society. Challenges against this masculinity are at work through various routes especially through the media. These venues are creating spaces where male femininity can be further explored and redefined.

Keywords: femmephobia, feminism, LGBTQ+, masculinity, media, men, MSM

Historical Context

> "Maybe Gilda isn't a big meanie grumpy mean-meanie-pants. Maybe I'm just a
>
> big jealous judgmental jealous-jealousy pants."
>
> -Pinkie Pie, "Griffon The Bush Off," *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* (Morrow)

Hollywood has popularized the stereotypes surrounding gay men. From the 1890s to the 1980s, "Hollywood's portrayal of lesbians and gay men has often been cruel and homophobic. During that period, Gay and lesbian characters were defined by their sexual orientation and lacked any complex character development" ("Queer Representation", n.d.). In illustrating gay men in the one-dimensional manner, gay men are established in the media industry as stagnant "cookie cutter" characters often present for little more than to offer comedic relief or to offer a character solely due to their sexual orientation. The character's sexual orientation was their character. The character was their sexual orientation. The films presented gay men as the side characters that offered little function to the plot. In Hollywood's early years, "homosexuality was often presented as an object of ridicule and laughter. The archetype of 'the sissy'- foppish and feminine males, often of delicate sensibilities- was popular at this time, […] such a character was a source of amusement and reassurance for the audience" ("Queer Representation", n.d.). Although the images were poor, the representation did result in the introduction of gay characters in film. Comedy may have been one of the few routes for representing gay

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characters. For example, the sissy was not a ridiculed character trope for he occupied a middle ground for masculinity and femininity ("Queer Representation", n.d.). Through the introduction of stereotypical gay characters as a means for exposure, more people were exposed to them, however, the gay characters were not realistic beyond the smaller portion of the demographic they represented.

The 1930s and 1950s was a period that focused on shifting away from the overt stereotypical gay characters toward sets of gay mannerisms. Faced with contributions toward immorality, Hollywood introduced the Hayes Code in which "films could not feature overtly homosexual characters - so homosexuality was coded into a character's mannerisms and behaviors" ("Queer Representation", n.d.). The gay "sissy" or "pansy" was the result—Hollywood's first gay stock character (Mislak, 2015). The gay "sissy" was an "extremely effeminate boulevardier type sporting lipstick, rouge, a trim mustache and hairstyle, and an equally trim suit, incomplete without a boutonniere" (Lugowski, 2011, p. 4). The stereotype of the gay "sissy" was, and remains to be a common perception of gay men, the belief that all "homosexuals are weak-willed, make-up wearing men who society values for nothing more than a cheap joke" (Mislak, 2015). Not only does the portrayal marginalize the gay men who do exhibit some of the "sissy" characteristics, but it also places a stigma on gay men that they, too, must act in accordance to this stereotype. Since the "sissy" was the first gay character in Hollywood, gay became shorthand for feminine.

Masculinity and Stereotyped Homosexual Men

The connection of femininity to homosexual men created an interesting dynamic for homosexual men. Society pushes for men to be masculine from an early age. From teaching young boys to not show emotion when they fall to shorthand insults, men are raised to not be feminine. More specifically, "masculinity is the relentless repudiation of the feminine" (Kimmel, 2008, p. 45). In this context, homosexual men would typically refuse "gay" partners, men that could come across as "looking" gay. In being raised and taught masculinity through refusal of the feminine, gay men are internalizing and propitiating femmephobia for others in the community.

Homosexual men are left on unstable ground in reference to their sexuality and masculinity, which leads to femmephobia within the gay community. Guys are raised to "not being a sissy, not being perceived as weak, effeminate, or gay" (Kimmel, 2008, p. 45). Two of the important competing factors are being gay and being effeminate. In order to maintain one's masculinity, too many factors of their masculinity must not be put into question. In order to allow oneself to be gay, compensation for the weakened masculinity is vital and often a hyper masculinity is sought (Saucier & Caron, 2008). When pushing against femininity and effeminate men, femmephobia is the result. Men may also retain their masculinity by refusing their sexuality, despite having sex with gay men. In refusing their sexuality, men may feel even more personally insecurity which is difficult to accept. In order to live a life that is sexually and romantically involved, the individual must make some compromises. Smaller compromises would be the preferred in relation to bigger changes (Backlund & Mary, 2004). A small give in masculinity by being gay would be the preferred rather than accepting femininity, for seeking a masculine partner would cause less social pressure than seeking a feminine partner.

Shifts in Attractiveness Standards

Male attractiveness could also be important to the gay community to ward off stereotypes. The gay community often portrays images of a "hyper masculine physical appearance in order to ward off stereotypes"

(Saucier & Caron, 2008, p. 506). A paper by Jason Saucier and Sandra L. Caron looked at the portrayal of men in four popular magazines aimed toward gay men: *The Advocate*, *Genre*, *Instinct*, and *Out*. For their research, they looked at 4 issues, one from each season from 2001 to 2004. Only the advertisements that were at least a third of a page were analyzed. Among the different models of analysis used, a primary method was the characteristics of the men in the advertisement. The factors of analysis were if the individuals looked under 30 years old, if they were shirtless (and if they were, was their chest hairless), muscularity of the individuals, and if the individual was white. Analysis of the advertisements reveal that, 98 percent of the men had a youthful appearance (under 30 years of age), 52 percent were shirtless, 99 percent of whom had hairless chests, 53 percent were muscular, and 95 percent were Caucasian (Saucier & Caron, 2008). The amount of muscular models is declarative of the desire for a masculine partner. Of the four gay-audience targeted audiences, the muscular models were, more often than not, depicted. In *The Advocate*, *Genre*, and *Instinct*, 46 percent, 67 percent, and 73 percent of the models had muscle tone/low body fat (Saucier & Caron, 2008, p. 513). The author makes some important notes on these rates of muscularity in that "ads containing only headshots or men in loose clothing inhibited coding in this category. If these men were able to be distinguished as muscular or not, it is most certain that this percentage would be far higher than the reported 52 percent reported" (Saucier & Caron, 2008, p. 520).

How the media presented the gay male body resulted in the persistence of gay stereotypes. In looking for a male partner, personal ads by homosexual men often "mention traits related to sex typical and more likely to request sex-typical than sex-atypical partners" (Bailey, Kim, Hills, & Linsenmeier, 1997). In hopes of finding a new partner, homosexual men would emphasize their masculine behavior, this is a sign that masculinity is an attractive factor within the gay community. The seeking of a masculine partner and emphasis on one's own masculinity establishes that masculinity as an ideal body image within the gay community. The want for a masculine partner was weaker within personal ads of effeminate gay men than masculine men in "gay men preferred men who described themselves as masculine rather than feminine, but this preference was weaker among men who rated themselves as relatively feminine (Bailey et al., 1997). In other words, "[most advertisers] expressed that stereotypical feminine traits were undesirable in a potential mate" (Sánchez, Greenberg, Liu, & Vilain, 2009).

The result of the increased masculinity focus and preference within the LGBTQ+ community can be seen in a study conducted to learn more about the perception of the male body by men identifying as queer against those that identify as straight. Viren Swami conducted a study, "The Muscular Male: A Comparison of the Physical Attractiveness Preferences of Gay and Heterosexual Men", which compared the ratings of attractiveness by straight and queer men in order to determine if there was a difference in perception. The study was conducted by gathering men and having them take an 8-point Kinsey-type test to determine their sexuality in a quantitative manner, and those that identified as bisexual, or were more heterosexual than homosexual (or more homosexual than heterosexual) were excluded (Swami & Tovee, 2008). The men were then shown images of men, one time to get an idea of the images, and the second time, they were prompted to rate the attractiveness of the men in relation to the group as a whole (Swami & Tovee, 2008). The images presented were standardized images of men a set distance from the camera, wearing tight grey leotards and leggings, with their faces blurred out as to not interfere with the analysis of attractiveness of the body (Swami & Tovee, 2008). The models used were of know body weight, body mass index (BMI), waist-to-chest ratio (WCR), and waist-to-hip ratio (WHR) to determine factors relating to attractiveness based on the build of the body (Swami

& Tovee, 2008). The researchers found that "gay observers appear to judge a body that is more V-shaped (lower WCR) as more attractive than heterosexual viewers" (Swami & Tovee, 2008). The finding indicates that gay men find more muscular men more attractive, than from the straight male perspective. The use of the straight men being included in the study, is to serve as a control for media exposure and classical definitions of what it takes to be a "real man". The straight men are the preferred control group in that the sexes of the two groups would face similar social pressures to a specific body type, with the only difference being placed on their sexuality. With WCR serving as the main point of determination of attractive even in female populations, gay men tended to prefer a lower WCR—"a stronger idealization of upper-body muscularity" (Swami & Tovee, 2008). Swami also suggested that "the value of muscularity may reflect the tendency to associate muscularity with masculinity… while signaling distance from the ideas about femininity". By constructing masculinity around a more muscular body while visually distancing oneself from femininity, the evidence suggests that gay men are more prone to distancing oneself from femininity toward a more muscular body as a way of preserving their masculinity, which is put into question by being gay. The idealization of a muscular body is seen in Saucier's work of male models in common LGBTQ+ magazines, in promoting a masculine man as the "goal" of a gay relationship. The data also revealed little difference between the BMI preferences between straight and gay men which further indicates that "most [gay] participants were concerned with muscularity rather than weight" (Levesque, 2006). The finding that the main factor on bodily attractiveness did not so much rely on BMI but instead on WCR, indicated that the weight of the body did not matter, but the composition of the body did.

Femmephobic Expansion Through Dating Profiles

The effects of femmephobic comments on gay dating profiles have also been analyzed to determine the effect on how gay users interpret user profiles. Brandon Miller's study "Masculine Guys Only: the effects of femmephobic mobile dating application profiles on partner selection for men who have sex with men (MSM)" illustrates how femmephobic comments alter MSM's perceptions. The study was conducted by looking at how MSM score dating profiles that are the same, with the only difference is the presence of femmephobic comments in their bio (Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). The factors of consideration were physical attractiveness, intelligence, sexual confidence, masculinity, and dateability (Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). The accounts that contained a femmephobic comments in their bio descriptions were perceived differently across the variables when compared to profiles without femmephobic profiles (Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). However, the characteristic of physical attractiveness was not affected by the profile description which was hinted to suggest that "much of the social capital seems to be placed on appearance and materiality" (Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). The separation of physical attractiveness and femmephobia is distinct in that femmephobia is more characteristic of one's personality than one's appearance. The profile user's perceived masculinity was also unaffected (Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). An unaffected masculinity due to femmephobia indicates that the use of femmephobic commentary did not make the profile more masculine, despite the intended purpose that the femmephobic comments would have increased their masculinity in the view of others. The profile's perceived intelligence, sexual confidence and dateability did decrease with the presence of a femmephobic profile (Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). The researcher then begged the question as to "why some men continue to frame their profiles in an especially femmephobic manner" (Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). A possible reasoning for the continued femmephobia in the profiles is that despite

these factors, the profiles were not affected when asked the desire to meet for sexual partners (Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). Thus, including femmephobic remarks on one's profile would not be a loss to users seeking sex only, and still get rewarded for their profile. Two reasons arose to explain the overlooked femmephobia for the purpose of sexual interaction is that it "could be related to the anti-effeminacy that many queer men develop early on in life as a response to societal masculinity pressures, or perhaps indicative of the overall preference that many gay and bisexual men have for masculine sexual and dating partners" (Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). There was the result that the presence of femmephobic commentary did lead to increased ratings from men of similar belief. The reasoning was that the presence of the femmephobic comments attracted MSM who endorsed similar models of thinking and were also likely to be displaying femmephobic speech (Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). The femmephobic users would thus gain from having femmephoic speech on their profiles in that it would attract men that they would be more likely to think attractive, dateable, intelligent, ect. The cycle would continue to promote femmephobic speech in order to find like-minded users.

In another study of the Jack'd profiles on a global scale, David Miller looked at the self-portrayal of gay men in a masculine manner. Jack'd is a social app aimed at gay men that allows for randomized conversation with men globally (Miller, 2015). In the study, 300 Jack'd profiles were analyzed and coded in order to determine how gay men portray themselves and to gain insight on the global gay community (Miller, 2015). Various factors were looked at including the self-description of the users, whether the face was included, if the pictures were shirtless, and the partner preferences of the user (Miller, 2015). In the study, the most revealing feature was that none of the profiles self-described themselves as feminine (Miller, 2015). Many users also devoted sections of their profiles, despite the presence of pictures of the users, to address their masculinity (Miller, 2015). A reason given as to why "anti-effeminacy might run rampant in online MSM spaces is due to the policing of masculinity that all men experience as products of a heterosexist and, often, homophobic culture" (Miller, 2015). In suppressing the feminine characteristics in favor of the masculine traits, MSM are molding themselves into the masculine man that society conditions individuals into. Another reasoning was that MSM may be trying to disassociate from the social stigma of being gay though not being feminine, even in a queer space (Miller).

Addressing Femmephobia Through Protest Masculinities

A new mode of masculinity must be applied in order to address femmephobia at its core. Eric Anderson describes of two different models of masculinity: orthodox and inclusive. She describes how there are multiple types of masculinity that can coexist in every sphere. For example, orthodox masculinity includes extreme homophobia whereas inclusive masculinity does not (Anderson & Rhidian, 2010). She states that hegemonic masculinity functions as a "hegemonic process by which one form of institutionalized masculinity is 'culturally exalted' above the others" (Anderson & Rhidian, 2010). The hegemonic process of masculinity results in the orthodox form of masculinity to be the prevailing form of accepted masculinity. As a solution, she states there are also protest masculinities which all compete within the hegemonic system of masculinity. However, she suggests that as homophobia decreases, multiple forms of masculinity can be expressed in a horizontal fashion, rather than a stratified competitive fashion in the hegemonic order (Anderson & Rhidian, 2010). The result of no hegemonic masculinities would be many personalized masculinities which would allow men to make their own working definition of masculinity that is not culturally restrained (Anderson & Rhidian, 2010). The model

of the inclusive masculinity, rather than the current hegemonic system of masculinity, would profoundly decrease femmephobia within the LGBTQ+ community by allowing for greater acceptance of sexuality and preferences beyond the muscular, masculine male ideals.

Media, though is the root of the advertisement of femmephobia, can also function as part of the solution through its television programs. Leah Palmer, a student at Warren Wilson College, performed some research on the shifts in masculinity perspective among men that watch *My Little Ponies: Friendship is Magic*. In her research, she interviewed several men that watch the show to discover that "many men have begun to openly reject the idea that liking something that is feminine is emasculating" (Palmer, 2013). The show seems to bring to question the rigidity of masculinity in exchange for a more fluid model of gender expression and a more tolerant form of masculinity (Palmer, 2013). The showing was, for many viewers, "their gateway to a more tolerant, open-minded approach to life" (Palmer, 2013). The break-down of the hegemonic structure of masculinity is a gateway to a greater acceptance that would deteriorate homophobia as well as femmephobia. The show is operating on men by questioning their ideas on masculinity, and the result is greater acceptance of various forms of gender expression. The greater overall acceptance is indicative of the shift toward an inclusive masculinity and ultimately a "leveling-out" of stratification of the hegemonic order of masculinity. The television show is able to work on people in a way needed to allow for greater acceptance of all expressions of gender.

Conclusion

The media has established a standard of weak feminine characters that are of little importance than the passing LGBTQ+ minority. The media has shaped gay men's perception of body image, standards of beauty, and has led to the progression of femmephobia within the LGBTQ+ community as a mode of restoring the definition of masculinity that would not accept them fully for being gay. The introduction of alternative ideas of masculinity and gender perception are necessary for creating an inclusive form of masculinity that would promote a greater acceptance of all, and reduce femmephobia in society.

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