

Gender Role Beliefs and Attitudes toward Lesbians and Gay Men in Chile and the U.S.

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Abstract We compared the relationship between gender role beliefs and antigay prejudice in Chile and the United States. Participants were Chilean and American university students. In Study 1, Chileans were more prejudiced than Americans, and men were more prejudiced than women. In Study 2, gender role beliefs mediated cultural and sex differences in prejudice. Chileans held more traditional gender role beliefs and were more antigay than Americans. Men were more prejudiced than women, particularly in their attitudes toward gay men. Further, sex differences in attitudes toward lesbians and gay men were completely mediated by gender role beliefs. Nationality differences in attitudes toward lesbians were completely mediated, and nationality differences in attitudes toward gay men were partially mediated, by gender role beliefs.

Keywords Gender roles · Prejudice · Cross-cultural · Sex differences

Although the study of prejudice was originally limited to issues of race and gender, psychologists' conception of prejudice has broadened since the 1980s to include issues of religious and political ideology (Herek 1987), obesity (Crandall et al. 2001), physical or mental illness (Weiner et al. 1988), and sexual orientation (Whitley 1990). While prejudice is universal in that hostility toward outgroups occurs in all cultures, the conditions under which prejudice is expressed can vary widely in different types of cultures (e.g., cultures defined by UN gender indices as more progressive or more traditional; Fiske 2000). The current study investigated factors that are associated with antigay prejudice and how they are similar or different in two distinct cultural contexts: Chile, a highly patriarchal country characterized by its *machista* culture of male dominance and rigid definition of masculinity, and the United States, a less patriarchal country with relatively more egalitarian ideals.

While *machismo* can be taken to mean many different things, including the celebration of male dominance, sexuality, aggression, honor, and possessiveness and control of women, it is widely recognized as the foremost symbol of Latin American masculinity (Fuller 1998). Serving as one indication of the predominance of male power, the United Nations (UN) Statistics Division (2005) reported that the percentage of women (relative to men) in administrative and managerial positions was 24% in Chile (2003), compared to 46% in the U.S. (2002). Further, Chile ranked 58th and the U.S. ranked 14th on the UN's (2004) gender empowerment measure which is calculated from the percentage of seats women hold in parliament, the number of female legislators, senior officials, managers, professional

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and technical workers, and the ratio of female to male income.

The notion of ideology, or the set of beliefs that characterizes an individual's way of viewing the world, is pertinent to the study of prejudice because of its relationship to attitude formation. Ideology encompasses a body of ideas reflecting social, cultural, and behavioral norms and is heavily shaped by the socio-cultural context in which the individual is surrounded. Consequently, ideological variables, or the individual components that make up a global ideology (e.g., belief in a just world, authoritarianism, political conservatism, gender role expectations, and ideas about sexuality), are likely to vary cross-culturally. In the current study, Chilean and American participants were chosen because it is likely that they differ on the ideological dimension of primary interest to this study—gender role beliefs. Sakallı (2002) found that sexist attitudes and being more traditional and conservative predicted more negative attitudes toward homosexuality. Because they are conceptually linked to traditionalism and conservatism, we predicted that gender role beliefs are also related to attitudes toward gay men and lesbians.

Gender role beliefs, defined as “people's ideas of the proper roles for men and women in society and of behavioral norms for men and women” (Whitley 2001, p. 692), are predicted to explain cross-cultural differences in attitudes toward lesbians and gay men because they closely reflect cultural ideas about acceptable sexual behavior. Kite and Whitley (1998) present two fundamental ideas related to gender roles and antigay prejudice: (1) there is an expectation of consistency in gender-related characteristics (e.g., traits, roles, physical characteristics); and (2) lesbians and gay men are perceived as being gender inconsistent and are consequently evaluated negatively for violating social norms. There is evidence to suggest that some individuals react negatively to those who violate traditional gender norms because the individuals making the judgment need to maintain a rigid masculinity–femininity distinction (Herek 1993b; Whitley 2001).

The antigay prejudice that stems from the perceived violation of gender role norms may operate differently in regard to gay men than in regard to lesbians. In a study by Kite and Deaux (1987), the association between gay men and feminine characteristics was stronger than the association between lesbians and masculine characteristics. It is possible that this stems from a more highly developed set of beliefs about male homosexuals and more clearly defined stereotypes of the male gender role than of the female gender role. Kite and Whitley (1998) suggest that violation of the traditional male gender role is viewed more negatively than violation of the female gender role because male gender roles are particularly rigid and more narrowly defined than female gender roles.

The gender role belief system also provides a viable explanation for a well-established pattern of sex differences in attitudes toward homosexuals: men's attitudes toward gay men tend to be more negative than toward lesbians, while women hold similar attitudes toward both (Herek 2000, 2002; Kite and Whitley 1996). In accordance with a gender role analysis of sex differences in antigay attitudes, especially strict gender role expectations pressure men to distance themselves from anything associated with femininity, while more flexibility in the female gender role allows women to express greater acceptance of both lesbians and gay men. Consequently, men may feel pressured to display antigay prejudice in order to assert their own masculinity. Cultural pressure for men, more so than for women, to conform to rigid gender role expectations has been linked to male privilege (Kite and Whitley 1998; Sears 1998). Same-sex relations are threatening to a male dominated culture in which traditional gender role distinctions serve to rationalize patriarchy. Therefore it seems to follow that the rigidity of gender identity should be even more pronounced in traditionally patriarchal societies (e.g., Latin American countries).

It is well-established that those who hold more traditional (i.e., narrowly defined) beliefs about gender roles are more negative in their evaluations of people who violate traditional gender role expectations (i.e., homosexuals, Herek 1993a; Kite and Whitley 1998; Sakallı 2002; Whitley 2001). It is clear that this relationship is quite strong, having been replicated across various (American) populations and measurement instruments. Cross-cultural investigation of the relationship between gender role beliefs and prejudice is needed, however, especially given that gender role belief systems are culturally constructed.

Study 1

Study 1 was conducted to obtain preliminary support for the idea that measures of antigay prejudice differ according to cultural context. Because Chile is a more highly patriarchal society than the U.S., it was predicted that Chileans would hold more negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay men than Americans. It was also predicted that men's attitudes would be more negative than women's.

Method

Participants

Eighty-two Chilean students (28 men and 54 women), and 103 American students (53 men, 50 women) participated in the study. Chilean participants enrolled in social science courses were asked to participate on a volunteer basis.

American participants were members of the Introductory Psychology Subject Pool and were awarded course credit for their participation.

Measure

Attitudes toward gay men and lesbians were assessed using the Attitudes toward Lesbians and Gays scale (ATLG; Herek 1994), specifically for the assessment of attitudes toward gender-specific groups of homosexuals. The original 20-item version of the scale includes separate 10-item ATL (e.g., “Female homosexuality is a sin”) and ATG subscales (e.g., “Male homosexuals should not be allowed to teach school”), and uses a 7-point Likert-type response scale (1=*strongly disagree*, 7=*strongly agree*). Higher scores indicate more negative attitudes. The scale had acceptable reliability for both the Chilean ($\alpha=.92$) and the American ($\alpha=.91$) samples. All materials were translated into Spanish using the back translation method for Chilean participants. American participants completed all measures in English.

Procedure

After obtaining informed consent, all participants completed the survey packet which included demographic information followed by the measures detailed above. At the end of the study, participants were debriefed and invited to contact the researcher by email with further questions.

Results

A two-factor between-subjects ANOVA was carried out on ATLG scores as a function of participant sex (man or woman) and nationality (Chilean or American). Results indicated significant main effects for participant sex and nationality. Men’s attitudes ($M=2.6$, $SD=0.98$) were more negative than women’s ($M=2.3$, $SD=1.16$), $F(1, 181)=4.92$, $p<.05$, and Chileans’ attitudes ($M=2.6$, $SD=1.20$) were more negative than Americans’ ($M=2.3$, $SD=0.99$), $F(1, 181)=4.11$, $p<.05$. The participant sex \times nationality interaction was not significant.

Discussion

As predicted, men’s attitudes toward lesbians and gay men were more negative than women’s; and, overall, Chileans were more antigay than Americans. Encouraged that these data were at least consistent with the hypothesis that measures of antigay prejudice would differ by participant sex and nationality, Study 2 was conducted to investigate gender role beliefs as a possible explanation for the differences in antigay prejudice in Chile and the United States.

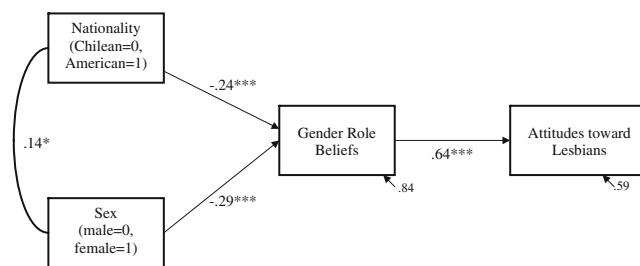


Fig. 1 Mediation model of the relationships from sex and nationality to attitudes toward lesbians through gender role beliefs. Coefficients are standardized path coefficients. Overall model fit: $\chi^2(2, N=255)=3.33$, $p<.001$, CFI=.99, RMSEA=.05, SRMR=.026. Significance levels for paths: * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$.

Study 2

While a basic assumption of this paper is that gender role beliefs will be more traditional in Chile (a highly patriarchal society) than in the U.S. (a less patriarchal society), the more important overall prediction is that this difference in gender role expectations will help to explain cultural and sex differences in attitudes toward lesbians and gay men (e.g., why Chileans are more negative toward homosexuals than Americans, and why men are more negative than women). Two models are proposed and tested (see Figs. 1 and 2) in which gender role beliefs mediate the relationships between both participant sex and nationality and attitudes toward lesbians and gay men, respectively.

Method

Participants

The Chilean sample was comprised of 108 students (46 men, 62 women) between the ages of 17 and 29. The majority of the Chilean sample (79.4%) identified themselves as Mestizo Latin American. The second most common racial/ethnic identity was White European (13.6%), followed by White North American (2.9%), Indigenous (1%), Asian (1%), Mestizo (1%), and White Latin American (1%). The most common religious affiliations were Catholic (60.8%),¹ no religious affiliation (21.6%), and agnostic (10.8%), followed by Buddhist (2%), atheist (2%), Christian (2%), and Mormon (1%). Only students who identified themselves as primarily heterosexual (a response of zero, one or two) on an adapted version of the Kinsey scale (Kinsey et al. 1948) which ranged from zero to six with zero indicating no

¹ Partial correlation was used to rule out the possibility that differences in gender role beliefs and prejudice could be accounted for by differences in Catholicism between Chileans and Americans. Because correlations did not change when statistically controlling for whether or not the participant was Catholic, this variable was dropped from the analysis.

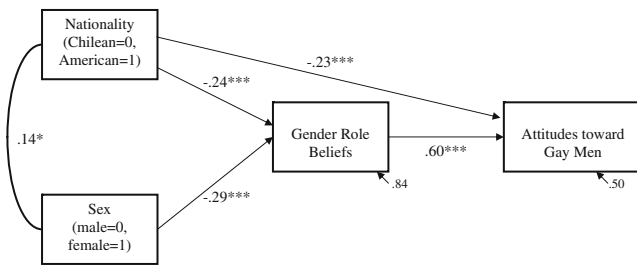


Fig. 2 Mediation model of the relationships from sex and nationality to attitudes toward gay men through gender role beliefs. Coefficients are standardized path coefficients. Overall model fit: $\chi^2(1, N=255)=.72, p=.40, CFI=1.00, RMSEA=.00, SRMR=.01$. Significance levels for paths: * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$.

attraction to members of the same sex and six indicating no attraction to members of the opposite sex, were included in the study. Data from non-heterosexuals ($n=6$) were excluded from the analysis. Thus the final Chilean sample size was 102 (44 men, 58 women).

The American sample was comprised of 183 students (50 men, 133 women) between the ages of 17 and 23. The majority of the American sample (77.8%) identified themselves as White/Caucasian. The second most common racial/ethnic identity was Asian-American (8.5%), followed by Hispanic/Latino (3.3%), and Black/African-American (2%). Several students (7.8%) did not identify with any of the listed racial/ethnic groups. The most common religious affiliations were Christian (28.8%), no religious affiliation (15.7%), and Jewish (18.3%), followed by agnostic (15%), atheist (9.8%), Catholic (7.2%), Muslim (0.7%), Buddhist (0.7%) and “other” (3.9%). Again, only students who identified themselves as primarily heterosexual on the adapted Kinsey scale were included in the study. Data from non-heterosexuals ($n=30$) were excluded from the analysis. Thus the final American sample size was 153 (45 men, 108 women).

Participants were solicited by an e-mail request sent to 427 Chilean students and approximately 350 American students. Regarding the equivalency of Chilean and American samples, the majority of students shared a similar educational background and social class as both universities are private and elite academic institutions. The e-mail contained the web address and password required to access the web-based survey. The first page of the survey included a description of the purpose of the study, possible risks, and permission to terminate participation at any time without negative consequence. Participants were required to indicate that they had read and understood the consent form in order to continue with the survey.

Measure/Apparatus

A professional account was established on Survey Monkey, a program designed as an online research tool, to create two

versions of the web-based survey (one in Spanish and one in English). Survey Monkey was used for distributing email requests for participation, collecting data, and exporting the data file.

Gender role beliefs were assessed using the Gender Role Beliefs Scale (GRBS; Kerr and Holden 1996). The scale contains 20 items (e.g., “The initiative in courtship should usually come from the man”) about traditional gender role expectations (1=*strongly disagree*, 7=*strongly agree*). Higher scores indicate more traditional attitudes. The scale had acceptable reliability for both the Chilean ($\alpha=.88$) and American ($\alpha=.89$) samples.

Attitudes toward gay men and lesbians were assessed using the same version of the Attitudes toward Lesbians and Gays scale as used in Study 1 (ATLG; Herek 1994). The ATL subscale had acceptable reliability for both the Chilean ($\alpha=.84$) and American ($\alpha=.84$) samples. Reliability for the ATG subscale was also acceptable for both the Chilean ($\alpha=.81$) and American ($\alpha=.93$) samples.

Procedure

All participants completed the web-based survey which included informed consent, demographic information, all measures detailed above, and debriefing information. Participants were invited to contact the researcher by email with further questions and to request a summary of the results upon completion of the study. Participants were also given the option of entering a lottery-style prize drawing for a chance to win a small gift to thank them for their participation. All instructions and measures appeared in Spanish for the Chilean sample and in English for the American sample.

Results

A two-factor between-subjects ANOVA was carried out on GRBS scores as a function of participant sex (man or woman) and nationality (Chilean or American). There were significant main effects of participant sex and nationality, and no significant interactions. Men’s gender role beliefs ($M=3.1, SD=0.83$) were more traditional than women’s ($M=2.4, SD=0.81$), $F(1, 245)=23.98, p<.001, \eta^2=.09$. Also, Chileans’ gender role beliefs ($M=3.0, SD=0.89$) were more traditional than Americans’ ($M=2.5, SD=0.78$), $F(1, 245)=15.52, p<.001, \eta^2=.06$.

A second two-factor between-subjects ANOVA was carried out on ATL and ATG subscales as a function of participant sex (man or woman) and nationality (Chilean or American). For both subscales, there were significant main effects of participant sex and nationality, and no significant interactions. Men’s attitudes toward lesbians ($M=2.3, SD=1.10$) were more negative than women’s ($M=1.9, SD=1.02$), $F(1, 250)=3.91, p<.05, \eta^2=.02$. Men’s attitudes toward gay

men ($M=2.8$, $SD=1.33$) were also more negative than women's ($M=2.1$, $SD=1.22$), $F(1, 249)=15.57$, $p<.001$, $\eta^2=.06$. Judging from effect sizes, the predicted sex difference is more pronounced for attitudes toward gay men than lesbians. Chileans' ATL scores ($M=2.4$, $SD=1.15$) were more negative than Americans' ($M=1.8$, $SD=0.94$), $F(1, 250)=11.38$, $p<.01$, $\eta^2=.04$. Chileans' ATG scores ($M=3.0$, $SD=1.17$) were also more negative than Americans' ($M=1.9$, $SD=1.21$), $F(1, 249)=44.33$, $p<.001$, $\eta^2=.15$. Again, the predicted nationality difference had a larger effect size for attitudes toward gay men than for attitudes toward lesbians.

A mediational analysis was conducted where we estimated the models in Figs. 1 and 2 via path analysis in EQS 6.1 (Bentler 1995). The prediction was that gender role beliefs would mediate the relationships between both participant sex and nationality and attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. The analysis was run separately for the ATL and ATG subscales. First, we estimated the model in Fig. 1 with attitudes toward lesbians (ATL) as the dependent measure, and without the direct effects from sex and nationality to ATL. The fit of this model was good, $\chi^2(2, N=255)=3.33$, $p<.001$, CFI=.99, RMSEA=.05, SRMR=.026. No modifications were indicated. Standardized path coefficients and significance levels appear in Fig. 1, and as can be seen, there were significant relationships from both nationality and sex to gender role beliefs, and gender role beliefs was significantly correlated with ATL. The relationship of sex to ATL was completely and significantly mediated by gender role beliefs, as evidenced by a non-significant change in χ^2 with the addition of the direct path from sex to prejudice, $\chi^2_{\Delta}(1, N=255)=1.07$, *ns*, and a significant mediated effect, $z=-4.62$, $p<.001$. The relationship of nationality to ATL was also completely and significantly mediated by gender role beliefs, as evidenced by a non-significant change in χ^2 with the addition of the direct path from sex to prejudice, $\chi^2_{\Delta}(1, N=255)=2.072$, *ns*, and a significant mediated effect, $z=-3.84$, $p<.001$.² Thus, the relationships between participant sex and nationality and ATL are completely mediated by gender role beliefs.

Next, we tested the model in Fig. 2 with attitudes toward gay men (ATG) as the dependent measure. The fit of this model was poor, $\chi^2(2, N=255)=24.62$, $p<.001$, CFI=.89, RMSEA=.21, SRMR=.07. Modification indices suggested that the addition of the direct path from

nationality to ATG would improve the fit of the model, and indeed it did, $\chi^2_{\Delta}(1, N=255)=23.89$, $p<.001$. The model was now an adequate fit to the data, $\chi^2(1, N=255)=.72$, $p=.40$, CFI=1.00, RMSEA=.00, SRMR=.01. Standardized path coefficients and significance levels appear in Fig. 2, and as can be seen, the relationship of sex to ATG was completely and significantly mediated by gender role beliefs, as evidenced by a non-significant change in χ^2 with the addition of the direct path from sex to prejudice, $\chi^2_{\Delta}(1, N=255)=1.15$, *ns*, and a significant mediated effect, $z=-4.61$, $p<.001$. Interestingly, however, there was evidence of *partial* mediation of the effects of nationality on ATG by gender role beliefs. The Sobel (1982) test was also significant for this indirect effect, $z=-3.84$, $p<.001$. So, though there was still a significant direct relationship between nationality and ATG, a portion of this relationship can be accounted for by gender role beliefs.

Discussion

Significant cultural differences were found such that Chileans as a group held more traditional gender role beliefs than Americans, and Chileans were more prejudiced toward gay men and lesbians than Americans. Significant sex differences were also found such that men were more prejudiced than women, particularly in their attitudes toward gay men. Finally, sex differences in attitudes toward lesbians and gay men were completely mediated by gender role beliefs. Nationality differences in attitudes toward lesbians were completely mediated, and nationality differences in attitudes toward gay men were partially mediated, by gender role beliefs.

Gender role beliefs seem to provide a good indication of how attitudes may vary both within and between cultures. It seems that, overall, individuals with more traditional gender role beliefs (i.e., Chileans and men) are more likely to express antigay prejudice, especially toward gay men. Individuals with more traditional beliefs about men's and women's proper roles in society are more likely to hold negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay men, perhaps because they see lesbian women and gay men as violators of cultural standards of femininity and masculinity, respectively. The demonstrated relationship between traditional gender role beliefs and antigay prejudice is consistent with previous studies (Herek 1993a; Kite and Whitley 1998; Whitley 2001), and extends the finding to include a non-American sample (Chile).

The models tested in Figs. 1 and 2 support the idea that gender role beliefs mediate the relationship of both participant sex and nationality to antigay prejudice. When gender role beliefs are taken into account, participant sex and nationality are no longer related to attitudes toward lesbians. Similarly, participant sex is no longer related,

² A cross-groups analysis conducted in EQS 6.1 (Bentler 1995) verified that the mediation of the gender effect was upheld for both DVs in both countries. Lagrange multiplier tests (LM tests) were calculated for each parameter constrained to be equal across groups (Bentler 1995). A significant LM test suggests a parameter on which the two groups differ. In this case, none of the LM tests was significant in the ATG model (all p 's > .45) nor in the ATL model (all p 's > .14), indicating that the finding of mediation of the effects of sex of participant on antigay prejudice was equivalent across nationalities for both DVs.

and nationality is only moderately related, to attitudes toward gay men when gender role beliefs are taken into account. Interestingly, there is a remaining direct effect from nationality to ATG, but not to ATL. In other words, Chileans are no more negative toward lesbians than Americans when controlling for gender role beliefs; whereas Chileans are still more negative toward gay men than are Americans, even after controlling for gender role beliefs. This suggests there is some remaining cultural difference in Chileans' and Americans' attitudes toward gay men that cannot be fully explained by gender role beliefs. Something about Chilean culture, other than traditional ideas about the proper social and behavioral roles for men, is causing gay men to be viewed very negatively. Kite and Whitley (1998) suggest that (American) standards of masculinity are particularly rigid, while femininity is more loosely defined. Consequently, men feel pressure to assert their own masculinity by condemning and distancing themselves from "effeminate" gay men. Our results suggest that this pressure is particularly strong in highly patriarchal countries like Chile, and less strong (though still present) in less patriarchal countries like the United States.

It is possible that the significant differences found between Chilean and American samples were affected by the translation of the measures or by the "reference-group effect" (Heine et al. 2002). The "reference-group effect" can confound the results of cross-cultural comparisons, particularly when Likert-style response measures are used to evaluate groups who compare themselves to different others and different cultural standards. Following suggestions by Heine et al. (2002), we have taken steps to rule out this alternative explanation. First, our individual-level measures are consistent with cultural-level measures of gender empowerment provided by the United Nations Human Development Report (2004) in identifying Chile as more traditional than the U.S. Second, we have shown that our results converge with multiple measures. Although we only report data for the ATLG, we also have data for the Social Distance Scale (SDS; Gentry 1986) as an alternate dependent measure of antigay prejudice. The pattern of results for both the ATLG and the SDS was the same; therefore, only data for the former are included in this report. Finally, we were able to demonstrate construct validity of the translated measures by showing that religiosity items were correlated with the dependent measures in both languages.³

³ Construct validity of the translated measures can be demonstrated by showing that religiosity ("Please rate the extent to which you are religious") is correlated with the ATLG ($r(153) = .51, p < .001$; $r(100) = .30, p < .01$) and the GRBS ($r(152) = .32, p < .001$; $r(96) = .29, p < .01$) for both the American and the Chilean samples, respectively.

There are several limitations of the study. Due to limited resources, only two countries were studied. Future research is needed to investigate the relationship between gender role expectations and prejudice across a wider range of cultures, and to utilize experimental design to implicate causality in the relationship between culture and prejudice. Admittedly, the conditions (i.e., time of day, distractions present) under which participants complete online studies may vary widely, which could limit the validity of the study. This concern was minimized, however, by the use of closed-ended scales and by affording careful attention to the clarity of each item, as suggested by Riggle et al. (2005). The conclusions of this study are also limited to the college student population, which tends to be more liberal in its attitudes than the general population. However, previous research has found that patterns of men's and women's attitudes toward lesbians and gay men are similar in both nationally representative adult samples and in college student convenience samples (Herek 2000).

Strengths of this study include the use of a web-based survey, and support for the main hypothesis that gender role beliefs mediate the relationship between sex, nationality, and antigay prejudice. The online survey allowed for a wider participant base than the researchers would have otherwise had access to, and consequently made cross-cultural comparison more feasible. The study contributes to the literature by extending the finding that gender role beliefs are reliable predictors of antigay prejudice to include participants in two different types of cultures (highly patriarchal and less patriarchal). Most importantly, support was demonstrated for the idea that gender role expectations at least partially account for cultural and sex differences in attitudes toward gay men and lesbians.

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