

Gender norms affect attitudes towards gay men and lesbian women globally

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Gay men and lesbian women have often been the targets of prejudice

and even violence in society. To better understand what shapes these attitudes and prejudices, Maria Laura Bettinsoli, Alexandra Suppes, and Jamie Napier (all New York University—Abu Dhabi) tested how beliefs about gender norms (expectations of society for how men and women act and look) and people's attitudes towards gay men and women relate across the globe.

They found that globally, gay men are disliked more than [lesbian women](#) across 23 countries. Their results also suggest negative attitudes are guided by the perception that gays and lesbians violate traditional gender norms. But in three countries, China, India, and South Korea, the correlation between beliefs in gender norms and attitudes towards gays and lesbians was absent or even reversed.

The research appears online before print in *Social Psychological and Personality Science*.

The team assessed attitudes towards gay men and lesbian women separately, noting that most research focuses on homosexuality as a broad category and doesn't separate attitudes by gender.

Bettinsoli and colleagues were surprised at how consistently gay men were rated more negatively than lesbian women in a vast majority of their samples.

They were also surprised "at the consistency of the relationship between gender norm endorsement and sexual prejudice," says Bettinsoli. "Even though there were some non-Western countries that did not conform to the pattern, the majority of countries did."

These findings were true for [western countries](#) including Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Mexico, Peru, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and the USA. The

same was true for Russia, South Africa, and Turkey too.

"We also found that, in line with previous research, the endorsement of gender norms was associated with anti-gay attitudes—toward both gay men and lesbian women—in every Western country in our sample," says Bettinsoli.

In South Korea, the researchers saw that endorsement of [gender norms](#) was unrelated to attitudes toward gays and lesbians, and in Japan, there was a small association between gender norm endorsement and attitudes toward gay men, but not towards lesbian women.

"In China and India, the reverse pattern emerged. Those who were highest on endorsement of traditional [gender](#) roles were the most positive toward gay men and lesbian women," says Bettinsoli.

While some of the countries show friendlier attitudes towards gays and lesbians, Bettinsoli notes that even in the more tolerant places discriminatory attitudes still exist.

The study is one of several appearing in a future special issue of *Social Psychological and Personality Science* focused on underrepresented populations.

More information: Maria Laura Bettinsoli et al, Predictors of Attitudes Toward Gay Men and Lesbian Women in 23 Countries, *Social Psychological and Personality Science* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/1948550619887785](https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550619887785)

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