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Intersectional Invisibility at the Intersection of Gender and Sexual Orientation Heterosexual Gender Prototypes

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Theoretical background

The intersectional invisibility hypothesis (**IIH**) suggests that individuals with multiple marginalised identities are seen as non-prototypical representatives of either of the groups they belong to, and therefore experience invisibility (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). An example of this process is that white women are seen as prototypical for the group “women” and black men are seen as prototypical for the group “black people”, while black women are non-prototypical for both the categories women and black (Ghavami & Peplau, 2013).

Two studies were conducted in Sweden to test the IIH for groups at the intersection of the genders women and men and the sexual orientations heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual. To this end, two main predictions from the IIH are tested. 1) Sexual minority groups will show unique stereotype content not present in the stereotype of their general gender group. 2) Prototypes for general gender groups are determined by heterocentrism, and groups with multiple marginalised identities will be less prototypical than groups with one marginalised identity.

Hypotheses

- H_1 : Attributes associated with ‘women’ and ‘men’ will overlap with attributes associated with same gender heterosexual groups
- H_2 : Heterosexual women and men will be viewed as more similar to ‘women’ and ‘men’ respectively than same gender sexual minority groups are
- H_3 : The perceived difference between ‘women’ and sexual minority women will be greater than the difference between ‘men’ and sexual minority men

Methods

Design

The studies consisted of a between-subjects design: 2 (gender: women, men) × 4 (sexual orientation: unspecified, heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual). Study 1 included a free association attribute generation task, numerical ratings of similarity between target group and general gender groups, and femininity and masculinity ratings of target group. Study 2 included numerical ratings of similarity between target group and general gender groups, and femininity and masculinity ratings of target group.

Participants

Study 1 included 824 participants recruited through social media. Study 2 included 424 participants recruited through a web panel to be representative for the Swedish population. For a selection of sample demographics, see Table 1.

Table 1. Sample demographics for Study 1 and 2

Sample 1 (N = 824)						Sample 2 (N = 424)					
Gender		Age		Sexual orientation		Gender		Age		Sexual orientation	
Women	62% _a (509)	Min-Max	16-83	Heterosexual	77% _a (638)	Women	54% _b (228)	Min-Max	16-84	Heterosexual	85% _b (362)
Men	34% _a (280)	<i>M</i>	44.29 _a	Homosexual	3% _a (25)	Men	45% _b (189)	<i>M</i>	48.71 _b	Homosexual	0.5% _b (2)
Non-Binary Individuals	2% _a (13)	<i>SD</i>	13.54	Bi- or pansexual	11% _a (87)	Non-Binary Individuals	0.5% _a (2)	<i>SD</i>	17.58	Bi- or pansexual	6% _b (24)
<i>N/A</i>	2% _a (22)	<i>N/A</i>	14	Asexual	1% _a (9)	<i>N/A</i>	1% _a (5)	<i>N/A</i>	2	Asexual	0% _b (0)
				Other	1% _a (7)					Other	0.2% _a (1)
				Did not respond	14% _a (58)					Did not respond	8% _a (35)

Note: Different subscripts denote a significant inter-study difference between groups at $p < .05$.

Table 2. Top 15 themes for groups in the gender category ‘men’

Men (N_{traits} = 606)		Heterosexual men (N_{traits} = 440)		Homosexual men (N_{traits} = 474)		Bisexual men (N_{traits} = 285)	
Themes	%	Themes	%	Themes	%	Themes	%
Strong	8.58	Masculine	9.55	Feminine	23.00	Feminine	11.54
Arrogant	6.93	Oppressive	8.41	Exaggerated	7.81	Non-normative	11.54
Aggressive	6.77	Emotionally incompetent	7.05	Interested in fashion	5.49	Hypersexual	8.39
Emotionally incompetent	6.77	Normative	7.5	Hypersexual	5.27	Confused	7.34
Masculine	6.11	Arrogant	6.14	Emotionally competent	4.64	Emotionally competent	5.25
Reliable	3.80	Aggressive	5.91	Overly emotional	4.43	Actually hetero/homosexual	5.25
Oppressive	3.63	Strong	4.77	Immoral	3.59	Invisible	4.55
Technically minded	3.47	Reliable	3.41	Attractive	3.38	Attractive	4.20
Not conscientious	3.30	Easily offended	3.18	Vain/shallow	3.17	Don't know	4.20
Competent	3.14	Competent	2.96	Interested in culture	3.17	Trendy sexuality	3.50
Rational	3.14	Agentic	2.96	Arrogant	2.95	Exaggerated	2.80
Incompetent	2.97	Sporty	2.73	Weak	2.74	Interested in fashion	2.80
Privileged	2.81	Technically minded	2.27	Gentle	2.11	Marginalised	2.80
Determined	2.81	Not family oriented	2.27	Interested in aesthetics	1.90	Gentle	2.10
Agentic	2.64	Confident	2.05	Progressive	1.69	Progressive	2.10

Table 3. Top 15 themes for groups in the gender category ‘women’

Women (N_{traits} = 520)		Heterosexual women (N_{traits} = 372)		Homosexual women (N_{traits} = 457)		Bisexual women (N_{traits} = 333)	
Themes	%	Themes	%	Themes	%	Themes	%
Caring	7.89	Family oriented	13.98	Masculine	24.73	Non-normative	11.41
Family oriented	7.12	Normative	8.60	Progressive	13.79	Masculine	8.41
Emotionally competent	6.54	Vain/shallow	6.99	Short haired	6.91	Hypersexual	8.11
Overly emotional	6.35	Emotionally competent	5.65	Aggressive	4.81	Independent	7.21
Marginalised	5.58	Demanding	5.38	Unattractive	4.16	Progressive	6.91
Gentle	5.19	Caring	5.11	Hates men	3.72	Unfaithful	4.20
Vain/shallow	5.19	Dependent	5.11	Non-normative	3.28	Actually hetero- or homosexual	4.20
Demanding	5.00	Feminine	4.03	Independent	2.84	Don't know	3.90
Dependent	4.82	Conscientious	3.76	Pierced/tattooed	2.41	Competent	3.30
Socially competent	4.62	Overly emotional	3.50	Poor mental health	2.19	Confused	3.30
Attractive	4.04	Marginalised	3.50	Hypersexual	1.75	Trendy sexuality	3.30
Physical term	3.65	Attractive	3.23	Hairy	1.75	Short haired	3.00
Progressive	3.46	Incompetent	3.23	Sporty	1.53	Attractive	3.00
Conscientious	3.46	Agentic	2.96	Misses men	1.53	Emotionally competent	2.40
Competent	3.08	Adapts to men	1.88	Relaxed	1.53	Attracted to men	2.40

Results

- Characteristics associated with heterosexual women overlapped to 79% with characteristics associated with ‘women’, but only with 14% and 12% for homosexual and bisexual women. Characteristics associated with heterosexual men overlapped to 83% with characteristics associated with ‘men’, but only with 3% and 0% for homosexual and bisexual men. H_1 is thus supported. See Table 2 and 3 for themes of characteristics.
- For femininity and masculinity, there was a significant interaction between gender and sexual orientation in both Study 1 and 2. As can be seen in Figure 1, heterosexual groups did not differ significantly from their respective same gender general gender group, while sexual minority groups did. H_2 is thus supported. However, the difference to general gender groups did not differ significantly between sexual minority women and men, and thus H_3 was not supported.
- For similarity to women/men, there was a significant interaction between gender and sexual orientation in both Study 1 and 2. As can be seen in Figure 2, heterosexual women and men were seen as more similar to their own gender group, while homosexual women and men were less similar to their own gender group in Study 1 but not Study 2. Bisexual groups were equally similar to either gender group in Study 1, but in Study 2 this was only true for bisexual men while bisexual women were seen as more similar to women than to men. H_2 is thus supported only partially supported.
- Intergroup differences for sexual minority groups in dissimilarity to women/men showed that in Study 2, homosexual women were seen as significantly more similar to women than homosexual men were to men. However, no other comparisons reached significance. H_3 could thus not be strongly supported.
- The proportion of unique to non-unique characteristics reported for sexual minority groups compared to their congruent gender group differed in the opposite direction as hypothesised. Homosexual and bisexual men had a higher ratio of characteristics not reported for the group ‘men’ than homosexual and bisexual women had in relation to the group ‘women’. H_3 could thus not be supported

Discussion

- The current study found support for the prediction that individuals belonging to marginalised groups are seen as non-prototypical for the social categories that make up their group membership. **The gender groups ‘women’ and ‘men’ were represented by heterosexual prototypes.**
- Degree of non-prototypicality did not increase with the number of marginalised identities present. That is, sexual minority women were not seen as less prototypical for their gender group than sexual minority men were. In fact, sexual minority men diverged more strongly from ‘men’ than sexual minority women did from ‘women’ in terms of associated characteristics.
- Further studies should investigate predictions from the IIH also in relation to general views of sexual orientation categories. Examining the relation between gender prototypes *and* sexual orientation prototypes would give important information regarding issues of hypervisibility/invisibility of marginalised groups.

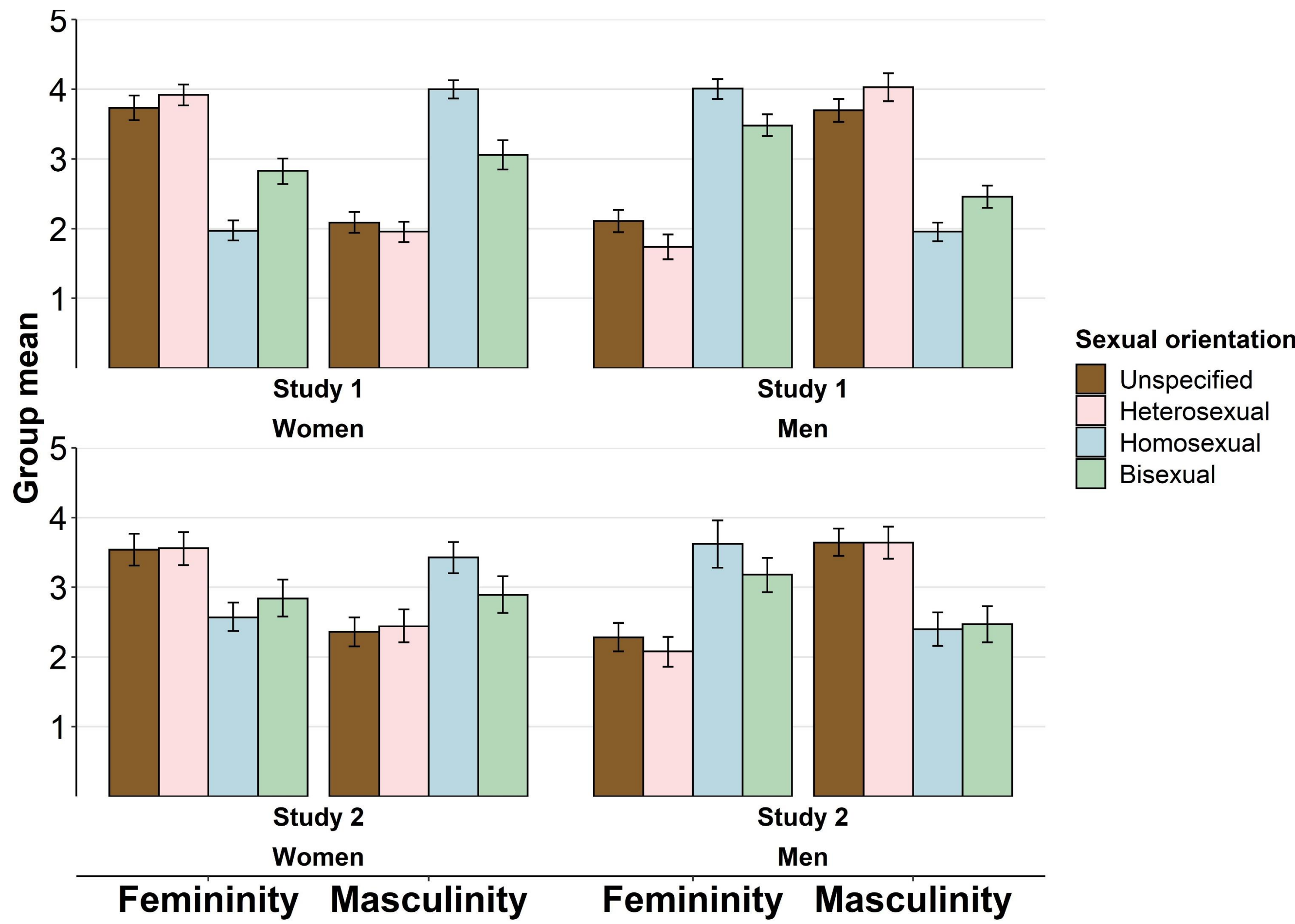


Figure 1. Mean ratings of target group femininity and masculinity. Error bars represent the 95% confidence interval of the mean.

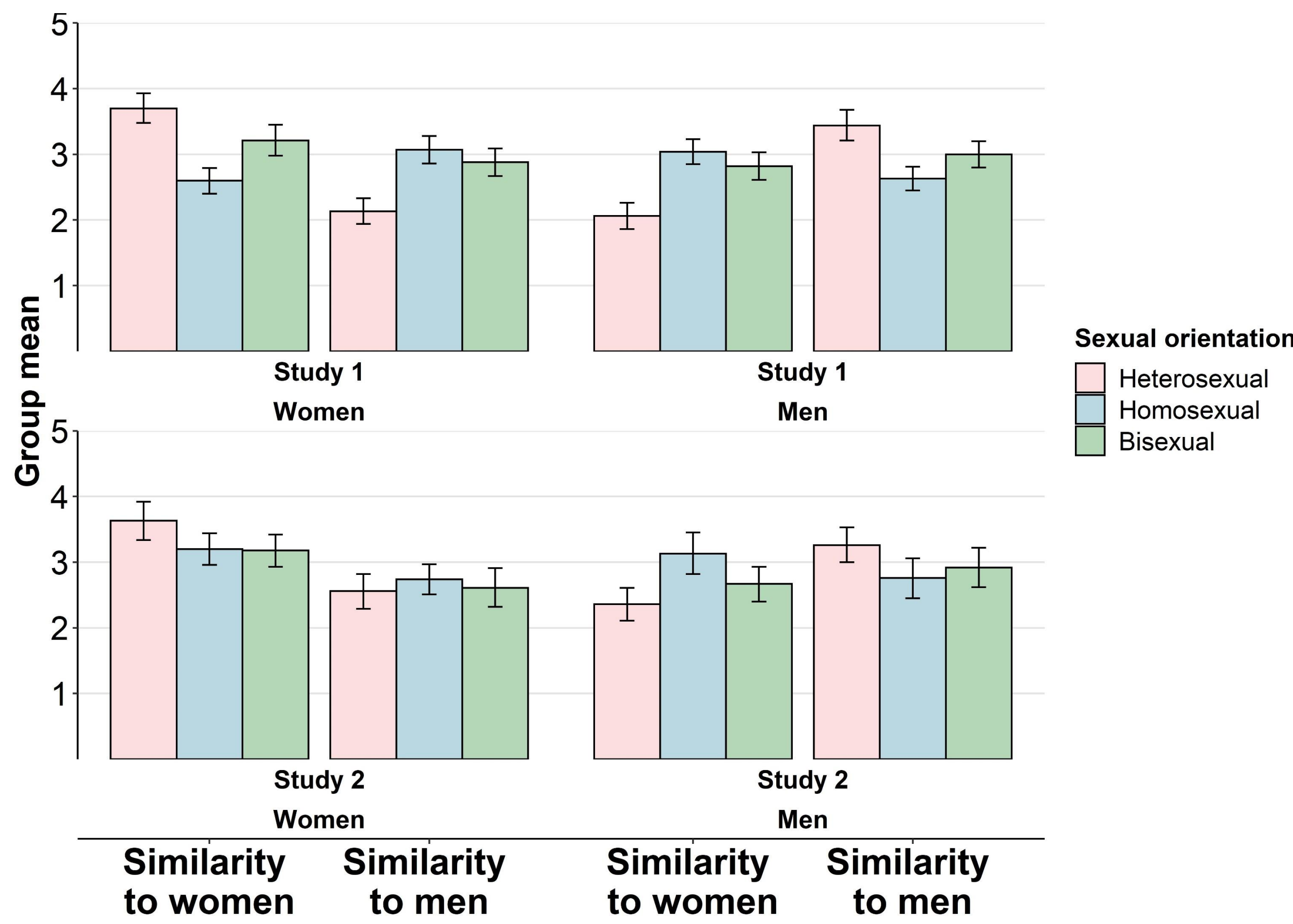


Figure 2. Mean ratings of target group similarity to women and similarity to men. Error bars represent the 95% confidence interval of the mean.

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