

This article was downloaded by: [Arizona State University]

On: 14 March 2015, At: 12:38

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Southern Communication Journal

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rsjc20>

Reacting to the verbal expression of affection in same-sex interaction

Kory Floyd^a & Mark T. Morman^b

^a Department of Communication, Cleveland State University, 2001 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio, 44115 E-mail:

^b Communication, Baylor University

Published online: 01 Apr 2009.

To cite this article: Kory Floyd & Mark T. Morman (2009) Reacting to the verbal expression of affection in same-sex interaction, *Southern Communication Journal*, 65:4, 287-299, DOI: [10.1080/10417940009373177](https://doi.org/10.1080/10417940009373177)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10417940009373177>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

REACTING TO THE VERBAL EXPRESSION OF AFFECTION IN SAME-SEX INTERACTION

Kory Floyd and Mark T. Morman

In an attempt to account for the common finding that men engage in less same-sex touch than women do, Derlega, Lewis, Harrison, Winstead, and Costanza (1989) proposed that because touch can be interpreted as sexual, same-sex touch is curtailed as a function of one's level of homophobia. Floyd (in press) extended this argument into a model that predicts not only individuals' own behavior, but also their reactions to behaviors they observe. The present experiment was designed to test this model within the realm of verbal expressions of affection. Two hundred twenty-one adults read a transcript of a conversation between two men or two women in which one communicator said "I love you" to the other. Participants made evaluative judgments of the conversational behavior and provided attributions about the type of relationship the communicators have. Results indicate that homophobia negatively predicts evaluative assessments of the behavior and makes salient a romantic attribution for the communicators' relationship, while making a platonic attribution less salient. Implications of the study for further research on the effects of homophobia on behavior are discussed.

Few can dispute the importance of affectionate communication in the development and maintenance of personal relationships. Indeed, affectionate expressions often serve as critical incidents by which relational development is gauged (Owen, 1985). However, the communication of affection can subject both senders and receivers to a number of risks (Floyd, 1997a). Much of the risk in expressing affection is due to its ambiguous nature. A hug, a wink, or a kiss on the cheek can be intended to express many things, including platonic love, romantic interest, appreciation, and social support. Moreover, receivers can make multiple attributions about such behaviors (Booth-Butterfield & Trotta, 1992). Of course, affectionate behaviors may not always be interpreted by receivers in the way they are intended by senders. For instance, saying "I love you" might be intending to communicate platonic love, but could be interpreted as expressing a romantic sentiment.

The distinction between affectionate expressions that are romantic and those that are not is of particular importance in same-sex interaction, given that romantic sentiments in such relationships may carry connotations of homosexuality. Those who experience a fear of being seen as homosexual, which Morin and Garfinkle (1979) defined as homophobic, might therefore be particularly threatened by affectionate behaviors directed toward them from same-sex others (Morman & Floyd, 1998). This argument was advanced by Derlega, Lewis, Harrison, Winstead, and Costanza (1989) to explain sex differences in same-sex touch. Derlega and his colleagues reasoned that, because empirical evidence shows that men are generally more homophobic than women are, and that touch between men is more likely to be seen as sexual than touch between women, men

Kory Floyd, Communication, Cleveland State University; Mark Morman, Communication, Baylor University. The authors thank the undergraduate students who served as research assistants in this study. Address correspondence to Kory Floyd, at Department of Communication, Cleveland State University, 2001 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio 44115, or by electronic mail to k.floyd@csuohio.edu.

are therefore motivated to avoid touching each other. Unlike other explanations for this sex difference (see Roese, Olson, Borenstein, Martin, & Shores, 1992), Derlega et al.'s position explains why touch is not similarly curtailed in female-female relationships (because it is less likely to be seen as homosexual) and in opposite-sex relationships (because it would connote heterosexuality). In a later pair of studies, Roese et al. (1992) reported a negative correlation between homophobia and men's touching behavior, and a weaker correlation between homophobia and women's touching behavior.

Although this position has promise, it may not apply to all types of touch, let alone to other interpersonal behaviors. In an attempt to add specificity and invoke boundary conditions on this position, Floyd (in press) extended Derlega et al.'s original argument by specifying the conditions under which it applies. The purpose of the current study is to test the extended model within the context of a particular verbal expression in same-sex interaction. An explication of the model is offered below, followed by the presentation of hypotheses derived from the model.

The Effect of Homophobia on Affectionate Behavior

In extending Derlega et al.'s position, Floyd (in press) asserted four postulates regarding the influence of homophobia on behavior and responses to behavior. The first is that homophobia causes people to avoid behaviors that connote homosexuality. Put simply, those who fear being seen as homosexual will actively attempt to avoid appearing that way, by refraining from behaviors in same-sex contexts that might imply a romantic intent, either to the receiver or to observers. Inherent in this argument is a definition of homophobia as the fear of being seen as homosexual, because it is that fear that motivates one to avoid behaviors that have homosexual connotations. Of course, other definitions of the construct have been advanced, including a fear of homosexual people, an aversion to homosexual behavior, and a fear that one may actually be homosexual (Herek, 1984). Although these phobias may also lead to avoidance of certain behaviors, the current model proposes that the fear of being viewed as homosexual is the most direct motivator.

Derlega et al. originally proposed that men avoid touching each other more than women do because men are more homophobic than women, and thus, are more concerned about the potential homosexual connotations of their behaviors. However, because the causal mechanism in this model is homophobia itself, rather than biological sex, this sex difference would be reversed if dealing with women who are highly homophobic and men who are not.

The second postulate is that affectionate behaviors can have either sexual or non-sexual connotations. Research on affection has documented a number of behaviors that are used to express affection in both romantic and nonromantic ways (Floyd & Morman, 1998). For instance, hugging, kissing, winking, and saying "I love you" are commonplace between friends, siblings, and parents and children, as well as lovers. The importance of this observation is evident when one considers the third postulate: the magnitude of homophobia's influence on behavior is proportional to the probability that the behavior is sexual in nature. That is, homophobia should influence only those behaviors that can plausibly be interpreted as sexual. If a behavior is clearly non-sexual in nature (e.g., shaking hands), then it cannot, by definition, connote homosexuality and should therefore provide nothing for a homophobic individual to fear. However, as the probability increases that a behavior is sexual, the magnitude of homophobia's influence on that behavior should also increase.

A final postulate deals with whether the influence of homophobia is limited to one's own behavior, or whether it extends to evaluations of behavior observed between others. Specifically, to the extent that a sexual interpretation of the behavior is plausible, homophobia is inversely related to the evaluation of observed same-sex behavior.

This postulate draws from the assumptions of a social meaning orientation to interpersonal behavior (Burgoon & Newton, 1991). The social meaning orientation recognizes that participants and nonparticipants in an interaction are both observers of it and posits that individuals interpret and evaluate others' behaviors in much the same way as they do their own. Moreover, as the literature on actor-observer biases in interpreting behavior suggests, people are often more critical in their interpretations of others' behaviors than of their own, further suggesting that one's own homophobia is negatively related to one's reactions to another's behaviors (Harvey, Arkin, Gleason, & Johnston, 1974).

In two experiments, Floyd (*in press*) tested several predictions derived from this model with respect to interpersonal touch. The first demonstrated that observers were more likely to perceive affectionate touch as sexual when engaged in between men than between women and that homophobia was negatively associated with perceptions of the appropriateness of the touch. The second experiment demonstrated that the negative relationship between homophobia and assessments of touch was strongest when observers attributed romantic interests to the touch and zero with nonromantic attributions.

The present experiment tests the model's predictive ability with verbal interaction, rather than nonverbal. Although language is often assumed to be more straightforward in meaning than nonverbal behavior, thus lacking the ambiguity that is central to the present model, there is reason to believe this is not necessarily the case with affectionate language. An expression such as "I love you," for instance, might be used to express any number of love types, including romantic love, platonic love, or familial love. Indeed, misconstrual of such an expression by the receiver is among the most salient risks of expressing affection in personal relationships (see Floyd, 1997b; Floyd & Morman, 1997).

A key assumption in this model is that reaction to the observed behavior (whether it be nonverbal or verbal) will be affected by homophobia only if the behavior can plausibly be interpreted as romantic or sexual. If a given behavior is clearly nonsexual, then it should provide nothing for the homophobic to fear. Floyd suggested that expressions of affection are excellent vehicles for the examination of homophobia's effects, because they are used to communicate both romantic and nonromantic messages and are commonplace in sexual and nonsexual relationships. Thus, the expression "I love you," embedded within an expressive, appreciative conversation, was seen as a candidate verbal behavior with which to examine the predicted effects of homophobia. Of course, the frequency with which "I love you" is said within a relationship varies as a function of several things, including the gender of the speaker and hearer. Our contention is that some of these differences can be accounted for as a function of homophobia.

Hypotheses

Fundamental to our argument is the assertion that when individuals observe behaviors in same-sex contexts that are plausibly romantic in nature, their cognitive assessment of such behaviors is linearly related to their level of homophobia. Although previous research has tested this postulate with nonverbal behavior, we apply it here to a particular verbal expression and hypothesize that:

H1: For observers of an affectionate verbal interaction, homophobia is inversely related to favorable evaluations of the interaction.

Although the causal mechanism in this model is homophobia, biological sex may often act as a surrogate through which the effects of homophobia are observed. For instance, it was Derlega et al.'s original assertion that men touch each other less than women do because homophobia is inversely related to touch and because men are generally more homophobic than women. We believe the same case can be made for

observers of interpersonal behavior. Previous research has supported Derlega et al.'s assumption that affectionate behaviors are more likely to be seen as sexual when they are enacted by two men than by two women, all other things being equal. If true, the effect of homophobia on assessments of such behaviors should appear in the form of mean sex differences in those assessments:

H2: Observers of an affectionate verbal interaction judge the interaction as more positive when enacted by two women than by two men.

This investigation also addresses the relational attributions that an affectionate verbal interaction invites. Relational communication scholarship has widely espoused the notion that different relationships are subject to different rules or norms for appropriate behavior (Burgoon, 1978, 1995; Burgoon & Hale, 1988; Shimanoff, 1985). Thus, behavior that is expected in one relationship may be unwelcome in another and entirely prohibited in yet another. Therefore, knowledge of such norms can aid observers of behavior in formulating attributions about the relationship shared by the interactants. For instance, if a man and woman are observed passionately kissing, the knowledge that such behavior is normally restricted to romantic relationships should make such a relational attribution more plausible, while simultaneously rendering others (e.g., that they are brother and sister) less plausible.

As research on nonverbal behavior has demonstrated, homophobia can influence what behaviors individuals see as appropriate or normative (Roesse et al., 1992). We reasoned that, therefore, homophobia may also influence the relational attributions made about particular behaviors. Specifically, we proposed that because homophobia decreases the occurrence of behaviors that might be interpreted sexually in same-sex interaction, and causes people to evaluate such behaviors negatively, then more homophobic individuals should be more likely than less homophobic individuals to see such behaviors as inappropriate for nonsexual relationships. Relative to less homophobic observers, then, more homophobic people should be more likely to conclude that behavior in same-sex contexts that could plausibly be sexual, is, in fact, indicative of a sexual relationship. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H3: For observers of an affectionate verbal interaction, homophobia is positively related to a romantic attribution about communicators' relationship and negatively related to a nonromantic attribution about communicators' relationship.¹

Finally, we considered the effect of communicators' biological sex on relationship attributions. Derlega and his colleagues theorized that particular behaviors are judged differently when they are observed between men than between women. Specifically, they posited that touch is more likely to be seen as romantic or sexual when engaged in between men than women. Extending this position, we hypothesize that:

H4: Observers of an affectionate verbal interaction are more likely to make a romantic attribution about male communicators than about female communicators, and are more likely to make nonromantic attributions about female communicators than about male communicators.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 221 adults (45% male) ranging in age from 16 to 78 years ($M = 32.12$ years, $SD = 13.15$) who were self-identified as exclusively heterosexual. The participants were recruited from businesses, public gatherings, apartment complexes, univer-

sity dormitories, and restaurants in a large Southwest city and a large Midwest city. The majority (86.4%) were Caucasian, with the rest being Hispanic (10.9%), Black (2.7%), Asian/Pacific Islander (1.8%), Native American (0.5%), or of other ethnic origins (1.4%). Most (52.9%) were single, 39.4% were married, 6.8% were separated/divorced, and 0.9% were widowed. At the time of the study, 13.1% had a high school diploma or less, 33.5% had completed some college but had no degree, 38.6% had an associate and/or baccalaureate degree, and 11.8% had a graduate or professional degree.

Procedure

Undergraduate research assistants, who were volunteers from a senior-level course in relational communication, approached potential subjects and asked them to participate in a short study on first impressions. Participants were asked to read the transcript of a short conversation between two communicators and to "think about the impressions you form of these people based on what they say in this interaction." After looking at the transcript, participants responded to a series of 48 Likert-type statements, indicating their level of agreement with each. They were then asked to provide demographic and self-descriptive information, were informed of the purpose of the study, and were thanked for their participation.

Experimental Stimulus and Manipulation

Participants read a transcript of a short interaction between two communicators. Communicator sex was manipulated by describing the communicators as David and Daniel ($n = 115$) or as Linda and Laura ($n = 106$). The transcript read as follows (the transcript in the female condition used the female names):

David: It was great getting to spend time with you tonight.

Daniel: Thanks, same here. You're fun to hang out with.

David: It seems like we don't get enough of a chance to see each other.

Daniel: Yeah, you're probably right. We should try to get together more often.

David: I want you to know, Daniel . . . I love you.

Measures

Evaluation of the interactions was assessed with a four-item scale used by Burgoon and Walther (1990). The items address how positive or favorable participants perceive the interactions to be ($\alpha = .76$). *Homophobia* was assessed with a five-item measure developed by Floyd (in press) to focus on the fear of being seen as homosexual.² Coefficient alpha was .73. *Attributions about relationship type* were measured with pairs of Likert-type items developed by Floyd (1999). Coefficient alphas were .92 for familial attribution, .74 for platonic friendship attribution, and .93 for romantic attribution.³

RESULTS

Predicting Evaluation

The first hypothesis stated that homophobia is inversely related to participants' evaluations of the interaction. Controlling for participant sex and communicator sex, homophobia, entered third into a hierarchical regression, was a significant negative

predictor of participants' evaluations of the interactions, $\beta = -.44$, $p < .001$, accounting for 18.8% of variance ($r = .43$). The more homophobic participants were, the less favorably they evaluated the affectionate interactions. There were no significant interaction effects involving homophobia in this regression equation. The first hypothesis was supported. Beta weights, zero-order correlations, and significance tests are reported in Table 1.

The second hypothesis predicted a main effect of communicator sex on evaluation, such that participants evaluate female-female affectionate interactions more favorably than male-male interactions. Because communicator sex was dummy coded with the male-male condition as "1" and the female-female condition as "0," the hypothesis predicts a negative regression slope. Controlling for participant sex, communicator sex, entered second, was a significant negative predictor of evaluation, $\beta = -.13$, $p = .045$, accounting for 1.8% percent of variance ($r = .13$). However, in the fourth block of the regression, after communicator sex, participant sex, and homophobia were controlled for, a significant interaction emerged between communicator sex and participant sex, $\beta = -.18$, $p = .003$, predicting 3.2% of variance ($r = .18$). The interaction, which is shown in Figure 1, indicated that the predicted pattern of evaluating female-female affection more favorably than male-male affection held for both men and women, but that the difference was much more pronounced for male participants than for female participants.

Predicting Relationship Attributions

The third hypothesis suggested that homophobia would positively predict romantic attributions about the communicators' relationship and negatively predict nonromantic attributions. The fourth hypothesis suggested that participants are more likely to make nonromantic attributions about the female communicators than the male communicators, and more likely to make romantic attributions about the males than the

Table 1
Hierarchical Regression Predicting Evaluation of Affectionate Interactions ($N = 221$)

Predictor Variables	Zero-order r	B	SE B	β	ΔR^2
Step 1					
Participant sex	-.04	-.04	.08	-.04	.001
Step 2					
Communicator sex	-.13*	-.16	.08	-.13*	.018
Step 3					
Homophobia	-.43****	-.54	.08	-.44****	.188
Step 4					
Part sex x Comm sex	-.17*	-.22	.07	-.18***	.032
Step 5					
Part sex x Homophobia	.09	.10	.07	.08	.007
Step 6					
Comm sex x Homophobia	-.04	-.04	.07	-.03	.001
Step 7					
Part sex x Comm sex x Homophobia	-.04	-.07	.07	-.006	.000

Note. Total $R^2 = .25$, adjusted $R^2 = .22$. $F(7, 226) = 10.24$, $p < .001$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .005$, **** $p < .001$.

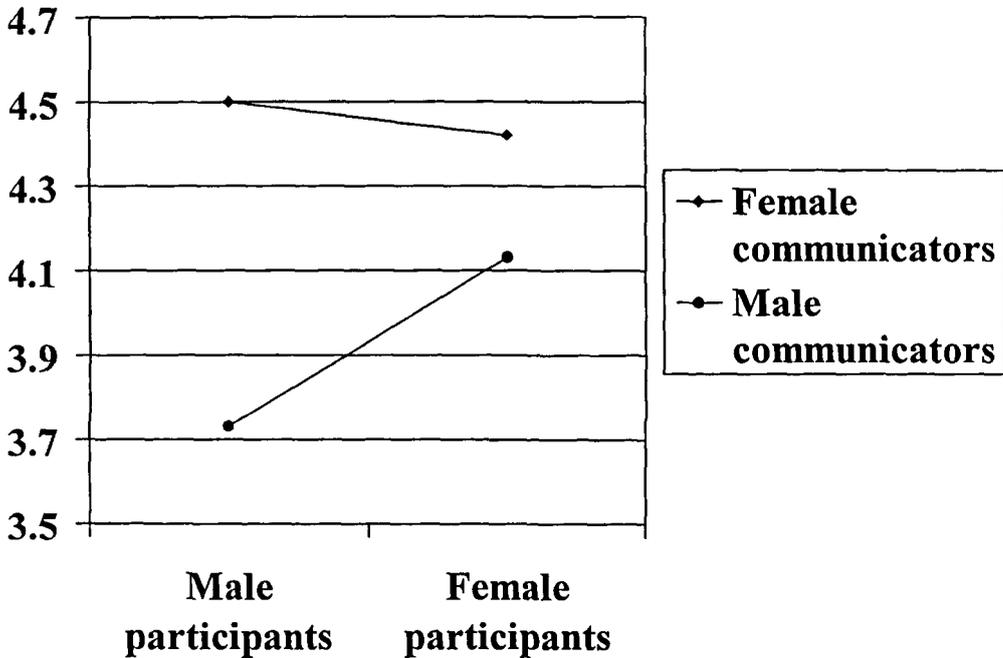


Figure 1.

Communicator sex by participant sex interaction on evaluation of verbal affection.

females. Due to the conceptual orthogonality of the romantic, friendship, and familial relationship attributions, they were analyzed in separate hierarchical regressions to test the hypotheses.

The regression for romantic attributions produced significant main effects for communicator sex, $\beta = .23$, $p = .002$, and homophobia, $\beta = .17$, $p = .012$. Both slopes are in the direction hypothesized. Beta weights, zero-order correlations, and significance tests for the romantic relationship attribution are provided in Table 2. Importantly, however, these main effects are subordinated to a significant disordinal three-way interaction between communicator sex, participant sex, and homophobia, $\beta = .14$, $p = .027$, which accounted for 2.0% of unique variance ($r = .14$). The interaction, which is depicted in Figure 2, indicated that the positive relationship between homophobia and romantic attribution was largely consistent across combinations of communicator sex and participant sex. The interaction also indicated, however, that the communicator sex main effect held only for men high in homophobia and women low in homophobia. Homophobic women and nonhomophobic men were only slightly more likely to attribute romantic interests to the interactions of males than females.

The regression on friendship attribution produced a significant main effect for homophobia, after controlling for participant sex and communicator sex, $\beta = -.16$, $p = .016$, accounting for 2.4% of the variance ($r = .15$). As hypothesized, participants with greater homophobia were less likely to believe that communicators were platonic friends than were participants with less homophobia. The regression also produced a significant main effect for communicator sex, $\beta = -.25$, $p < .001$, predicting 6% of the variance ($r = .24$). The direction of the regression slope indicated that, as hypothesized, participants were more likely to make a friendship attribution about the female communicators than the male communicators. Neither homophobia nor communicator

Table 2
Hierarchical Regression Predicting Romantic Relationship Attribution for Affectionate Interactions ($N = 221$)

Predictor Variables	Zero-order r	B	$SE B$	β	ΔR^2
Step 1					
Participant sex	-.01	-.09	.14	-.01	.000
Step 2					
Communicator sex	.23**	.46	.13	.23**	.051
Step 3					
Homophobia	.16*	.34	.13	.17*	.027
Step 4					
Part sex x Comm sex	.001	.01	.13	.01	.000
Step 5					
Part sex x Homophobia	-.07	-.13	.13	-.06	.004
Step 6					
Comm sex x Homophobia	.02	.04	.13	.02	.001
Step 7					
Part sex x Comm sex x Homophobia	.18**	.30	.13	.14*	.020

Note. Total $R^2 = .10$, adjusted $R^2 = .07$. $F(7, 226) = 3.57$, $p = .001$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .005$, **** $p < .001$.

sex were implicated in any interaction effects. Beta weights, zero-order correlations, and significance tests for the friendship attribution are provided in Table 3.

The regression on family attribution produced only a main effect for communicator sex, $\beta = -.14$, $p = .041$, accounting for 1.8% of variance ($r = .13$). The direction of the regression slope indicated that, as hypothesized, participants were more likely to make a familial attribution about the female communicators than the males. Contrary to the prediction, homophobia did not exert any significant influence on the familial attribution. Beta weights, zero-order correlations, and significance tests for the familial attribution are provided in Table 4.

DISCUSSION

As anticipated, homophobia was negatively related to participants' evaluations of a verbal affection sequence. This supports Floyd's argument that the effects of homophobia on certain interpersonal behaviors extend to the evaluation of those behaviors when observed in others. Although other recent studies have supported this principle with respect to nonverbal behavior, the present findings suggest that it applies to certain verbal behavior as well. Importantly, respondents in the present study acted as third-party, nonparticipant observers of the interaction, thus providing impressions of behavior that had no direct implications for them. An appropriate step for future research will be to attempt to replicate these findings with participant observers, or receivers of such statements. When the expression has a direct relational implication for the participant, it may invoke different attributions (see Floyd & Voloudakis, 1999a, b) and lead ultimately to different assessments than it does for nonparticipant observers.

Our hypothesis that the interactions would be judged as more favorable for female communicators than for males was also supported, with some qualification. As predicted, participants did see the female-female interaction as more favorable than the male-male interaction. The interaction with participant sex also indicated that men dif-

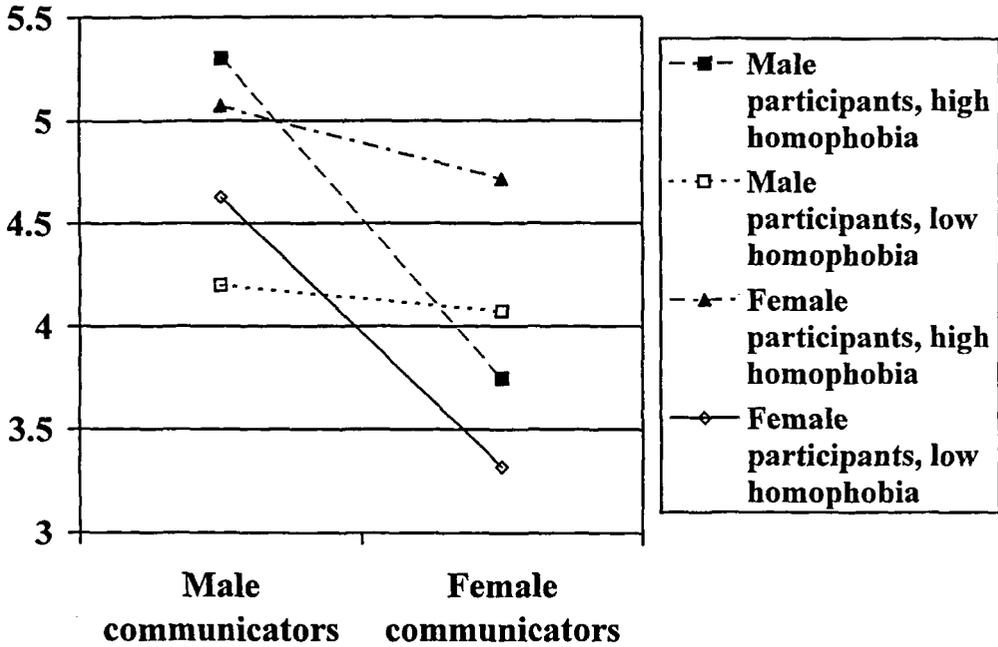


Figure 2.
Communicator sex by participant sex by homophobia interaction on romantic relationship attribution for verbal affection.

ferred more in their evaluations of male-male and female-female affection than did women. This latter exact interaction is common in research on observers' perceptions of affectionate behavior (e.g., Floyd & Morman, 1997), and it suggests that women view affectionate behavior as only slightly more appropriate for females than for males, but that the sex composition of the dyad engaging in the affectionate exchange is highly salient to men's evaluations. Importantly, however, the nature of the interaction allows for interpretation of the hypothesized main effect despite the significant interaction.

We also hypothesized that homophobia would increase observers' tendencies to see the communicators' relationship as romantic (or potentially romantic), and decrease their tendencies to see the communicators' relationship as platonic or familial. As anticipated, homophobia was a positive predictor of the romantic attribution. Although this main effect was implicated in a disordinal interaction with participant sex and communicator sex, the positive relationship between homophobia and the romantic attribution generally held across conditions. The predicted negative relationship between homophobia and the friendship attribution also obtained. These findings are important because in interaction situations, the relational attribution can affect subsequent cognitive and behavioral responses to communicators. For instance, highly homophobic observers who overhear one man saying "I love you" to another may, in the absence of strong cues to the contrary, conclude that the sentiment is romantic. Their homophobic nature should therefore cause negative assessments of the men and perhaps a refusal to interact with them. In extreme instances, it might even lead to violent behaviors directed toward the men. Of course, such negative outcomes would not be expected if it were known that the sentiment and the relationship were platonic. However, as this study demonstrated, homophobia makes an attribution of a romantic relationship salient and an attribution of a platonic friendship less likely.

Table 3
Hierarchical Regression Predicting Friendship Attribution for Affectionate Interactions ($N = 221$)

Predictor Variables	Zero-order r	B	SE B	β	ΔR^2
Step 1					
Participant sex	.01	.01	.12	.01	.000
Step 2					
Communicator sex	-.25****	-.47	.12	-.25****	.060
Step 3					
Homophobia	-.15*	-.29	.12	-.16*	.024
Step 4					
Part sex x Comm sex	-.04	-.07	.12	-.04	.002
Step 5					
Part sex x Homophobia	.10	.17	.12	.09	.008
Step 6					
Comm sex x Homophobia	.06	.10	.12	.06	.003
Step 7					
Part sex x Comm sex x Homophobia	-.10	-.11	.12	-.06	.003

Note. Total $R^2 = .10$, adjusted $R^2 = .07$. $F(7, 226) = 3.52$, $p = .001$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .005$, **** $p < .001$.

Contrary to the prediction, homophobia was not related to the familial attribution. This was surprising, given that family relationships, like friendships, should be presumed to be nonsexual, particularly in light of sociocultural proscriptions against incestuous behavior.⁴ It is possible that, although homophobia makes romantic attributions likely and nonromantic attributions less likely, the information necessary to arrive at a familial attribution is unaffected by homophobia. Certainly, this test deserves replication before more developed conclusions are warranted.

Finally, we predicted that, regardless of their own levels of homophobia, observers would be more likely to make nonromantic attributions about the female communicators than about the males, and would be more likely to make romantic attributions about the males than the females. These predictions followed from research on nonverbal behavior indicating that affectionate nonverbal interaction is more likely to be seen as sexual when engaged in between men than women, all other things being equal. The hypothesis was supported for both the familial and friendship relational attribution categories, underscoring the effects of communicators' biological sex on how their behavior is interpreted (Parks & Floyd, 1996; Wood & Inman, 1995). With respect to the romantic attribution, the three-way interaction indicated that the hypothesized effect of communicator sex held only for male participants who were high in homophobia and female participants low in homophobia. The former finding is understandable within the context of the model; men who are highly homophobic should be especially sensitized to the probabilities that observed same-sex behaviors are romantic in nature. The latter finding is more surprising, although it attests to the notion that homophobia, more than biological sex, is the causal agent in the proposed theoretic model. Future experimental research comparing groups that are determined on an *a priori* basis to differ in homophobic tendencies might further flesh out how biological sex or other demographic variables interact to moderate or intensify the effects of homophobia.

Table 4
Hierarchical Regression Predicting Familial Attribution for Affectionate Interactions ($N = 221$)

Predictor Variables	Zero-order r	B	SE B	β	ΔR^2
Step 1					
Participant sex	.05	.10	.13	.05	.003
Step 2					
Communicator sex	-.13*	-.27	.13	-.14*	.018
Step 3					
Homophobia	-.05	-.13	.13	-.07	.004
Step 4					
Part sex x Comm sex	-.03	-.06	.13	-.03	.001
Step 5					
Part sex x Homophobia	.12	.24	.14	.12	.013
Step 6					
Comm sex x Homophobia	-.01	-.01	.13	-.01	.000
Step 7					
Part sex x Comm sex x Homophobia	-.07	-.08	.14	-.04	.002

Note. Total $R^2 = .04$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$. $F(7, 226) = 1.35$, $p = .23$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .005$, **** $p < .001$.

LIMITATIONS

Particular limitations of the study's design should be kept in mind when interpreting the results. The transcript was selected over other stimuli, such as an audiotaped or videotaped interaction, because it exposed participants to the verbal message of interest without simultaneously exposing them to nonverbal cues that might confound their interpretations, such as communicators' facial expressions or tones of voice. Of course, individuals often do consider such cues in formulating their interpretations of an interaction (see Burgoon, Buller, Hale, & deTurck, 1984). It would be helpful to replicate these procedures using other forms of stimulus while controlling and varying such cues, to ascertain whether the modality itself affects the outcomes in any meaningful way.

Although empirical research on affection exchange led us to adopt the phrase "I love you" as a candidate operational definition of verbal affection, our results may not be fully generalizable to other verbal statements, such as "I like you," "I care about you," or "I think you're swell." As noted above, we chose "I love you" because it is a common form of verbal affection in romantic, familial, and friendship relationships (Floyd & Morman, 1998; although, as Floyd & Morman reported, its use varies as a function of the type of relationship and the sex of the relational partners). In particular, however, the effects of homophobia may be attenuated for verbal expressions that are less direct, given that their meaning may be more ambiguous and that hearers may be less likely to draw sexual inferences from them. According to the model, behaviors that are not interpreted as sexual are not influenced by homophobia; therefore, indirect statements of affection may be used more commonly than direct ones in situations when the speaker is particularly concerned about appearing homosexual. Applying the model's predictions to other verbal expressions would allow us to determine the extent to which observed effects are resident in particular expressions.

The data collection procedure provided a sample diverse in education and family status, with a wide age range and a higher mean age than convenience samples taken of

college students. However, the sample was largely Caucasian (85%). An additional option for future research would be to stratify sampling procedures to allow for comparisons between ethnic groups (Harrison-Speake & Willis, 1995), a variable with the potential to influence how affectionate behavior is assessed.

CONCLUSION

Considered collectively, the present findings support Derlega et al.'s (1989) assertion that homophobia predicts cognitive reactions to behavior in same-sex interaction that is potentially romantic in nature. Importantly, the present experiment demonstrated that this relationship is not limited to nonverbal behaviors, such as touch, but also applies to some verbal interaction. Moreover, it indicated that homophobia is a predictor not only of evaluative assessments, such as how positive a behavior is judged to be, but also to attributions about the type of relationship communicators share, a judgment with the potential to affect an observer's subsequent behaviors toward communicators.

Perhaps the most important implication of these findings is that expressions of affection need not always produce favorable outcomes. Although the intuitive notion is that affectionate communication is a positive behavior that serves to maintain and reinforce one's most intimate relationships, there are a number of risks inherent in expressing affection that, under certain circumstances, can render its relational outcomes negative. One such risk, at least in same-sex relationships, is that an affectionate expression will be interpreted as a romantic gesture even if it were not intended as such. In these instances, our model predicts that, based on the hearer's level of homophobia, he or she may not only judge the expression negatively but may take steps to decrease future contact with the speaker. Paradoxically, then, the expression of affection may lead ultimately to the termination of the relationship rather than to the enhancement of it. Future research testing this model can aid in the identification of relational and contextual cues that make romantic interpretations of affectionate behaviors more or less plausible, which can add specificity to the model's predictions regarding the outcomes of affectionate communication.

NOTES

¹We use the terms "sexual" and "romantic" interchangeably in this discussion, not because they are necessarily synonyms but because the model makes no distinction between these concepts. That is, homophobic people should be expected to react negatively to behaviors that imply either a romantic or a sexual interest in them by a same-sex other.

²The items were: (a) I would be very upset if someone else thought I was gay; (b) I am careful not to do things that might make others think I am homosexual [reverse-scored]; (c) If someone questioned my sexual orientation, it would not bother me [reverse-scored]; (d) If a homosexual person began talking to me in public, I would be concerned about what other people might think; and (e) I would be very ashamed if someone I know thought I were gay.

³Family relationship items were: (a) David is probably related to Daniel; and (b) David was most likely related to Daniel. Friend relationship items were: (a) David was probably a platonic (nonromantic) friend of Daniel's; and (b) David acted as if he and Daniel were friends rather than romantic partners. Romantic relationship items were: (a) David probably wanted to have a sexual relationship with Daniel; and (b) David seemed as if he had a romantic interest in Daniel.

⁴This should at least be true for same-sex family relationships. Certainly, marital partners can be considered as having a familial relationship as well as a romantic one. However, since the communicators in the present study were in same-sex pairs, this exception should not affect the presumption that familial relationships are nonsexual.

REFERENCES

- Booth-Butterfield, M., & Trotta, M. R. (1994). Attributional patterns for expressions for love. *Communication Reports*, 7, 119-129.

- Burgoon, J. K. (1978). A communication model of interpersonal space violations: Explication and an initial test. *Human Communication Research, 4*, 129-142.
- Burgoon, J. K. (1995). Cross-cultural and intercultural applications of expectancy violations theory. In R. L. Wiseman (Ed.), *Intercultural communication theory* (pp. 194-214). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Burgoon, J. K., Buller, D. B., Hale, J. L., & deTurck, M. A. (1984). Relational messages associated with nonverbal behaviors. *Human Communication Research, 10*, 351-378.
- Burgoon, J. K., & Hale, J. L. (1988). Nonverbal expectancy violations: Model elaboration and application to immediacy behaviors. *Communication Monographs, 55*, 58-79.
- Burgoon, J. K., & Newton, D. A. (1991). Applying a social meaning model to relational message interpretations of conversational involvement: Comparing observer and participant perspectives. *Southern Communication Journal, 56*, 96-113.
- Burgoon, J. K., & Walther, J. B. (1990). Nonverbal expectancies and evaluative consequences of violations. *Human Communication Research, 17*, 232-265.
- Derlega, V. J., Lewis, R. J., Harrison, S., Winstead, B. A., & Costanza, R. (1989). Gender differences in the initiation and attribution of tactile intimacy. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior, 13*, 83-96.
- Floyd, K. (1997a). Communicating affection in dyadic relationships: An assessment of behavior and expectancies. *Communication Quarterly, 45*, 68-80.
- Floyd, K. (1997b). Knowing when to say "I love you": An expectancy approach to affectionate communication. *Communication Research Reports, 14*, 321-330.
- Floyd, K. (1999). All touches are not created equal: Effects of form and duration on observers' interpretations of an embrace. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior, 23*, 283-299.
- Floyd, K. (in press). Affectionate same-sex touch: Understanding the influence of homophobia on observers' perceptions. *Journal of Social Psychology*.
- Floyd, K., & Morman, M. T. (1997). Affectionate communication in nonromantic relationships: Influences of communicator, relational, and contextual factors. *Western Journal of Communication, 61*, 279-298.
- Floyd, K., & Morman, M. T. (1998). The measurement of affectionate communication. *Communication Quarterly, 46*, 144-162.
- Floyd, K., & Voloudakis, M. (1999a). Affectionate behavior in adult platonic friendships: Interpreting and evaluating expectancy violations. *Human Communication Research, 25*, 341-369.
- Floyd, K., & Voloudakis, M. (1999b). Attributions for expectancy-violating expressions of affection in platonic friendships. *Journal of Psychology, 133*, 32-48.
- Harrison-Speake, K., & Willis, F. N. (1995). Ratings of the appropriateness of touch among family members. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior, 19*, 85-100.
- Herek, G. M. (1984). Beyond "homophobia": A social psychological perspective on attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. *Journal of Homosexuality, 10*, 1-21.
- Morin, S. F., & Garfinkle, E. M. (1978). Male homophobia. *Journal of Social Issues, 34*, 29-47.
- Morman, M. T., & Floyd, K. (1998). "I love you, man": Overt expressions of affection in male-male interaction. *Sex Roles, 38*, 871-881.
- Owen, W. F. (1987). The verbal expression of love by women and men as a critical communication event in personal relationships. *Women's Studies in Communication, 10*, 15-24.
- Parks, M. R., & Floyd, K. (1996). Meanings for closeness and intimacy in friendship. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 13*, 85-107.
- Roes, N. J., Olson, J. M., Borenstein, M. N., Martin, A., & Shores, A. L. (1992). Same-sex touching behavior: The moderating role of homophobic attitudes. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior, 16*, 249-259.
- Shimanoff, S. B. (1985). Rules governing the verbal expression of emotions between married couples. *Western Journal of Speech Communication, 49*, 147-165.
- Wood, J. T., & Inman, C. C. (1993). In a different mode: Masculine styles of communicating closeness. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 21*, 279-295.