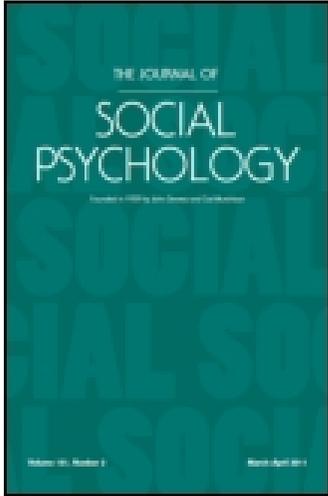


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Affectionate Same-Sex Touch: The Influence of Homophobia on Observers' Perceptions

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ABSTRACT. The author extended the proposition (V. J. Derlega, R. J. Lewis, S. Harrison, B. A. Winstead, & R. Costanza, 1989) that the fear of being seen as homosexual accounts for the common finding that U.S. women engage in more same-sex touch than do U.S. men. The author proposed a theoretic model positing that the magnitude of homophobia's influence on behavior and on reactions to behavior is proportional to the likelihood that the behavior is sexual in nature. An experiment involving reactions to same-sex embraces demonstrated that, although homophobia was negatively related to evaluations of same-sex affectionate touch, the magnitude of the relationship covaried with the probability that the touch was sexual. The implications of these findings for longer range theory development are discussed.

Key words: affection, homophobia, touch

TOUCH IS AN UBIQUITOUS ASPECT of human relational communication. Interpersonal touch has been shown to be critical to healthy human development (Frank, 1957) and beneficial in medical treatments (Whitcher & Fisher, 1979) as well as in psychotherapeutic interventions (Wilson, 1982). It is a fundamental vehicle for the communication of affection in personal relationships (Floyd & Morman, 1999). Touch can also be associated with a multiplicity of relational messages and interpretations (see Burgoon, 1991). For example, a pat on the head may carry messages of affection, dominance, or condescension, depending on variables such as the setting and the type of relationship in which it occurs.

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Although touch is pervasive, gender differences in the type and amount of touch have frequently been reported. With few exceptions, research has fairly consistently indicated (a) that U.S. women engage in more, and more intimate, same-sex touch than do U.S. men (Major & Williams, 1981); (b) that both men and women touch opposite-sex partners more than same-sex partners (e.g., Major, Schmidlin, & Williams, 1990); and (c) that women are more comfortable with same-sex touch than are men (Andersen & Leibowitz, 1978; Willis & Rawdon, 1994). Such differences have been identified in studies using self-report (Emmers & Dindia, 1995), observational (Greenbaum & Rosenfeld, 1980), laboratory experimental (Derlega, Lewis, Harrison, Winstead, & Costanza, 1989), diary (Floyd, 1997a), and field experimental methods (Floyd & Morman, 1997).

My purpose in the present study is not to replicate the foregoing gender-difference findings but to examine the theoretic explanations undergirding them. In particular, I extended a theoretic position offered by Derlega et al. (1989) regarding the role of homophobia in regulating same-sex touch and herein report the results of an experiment directly testing its predictions. A review of theoretic explanations for gender differences in touch is provided.

Explaining Gender Differences in Touch

A number of theoretic explanations have been offered for those common findings. Some researchers (e.g., Henley, 1973, 1977) have posited that touch is implicitly an exercise of status or power; thus, the initiators of touch are typically seen as being of higher status than the recipients. Others have applied this reasoning to male–male touching behavior, suggesting that men in peer relationships limit touch to ritualistic behaviors that connote status equality, such as a handshake (e.g., Greenbaum & Rosenfeld, 1980). By restricting their touch behaviors in this way, men presumably avoid the vulnerability and diminished competitive position that other forms of touch (e.g., an affectionate caress to the face) might engender. This explanation is limited, however, in that it does not clarify why touch in female relationships is not similarly restricted—that is, there is no reason to assume that concerns for power and status do not affect women and, thus, do not likewise influence women’s touch behaviors.

Another common theoretic position is that touch behaviors are governed by sociocultural norms, rules, or expectancies that proscribe male–male touch but permit female–female and opposite-sex touching behaviors (see Burgoon & Walther, 1990; Floyd & Morman, 1997; Major, 1981). This perspective suggests that women are socialized to be more overtly expressive of their emotions than are men, particularly in same-sex relationships, and that men and women differ in their touch behaviors as a function of conformity to these norms of appropriateness. Although this reasoning is intuitively appealing, Roese, Olson, Borenstein, Martin, and Shores (1992) correctly pointed out that its logic is somewhat

circular, given that normative standards may themselves be inferred and reinforced through the observation of enacted behaviors—that is, the direction of the causal chain (whether rules produce behavior, are produced by behavior, or both) is unclear.

A more parsimonious explanation was offered by Derlega et al. (1989), who suggested that gender differences in touch behavior can be accounted for largely as a function of homophobia. Their position was that men are more likely than women to be seen as homosexual if they engage in same-sex touch; therefore, the fear of being seen as homosexual (homophobia; Morin & Garfinkle, 1978) motivates men to avoid touching other men.¹ This theoretic position suggests that, particularly for men, homophobia is a negative predictor of touch in same-sex relationships. It, therefore, explains why touch is often not similarly curtailed in female–female relationships (because the behavior is less likely to be interpreted as homosexual) and in opposite-sex relationships (because it connotes heterosexuality).

In an indirect test of those propositions, Derlega and colleagues (1989) showed participants a series of three photographs depicting interactions within same- and opposite-sex dyads. In each interaction, one of the communicators hugged the other, put his or her arm around the other's waist, or did not touch the other. Participants then provided assessments of the normalcy of the interactions and attributions about the type of relationship the communicators had with each other. The normalcy ratings of opposite-sex communicators did not differ as a function of touch, whereas in female–female pairs, hugging and no touch were both considered more normal than arm around waist. In contrast, both types of touch were considered less normal than no touch for male–male pairs, and arm around waist was considered much more abnormal for the male pairs than for the female pairs. Moreover, both hugging and arm around waist were rated as significantly more likely than no touch to represent a sexual relationship in the male–male pairs. Derlega et al. interpreted these findings as consistent with the explanation that homophobia curtails touch between men, making it more abnormal and more “suspect” than touch between women or opposite-sex partners.

The connection between homophobia and touch remained speculative in the Derlega et al. (1989) study because the participants' homophobia was not measured. However, in an important extension of the findings of Derlega et al., Roesch et al. (1992) directly examined the relationship between homophobia and touch.

¹The author acknowledges that other conceptual definitions of homophobia have been advanced, including a fear of homosexual people, an aversion to homosexual behavior, and a fear that one may actually be homosexual. Although the model of Derlega et al. (1989) and the extension of it proposed herein were predicated on a conceptual definition of homophobia as the fear of appearing homosexual, other definitions of the construct may also be applicable.

They reasoned that individuals who are more homophobic would be more motivated to avoid same-sex touch. Because several studies have indicated that U.S. men are generally more homophobic than U.S. women (e.g., Black & Stevenson, 1984; Kite, 1984), Roese et al. hypothesized that men would be more likely than women to avoid same-sex touch. In the first of two studies, Roese et al. found that women were significantly more comfortable with same-sex touching than were men, whereas there was no gender difference in reported comfort with opposite-sex touching. In addition, the men reported higher homophobia scores than did the women, and homophobia was negatively related to comfort with same-sex touch for the men but not for the women. In a second study, Roese et al. covertly observed 8 male–male and 8 female–female dyads in a university cafeteria and recorded the number of touches in each dyad during a 10-min period. After the observations, the researchers approached the participants and asked them to complete the homophobia scale. Again, the men reported higher homophobia scores than did the women, and homophobia was negatively associated with comfort with same-sex touch for both the men and the women.

The Roese et al. (1992) study is important because it provided both self-report and observational evidence that homophobia was negatively related to comfort with same-sex touch and that this finding was particularly true for men. Both findings lent preliminary support to the theoretic position advanced by Derlega and his colleagues (1989). My purpose in the present study was to extend the proposition of Derlega et al. into a theoretic model from which more precise predictions about the effects of homophobia can be derived.

Extending the Theoretic Position of Derlega et al.

In the present study, I offered a theoretic model that began with, and then extended and clarified, the position of Derlega et al. (1989). Although the earlier studies (Derlega et al.; Roese et al., 1992) as well as the studies reported herein, specifically investigated touch, the model should be applicable to a number of behaviors, verbal as well as nonverbal. To accept the argument (Derlega et al.) that men avoid touching each other from fear of being seen as homosexual, one must accept two fundamental postulates. The first is that homophobia causes people to avoid behaviors that connote homosexuality. For this reason, one would expect men, who are generally more homophobic than women, to avoid same-sex touch more than women do. The causal mechanism is presumed to be homophobia itself, rather than biological sex; thus, one would expect this gender difference to be reversed in the case of women who are highly homophobic and men who are not. Also, one would not expect homophobic individuals to avoid opposite-sex touch, which cannot, by definition, be homosexual; therefore, it provides nothing for homophobic individuals to fear.

The second postulate is that affectionate behavior can have sexual or non-sexual connotations. Touch, for instance, can be clearly sexual (e.g., fondling

another's genitals) or clearly nonsexual (e.g., punching another in the face). However, many forms of touch (e.g., kissing, hugging, or holding hands) can be enacted in either sexual or nonsexual ways. The same is true for other forms of nonverbal affection (e.g., winking), as well as for many verbal expressions (e.g., "I love you"; Floyd & Morman, 1999). These two postulates constitute the position of Derlega et al. (1989): Because homophobic people try to avoid appearing homosexual and because touch can be sexual, homophobic people are motivated to avoid same-sex touch.

Why belabor the aforementioned assumptions? Because from them is derived a third, critical postulate that extends the position of Derlega et al. (1989): The magnitude of homophobia's influence on behavior is proportional to the probability that the behavior is sexual. Homophobia should, thus, influence only those behaviors that can plausibly be interpreted as sexual. Behaviors that are clearly nonsexual should be unaffected by homophobia, because they cannot possibly connote homosexuality.² As the probability increases that a behavior is sexual, the magnitude of homophobia's negative effect on that behavior should increase. This postulate is an important extension of the position of Derlega et al. because it clarifies when the effect of homophobia should be observed and when it should not.

A final theoretic issue is whether the influence of homophobia is unique to one's own behavior or extends to evaluations of behavior observed between others. Derlega et al. (1989) suggested that homophobia curtails touch between men because male-male touch is more likely than female-female touch to be interpreted as sexual. If this is the case, then it stands to reason that observers would similarly evaluate male-male touch less favorably and consider it less expected than female-female touch. Derlega and his colleagues themselves suggested that "if adult males are the special target of cultural prohibitions against physical intimacy, an increase in tactile intimacy (based on close physical contact) might be rated more negatively for male same-sex pairs than for female same-sex or opposite-sex pairs" (p. 88). A similar prediction would be offered by a social meaning orientation (Burgoon & Newton, 1991), which would suggest that communicators should make similar interpretations and assessments of behavior whether they are participating in the interaction or are acting as third-party observers. From the preceding prediction arises a fourth postulate: Homophobia negatively

²Within the arena of touch, this should include ritualized touches (e.g., a handshake) and touches that are deemed nonsexual by the context (e.g., those associated with a doctor's physical examination). Some have suggested that touch occurring in an athletic context is similarly protected from misinterpretation. For example, a high level of tactile contact characterizes sports such as football, wrestling, and basketball, as a function of those sports. In addition, hugs and pats on the behind are often observed between teammates. As Swain (1989) and others have argued, the athletic context is "gender validating" enough that men do not worry about the possible homosexual connotations that these same touches might invite in other contexts.

predicts the evaluation of observed same-sex behavior, to the extent that a sexual interpretation of the behavior is plausible.³ In the present study, I report the results of an experiment designed to test hypotheses derived from this theoretic model. Specific predictions are explicated below.

The Present Study

The theoretic model proposed herein suggests that, although homophobia negatively influences reactions to same-sex affectionate behavior in general, the magnitude of that effect depends on the likelihood that the behavior is sexual. I tested this proposal by directly manipulating participants' attributions for the behaviors that they observed. Some participants were told that the communicators that they observed had a romantic interest in each other, some were told that they did not, and others were told nothing. On the basis of the theoretic model, I expected homophobia's relationship with evaluation and perceived normalcy to differ among the three groups:

Hypothesis 1: Homophobia has (a) strong negative relationships with perceived normalcy and evaluation of affectionate touch when a sexual attribution is provided for the behavior, (b) moderately negative relationships when no attribution is provided, and (c) near-zero relationships when a nonsexual attribution is provided.

Because male–male touch is often judged as more likely to be sexual than female–female touch (Derlega et al., 1989), I also hypothesized that communicator gender would affect the influence of homophobia:

Hypothesis 2: Homophobia has stronger negative relationships with perceived normalcy and evaluation of affectionate touch between two men than between two women.

Different attributions about the nature of the relationship between communicators would not only affect the magnitude of the relationship between homophobia and observers' perceptions but would also lead to mean differences in those perceptions. Specifically, affectionate behavior would be most expected and evaluated most positively when it is clearly nonsexual. Likewise, it would be more expected and evaluated more positively when engaged in by women than when engaged in by men. Thus, I advanced two additional hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3: Assessments of observed affectionate touch are most positive when a nonsexual attribution is provided, less positive when no attribution is provided, and least positive when a sexual attribution is provided.

Hypothesis 4: Assessments of observed affectionate touch are more positive for behavior engaged in by two women than by two men.

³Although some researchers of touch (e.g., Burgoon, 1991; Burgoon & Walther, 1990; Derlega et al., 1989) have placed participants in the role of observers who evaluate touches enacted by others, participants' own homophobia was not measured in any of these studies to allow for examination of its moderating effects.

Unaddressed in the model is the potential effect of observers' own gender. It is possible that, if U.S. men are more homophobic than U.S. women, as has generally been reported (Black & Stevenson, 1984; Kite, 1984), men may consistently evaluate same-sex touch more negatively than women do. However, it may also be the case that the likelihood of the touch's being sexual overrides whatever influence observers' own gender may exert. Thus, I addressed the effect of observers' gender in a research question:

Research Question 1: What effect, if any, does observer sex have on assessments of same-sex touch?

Method

Participants

The participants were 150 adults (81 men, 69 women) ranging in age from 16 to 61 years ($M = 22.93$, $SD = 9.42$) who were self-identified as exclusively heterosexual. The participants were recruited from businesses, public gatherings, apartment complexes, university dormitories, and restaurants in a large city in the southwestern United States. The majority (82.7%) were Caucasian; the rest were Black (6.7%), Hispanic (6.7%), Native American (4.0%), Asian (2.7%), or of other ethnic origins (2.7%). (Percentages of ethnicities sum to more than 100 because some participants checked more than one category.) At the time of the study, most (86.7%) were single, whereas 9.3% were married, 2.7% were separated or divorced, and 1.3% were widowed.

Procedure

Five undergraduate research assistants, volunteers from an upper division experimental methods course, approached the participants and asked them to take part in a short study on first impressions. The participants were shown a series of three photographs, each depicting a pair of actors interacting, and were asked to "think about the impressions you might form if you were to observe this interaction in person." After looking at the photographs, the participants responded to a series of 40 Likert-type statements, indicating their level of agreement with each. They were then asked to provide demographic and self-descriptive information, were informed that the purpose of the study was to assess how people evaluate an embrace when they have reason to believe it is or is not sexual, and were thanked for their participation.

Experimental Stimuli and Manipulations

Each participant looked at a series of three photographs mounted on white poster board. The photographic stimuli approximated those in Study 2 of Derlega et al. (1989) by depicting a pair of individuals engaging in the following sequence of interactions:

1. In the first photograph, the communicators, approximately 6 ft (1.8 m) apart, were walking toward each other and looking at each other. They were approximately 20 ft (6.0 m) from the camera and were photographed from the side.

2. In the second photograph, the communicators embraced each other in a "criss-cross" manner, with each person putting one arm over and one arm under the shoulder of the other, with the majority of each individual's chest and trunk touching the other's. Again, they were approximately 20 ft (6.0 m) from the camera and were photographed from the side.

3. In the third photograph, the communicators were photographed from the front while walking side by side toward the camera and not touching. They were photographed approximately 8 ft (2.4 m) from the camera.

I selected the embrace because it is a common affectionate behavior in a number of relationship types, including romantic, platonic, and familial (Floyd & Morman, 1999). The photographs were mounted in a vertical sequence on the poster boards so as to represent the events as a series. I manipulated the independent variable of communicator gender by showing the participants the photographs depicting the interaction sequence occurring between two men ($n = 74$) or two women ($n = 76$). The individuals in the photographs were Caucasians in their mid- to late 20s, similar to the ages of the modal (most common) participant.

I manipulated attributions about relationship type by including a sentence in italic print at the top of each participant's questionnaire. In the *romantic attribution* condition, the participants ($n = 46$) were informed that "the people in these photographs most likely have a romantic interest in each other." In the *non-romantic attribution* condition, the participants ($n = 52$) were told that "the people in these photographs most likely have no romantic interest in each other." In the control condition, no attribution was provided to the participants ($n = 52$).

Measures

I assessed normalcy and evaluation of observed touch with eight Likert-type items (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*) used by Burgoon and Walther (1990).⁴ Four items each assessed how expected the communicator's behavior was ($\alpha = .75$) and how positively the behavior was evaluated ($\alpha = .76$).

I assessed homophobia with a Likert-type measure (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*), developed for this study to focus directly on the fear of being

⁴Normalcy items were "This person behaved in an unusual way" (reversed), "This person engaged in normal conversational behavior," "This person behaved the way you would expect most people to behave," and "This person acted in an appropriate manner during the conversation." Evaluation items were "This person acted like someone that most people would like to interact with," "This person behaved in a way that was pleasing to the other person," "This person behaved in an undesirable fashion" (reversed), and "This person made the interaction enjoyable for the other person."

seen as homosexual. The items were "I would be very upset if someone else thought I was gay"; "I am careful not to do things that might make others think I am homosexual" (reverse scored); "If someone questioned my sexual orientation, it would not bother me" (reverse scored); "If a homosexual person began talking to me in public, I would be concerned about what other people might think"; and "I would be very ashamed if someone I know thought I was gay." A principal-components factor analysis indicated that the items loaded onto a single factor that accounted for 54.16% of the variance, $KMO = .78$; Bartlett $\chi^2(10) = 205.86$, $p < .001$; coefficient $\alpha = .88$. As an assessment of the measure's construct validity, the participants also completed measures of their religious conservatism ($\alpha = .67$), their comfort with same-sex touch ($\alpha = .80$), their perceptions that most people felt the same way that they did about homosexuality ($\alpha = .20$), and a single-item measure of how many gay friends they had. As expected, scores on the homophobia scale were positively related to religious conservatism, $r(148) = .37$, $p < .001$, and to the perception that one's views about homosexuality are widely shared, $r(148) = .33$, $p < .001$; they were negatively related to comfort with same-sex touch, $r(148) = .55$, $p < .001$, and to number of gay friends, $r(148) = -.22$, $p = .004$. Moreover, as nearly every investigator of homophobia has found, the men's average homophobia score ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 1.36$) significantly exceeded the women's ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 1.03$), $t(146.86) = 7.27$, $p < .001$.

Results

Hypotheses 1 and 2

In Hypothesis 1, I predicted that homophobia would have (a) strong negative relationships with perceived normalcy and evaluation of touch when a sexual attribution was provided for the touch, (b) moderately negative relationships when no attribution was provided, and (c) near-zero relationships when a nonsexual attribution was provided. I conducted one-tailed zero-order Pearson correlations between homophobia, normalcy, and evaluation separately for the participants in each of the attribution conditions.

Among the participants who received the sexual attribution, homophobia was strongly and negatively related to perceived normalcy, $r(44) = -.72$, $p < .001$. Among those who received no attribution, homophobia showed a moderate negative correlation with perceived normalcy, $r(50) = -.38$, $p = .047$. These correlations differed significantly from each other, $z = 3.26$, $p < .05$. Finally, for the participants who received the nonsexual attribution, homophobia and perceived normalcy were unrelated, $r(50) = .04$, $p = .807$. This correlation was significantly weaker than that produced in the no-attribution category, $z = 3.54$, $p < .05$.

Among the participants who received the sexual attribution, homophobia was strongly and negatively related to evaluation, $r(44) = -.68$, $p = .006$. The relationship was less strong for those who received no attribution, $r(50) = -.33$,

$p = .049$. These correlations were significantly different, $z = 3.13$, $p < .05$. Finally, for the participants who received the nonsexual attribution, homophobia and evaluation were unrelated, $r(50) = .03$, $p = .710$. This correlation was significantly weaker than that produced in the no-attribution category, $z = 2.01$, $p < .05$. The foregoing results supported Hypothesis 1.

In Hypothesis 2, I predicted that homophobia would have stronger negative relationships with normalcy and evaluation when the participants observed touch between men rather than between women. Consistent with the hypothesis, homophobia's relationship with normalcy was stronger for the participants who viewed the male–male photographs, $r(92) = -.49$, $p = .001$, than for those who viewed the female–female photographs, $r(54) = -.16$, $p = .048$. These correlations differed significantly from each other, $z = 2.17$, $p < .05$. Likewise, homophobia's relationship with evaluation was stronger for those who viewed the male–male photographs, $r(92) = -.48$, $p < .001$, than for those who viewed the female–female photographs, $r(54) = -.18$, $p = .040$. These correlations differed significantly from each other, $z = 1.97$, $p < .05$. Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Hypotheses 3 and 4

In Hypothesis 3, I predicted that assessments of observed affectionate touch would be most positive when a nonsexual attribution was provided, less positive when no attribution was provided, and least positive when a sexual attribution was provided. Normalcy and evaluation, $r(148) = .33$, $p < .001$, were assessed in a three-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with the independent variables of communicator gender (male–male vs. female–female), attribution type (romantic, nonromantic, control), and participant gender (male vs. female). The MANOVA produced the following significant effects: attribution, $\Lambda = .92$, $F(4, 270) = 2.71$, $p = .031$, $R^2 = .04$; participant gender, $\Lambda = .93$, $F(2, 135) = 5.30$, $p = .006$, $R^2 = .07$; communicator gender, $\Lambda = .66$, $F(4, 270) = 35.48$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .35$; Attribution \times Participant Gender, $\Lambda = .93$, $F(4, 270) = 2.39$, $p = .05$, $R^2 = .03$; Communicator Gender \times Participant Gender, $\Lambda = .95$, $F(2, 135) = 3.72$, $p = .027$, $R^2 = .05$; Attribution \times Participant Gender \times Communicator Gender, $\Lambda = .87$, $F(4, 270) = 4.92$, $p = .002$, $R^2 = .09$.

Normalcy scores produced a univariate main effect for attribution, $F(2, 149) = 4.02$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2 = .06$; a two-way Attribution \times Communicator Gender interaction, $F(2, 149) = 3.36$, $p = .038$, $\eta^2 = .05$; and a three-way Attribution \times Communicator Gender \times Participant Gender interaction, $F(2, 149) = 3.03$, $p = .05$, $\eta^2 = .04$. The disordinal nature of the three-way interaction renders the lower order effects uninterpretable. Means for the three-way interaction (Table 1) were compared by means of the Student–Newman–Keuls test. Results indicated that the female–female hug, when rated by women in the nonsexual attribution condition, was considered the “most normal,” differing significantly from all other conditions except when women in the control group rated female–female hugs.

TABLE 1
Effect of Attribution × Communicator Gender × Participant Gender
Interaction on Normalcy Ratings

Gender	Attribution					
	Sexual		Nonsexual		None	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Men						
Male–male	3.05	1.68 _a	4.20	1.44 _{abcd}	3.67	0.92 _{ab}
Female–female	4.92	1.45 _{bcd}	5.19	1.41 _{cd}	5.38	1.77 _{de}
Women						
Male–male	4.44	1.87 _{bcd}	4.53	1.03 _{bcd}	4.81	1.87 _{bcd}
Female–female	5.00	1.60 _{bcd}	6.40	1.49 _e	5.69	1.61 _c

Note. Means with different subscripts differ significantly from each other, per Student–Newman–Keuls test.

Conversely, the “least normal” hug was the male–male one when rated by men in the sexual attribution condition. Scores in this cell differed from all other scores except those of men rating other male–male photographs.

Evaluation scores produced a three-way Attribution × Communicator Gender × Participant Gender interaction, $F(2, 148) = 3.89, p = .023, \eta^2 = .05$. Mean scores for the three-way interaction (Table 2) indicated that the “most positive” hugs were those between two females when rated by women in the control and nonsexual attribution conditions. Scores in these cells were significantly higher than those demonstrated by men rating the male–male hug in the sexual attribution condition, which was the “least positive” cell in the design. The preceding results offer only qualified support for Hypothesis 3.

In Hypothesis 4, I predicted that affectionate touch would be judged as more normal and more positive when observed between two women rather than between two men. Consistent with the hypothesis, normalcy scores produced a main effect for communicator sex, $F(1, 149) = 70.89, p < .001, \eta^2 = .34$. As anticipated, mean scores were higher for the female–female pair ($M = 5.41, SD = 1.08$) than for the male–male pair ($M = 3.91, SD = 1.12$). Evaluation scores produced a univariate main effect for communicator gender, $F(1, 148) = 17.48, p < .001, \eta^2 = .11$, and a two-way Communicator Gender × Participant Gender interaction, $F(1, 148) = 6.26, p = .014, \eta^2 = .04$. Unlike the main effects for attribution, the main effects just noted were not rendered uninterpretable by the three-way interactions, because of the patterns of the means. Consistent with the hypothesis, the participants evaluated the female–female hugs more positively ($M = 5.52, SD = .92$) than they did the male–male hugs ($M = 4.75, SD = 1.33$). This pattern was retained in the two-way interaction: The men evaluated female–female hugs significantly more positively ($M = 5.18, SD = 1.13$) than

TABLE 2
Effect of Attribution × Communicator Gender × Participant Gender
Interaction on Evaluation Scores

Gender	Attribution					
	Sexual		Nonsexual		None	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Men						
Male–male	3.63	1.18 _a	5.00	1.08 _{ab}	4.06	1.20 _a
Female–female	4.92	1.46 _{ab}	5.25	1.60 _{ab}	5.50	1.00 _{ab}
Women						
Male–male	4.25	1.60 _a	4.88	1.75 _{ab}	4.50	1.21 _{ab}
Female–female	5.00	1.33 _{ab}	5.80	1.42 _b	6.57	1.60 _b

Note. Means with different subscripts differ significantly from each other, per Student–Newman–Keuls test.

they did male–male hugs ($M = 4.87$, $SD = 1.30$), per post hoc analysis with the Student–Newman–Keuls test. The women, likewise, were significantly more favorably disposed to female–female hugs ($M = 5.86$, $SD = 0.45$) than to male–male hugs ($M = 4.60$, $SD = 1.36$). The results supported Hypothesis 4.

Research Question

I again addressed the research question, which concerned how the participants' gender would affect their assessments of observed affectionate behavior. Normalcy exerted a main effect for participant gender, $F(1, 149) = 10.86$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .07$; however, this effect was rendered uninterpretable by the disordinal nature of the three-way interaction. Participant gender did not exert a univariate main effect on evaluation. Moreover, its disordinal interaction with communicator gender, as reported earlier, would preclude interpreting such an effect if it were present.

Discussion

Derlega and his colleagues (1989) proffered an elegant and parsimonious explanation for why North American men touch each other less than women do. The present project was designed to expand their explanation into a theoretic model by clarifying its boundary conditions and by extending it to cover perceptual reactions to behavior as well as the occurrence of the behavior itself. The results of the present experiment provided support for the model's predictions within the realm of affectionate interpersonal touch.

On the basis of the likelihood that the communicators had a romantic interest in each other, there were statistically significant differences (as the model predicted) in the strength of homophobia's correlations with evaluation and perceived normalcy. The gender of the participants and the gender of the communicators both interacted with the attribution to influence perceptions of normalcy and expectedness. The present results obviously do not evidence the straightforward main effects hypothesized for the attribution condition; indeed, the complexity of the three-way interactions defies a simple interpretation. However, in both cases, the male-male hug rated by men who were led to believe the hug was sexual received the lowest scores for expectedness and normalcy, whereas the female-female hugs rated by women in either the nonsexual attribution condition or the control condition were seen as the most normal and most expected. Finally, the main effects for communicator gender, which were not rendered uninterpretable by the three-way interaction, indicated that, as hypothesized, hugs between men were rated as less positive and less expected than were hugs between women.

Several avenues remain for further tests of the model. An initial issue is whether the influences of homophobia are limited to perceptions of touch or whether the same propositions would extend to other nonverbal behaviors with the potential for carrying sexual messages (e.g., winking, using certain vocal tones), to verbal behaviors, or to both. Previous researchers have demonstrated that verbal expressions of affection, such as saying "I love you," are considered more characteristic of (Shuntich & Shapiro, 1991) and more appropriate in (Floyd 1997a, 1997b) female-female and opposite-sex relationships than in relationships between men. Homophobia was not measured in any of the foregoing studies; however, there is little theoretic reason to assume that the model's predictions would not apply. Future researchers should examine these possibilities.

Moreover, the model's postulate that the strength of homophobia's influence on behavior varies according to the plausibility of sexual interpretations should be tested in actual interactions. Future experimenters might manipulate participants' perceptions about a confederate's sexual orientation, for instance, and measure the extent of participants' verbal or nonverbal behaviors within an interaction. Studies of this nature may help to determine whether homophobia and the plausibility of sexual attributions for behavior influence actual behaviors in the same way that they influence perceptions of them.

Limitations and Conclusions

The major methodological limitation of the present study involved the nature of the experimental stimuli. Following the methodology of Derlega et al. (1989), I used still photographs as stimulus materials. This approach may be limiting, however, in that it cannot depict the duration of a given touch, a variable shown to influence relational interpretations of affectionate nonverbal behavior (see

Floyd, 1999). Future researchers might remedy those limitations by using moving pictures or by staging the touch so that participants observe it live. An additional potential limitation is the possibility that the participants engaged in hypothesis guessing, particularly in the control condition when they were given no attribution about the nature of the embrace. In the present investigation, I did not collect data that could rule out differential hypothesis testing as a limitation; future research in this area would benefit from such information.

Despite its limitations, the present study has provided evidence that both supports and extends the theoretic position offered by Derlega and his colleagues (1989). Most important, it demonstrated that homophobia may be strongly associated with perceptual reactions to affectionate touch and that certain individual and relational variables may influence the strength of that association. The most substantial contribution of this project, however, is perhaps not in the questions it answers but in the additional questions it has raised. Indeed, a number of important issues remain unaddressed about the nature of homophobia's influence on interpersonal behavior. Future research addressing these issues can provide additional clarification to flesh out further the implications of the proposed model.

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