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**WOMEN'S ATTEMPTS TO APPEASE MASCULINITY AND AVOID PUNISHMENT  
THROUGH SELF-SEXUALIZING APPEASEMENT STRATEGIES**

A Thesis in

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by

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### **Abstract**

Men often respond to feelings of masculinity threats with aggression. This study examines the degree to which women attempt to ameliorate masculinity threats and avoid aggression by using self-sexualizing appeasement strategies. Undergraduate females were assigned high or low power roles and ostensibly assigned a male teammate who indicated his masculinity had or had not been threatened. Both high and low power women responded to masculinity threats by representing themselves with avatars that wore more revealing and sexualized outfits. These findings provide support for the idea that women engage in self-sexualizing appeasement strategies when they perceive masculinity has been threatened.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

List of Tables.....	v
Chapter 1. Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2. Study Overview.....	17
Chapter 3. Method.....	19
Chapter 4. Results.....	25
Chapter 5. Discussion.....	30
Chapter 6. Conclusion.....	39
References.....	40
Appendix A: Emotions Questionnaire.....	47
Appendix B: Sexualized Self-Presentations.....	48
Appendix C: Sexualized Joking.....	49
Appendix D: Motivations Questionnaire .....	50
Appendix E: Perceptions of Experimental Feedback Questionnaire.....	51
Appendix F: Teammate Compatibility Survey.....	52
Appendix G: Joke Assessment Questionnaire.....	53

**List of Tables**

Table 1. Correlations within Threat Condition.....	45
Table 2. Correlations within No Threat Condition.....	46

## Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this research is to test the hypothesis that if women are aware that they have threatened the masculinity of a higher power man then women may attempt to appease masculinity and avoid retribution or punishment by engaging in self-sexualization. To the best of my knowledge, no prior research has examined whether women use appeasement strategies in response to perceptions that they have threatened the masculinity of another. We, therefore, lack answers to a host of important questions, including: whether and when women use strategies to appease masculinity threats, what strategies are used, whether appeasement strategies are consciously or unconsciously employed, what conditions influence the use of particular strategies, and whether various appeasement strategies are effective.

The theory and research presented here will explore when women might use self-sexualizing appeasement strategies to ameliorate masculinity threat. Self-sexualizing behaviors are actions that make salient women's subordinate position to men in heterosexual roles and relationships. Self-sexualizing appeasement strategies involve submissive sexualized behaviors that grant (or seem to grant) males permission to objectify female actors. These behaviors can take a variety of forms such as sexual banter, sexual joking, drawing attention to one's appearance, or flirtation. In order to explore when and why women may self-sexualize in an attempt to appease masculinity threats I first consider the "problems" women face when in masculine domains. I then review theory and research on gender roles and masculinity, as well as research examining the causes and consequences of threats to masculinity. Finally, I consider the possibility that women are aware of the potential for punishment and are motivated to avoid such punishments by appeasing masculinity threats. I will offer evidence that women engage in self-

sexualization and then discuss why self-sexualization may be a particularly “effective”<sup>1</sup> immediate strategy for a woman to ameliorate threats by appearing submissive and non-threatening without appearing incompetent.

### **Reviewing the “Problem” of Women in Masculine Domains**

Despite women’s gains in some traditionally masculine fields (such as medicine), women remain underrepresented other masculine domains such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (i.e. STEM domains). Furthermore, women in masculine domains still face numerous obstacles to success. For example, women are the targets of sexual harassment (Berdahl, 2007) and backlash (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004) more often in masculine domains than in traditionally feminine or gender neutral domains.

Masculine domains continue to be hostile environments for women, perhaps in part, because the mere presence of a competent woman in these domains has the potential to threaten masculinity. Consistent with this suggestion, research shows that when masculinity is threatened men are more likely to engage in a host of negative behaviors including physical aggression (e.g. Bosson, Vandello, Burnaford, & Watsi, 2009), sexual aggression (e.g. Maass, Cadinu, Guarnieri, & Grasselli, 2003) and social aggression. In other words, I argue that competent women in masculine domains may be punished because the presence of these women threatens masculinity.

Women in masculine domains are aware of the potential to become targets of aggression and are motivated to avoid punishment. Research shows that women in masculine domains will often hide their accomplishments because they fear punishment and hope to avoid backlash (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). However, when women are either unwilling or unable to hide their

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<sup>1</sup> The word *effective* in quotations to indicate that I neither advocate nor condemn engaging in self-sexualization as a way to ameliorate masculinity threats. I will address the potential short- and long-term consequences of self-sexualization in my discussion. Rather than passing positive or negative judgment on women who self-sexualize, I hope to convey my belief that women who threaten masculinity are stuck in a position in which no completely desirable options for action exist.

accomplishments, I suggest that they may try to avoid punishment by employing strategies that appease masculinity threats. There are undoubtedly numerous strategies that women can use in order to appease masculinity threats and avoid punishment. However, I will focus on one specific appeasement strategy: self-sexualization.

### **Gender Norms and Masculinity**

In order to understand why, in masculine domains, masculinity may be threatened by competent women we must first understand how heterosexual gender role norms for women and men differ. After briefly explaining the complementary nature of male and female gender roles, I will go on to discuss masculinity, masculinity threats, and men's reactions to masculinity threats.

#### **What are Heterosexual Gender Norms?**

Gender norms suggest that women and men have opposite but complementary strengths and weaknesses that determine how they should feel and act. Gender norms are socialized through heterosexual relationships because men and women are conceptualized as interdependent, complementary opposites who must come together as a cohesive unit for the purpose of childbearing (Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Herek, 1986). Gender role norms provide both prescriptions for how men and women should act and proscriptions about how men and women should not act. For example, traditional gender roles suggest that women should be subordinate, passive, warm, nurturing, and communal (e.g. Bem, 1974; Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Spence & Helmreich, 1978). However, men are expected to be deficient in these areas, instead possessing the qualities and traits that women lack. Masculine role norms indicate that men should be dominant, agentic, independent, and achievement oriented (e.g. Bem, 1974; Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Spence & Helmreich, 1978).

#### **What is Masculinity?**

Traditional, Western masculinity consists of four key components: 1) being powerful and high status; 2) being independent and self-assured; 3) toughness (physical, mental, and emotional) and aggression and 4) the active avoidance of anything feminine (Brannon, 1976; Fischer & Good, 1998; Fischer, Tokar, Good, & Snell, 1998; Thompson & Pleck, 1986). Masculinity requires that men be high status, dominant, and powerful relative to others (especially women). Power can be defined as “the potential to influence others in psychologically meaningful ways” (French & Raven, 1959) through giving or withholding rewards and/or punishments (Fiske, 1993; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003; Vescio, Snyder, & Butz, 2003; Vescio, Gervais, Snyder, & Hoover, 2005). Thus, in order to be a “good man” one should be able to demonstrate that one has the ability to influence and control others in meaningful ways. Masculinity also requires that men demonstrate their independence and ability to determine one’s own success without relying on others. The third component of masculinity, toughness, requires that men not show weakness in any form. Finally, masculinity demands avoiding or fleeing from any activities, traits, or behaviors that others could interpret as feminine or “sissy.”

Masculinity appears to be precarious in nature and readily susceptible to threats. Manhood is precarious in that it is perceived as something which can be easily lost if not continuously displayed and reaffirmed (Vandello, Bosson, Cohen, & Burnaford, 2008). Given that masculinity is core to men’s personal identity (Herek, 1986) masculinity threats can cause great anxiety in men (Babl, 1979). Thus, men find it important to repeatedly demonstrate their masculinity in order to avoid anxiety and psychological discomfort.

### **When is Masculinity Threatened?**

Masculinity threat occurs when attention is directed to the precarious nature of one or more of the core components of masculinity. Based on this definition, the presence of a high power woman in masculine domains could threaten masculinity by undermining the power/status component of masculinity. Threat could also occur when men's independence and self-assurance are questioned, when men are accused of being too feminine or "sissy", or not tough enough. Consistent with these suggestions, research shows that some men experience threats to masculinity when in competition with competent women (Pleck, 1976).

In masculine domains, the mere presence of competent women may be sufficient to threaten salient social identities, such as masculinity, among individuals and/or groups. According to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), when an individual is highly identified as a member of a particular social group they are motivated to not only to protect their individual identity, they are motivated to protect the identity of their in-group (Doosje & Ellemers, 1997). Thus, masculinity threats can occur in a variety of different ways on both the individual and group level.

Masculinity threats can be categorized in terms of four types of social identity threats: 1) *prototypicality threats*, 2) *distinctiveness threats*, 3) *threats to group value*, or 4) *legitimacy threats* (Maass et al., 2003)<sup>2</sup>. Though these four categories are conceptually distinct, specific instances of masculinity threats may sometimes simultaneously exemplify multiple categories of social identity threats. Below, I will discuss each of these categories of threat in more detail.

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<sup>2</sup> The original taxonomy of identity threats developed by Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje (1999) consisted of *acceptance threats* (called *prototypicality threats* by Maass and colleagues), *distinctiveness threats*, *value threats*, and *category threats*. *Category threats* occur when someone feels categorized or labeled against their wishes. However, given that being categorized as a man would bolster, rather than threaten masculinity, category threats will not be discussed further. Maass and colleagues added the category of *legitimacy threats* to this original taxonomy.

While doing so, I will discuss evidence consistent with my assumption that the presence of highly competent women in masculine domains can threaten masculinity.

*Prototypicality threats* refer to a highly identified group member being told that he is a peripheral or non-prototypical group member (Maass et al., 2003). Prototypicality masculinity threats call into question an individual's status as a "good man." Prototypicality threats have been shown to occur when men receive feedback that they have scored outside the typical range for men (and inside the typical range found for women) on gender-related knowledge tests (Maass et al., 2003; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2001). Any scenario in which a man believes that others will perceive him as being a "sissy" (overly feminine) or as lacking status, power, and toughness should be sufficient to produce the threat and fear that he is not a sufficiently prototypical man. A highly competent woman in a masculine domain might threaten masculinity by challenging the status and power possessed by successful men. In other words, because the success of a competent woman has the potential to lead to situations in which the woman possesses greater status and power than a man (or men), such situations may result in prototypicality threats for individual men. This scenario may be threatening because it may indicate a man lacks the appropriate levels of power and status that a "good man" should have in a masculine domain.

*Distinctiveness threats* consist of the suggestion that one's in-group and out-group are similar to or indistinguishable from one another (Branscombe et al., 1999; Maass et al., 2003) rather than being complementary opposites (Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Glick & Fiske, 1996). Several studies have provided evidence that distinctiveness masculinity threats occur when males are told that men in general have become less macho and masculine over the past several decades (Babl, 1979; Maass et al., 2003). What is not clear, however, is whether presenting men with

evidence that suggests women have become increasingly less feminine, more macho, or increasingly successful in traditionally male-dominated domains would also cause threats to masculine distinctiveness. It is theoretically, however, possible that presenting men with evidence that women are becoming increasingly present and successful in traditionally masculine domains would threaten masculinity by blurring the distinctions between roles traditionally assigned to men and women.

*Threats to group value* occur when someone is told that their in-group is less valued or performs worse than other groups (Branscombe et al., 1999; Maass et al., 2003). Highly competent women in masculine domains might represent a threat to men's group value in masculine domains. If men perceive that they no longer outperform women in traditionally masculine domains (which also tend to be highly valued domains), then men may feel that their group value is threatened because men no longer automatically outperform women in these fields. Given the complementary nature of gender role norms (e.g. that men and women should excel in separate, distinct domains), this type of masculinity threat should be expected only when women outperform men in traditionally masculine, rather than in the feminine or gender neutral domains where women are expected or allowed to excel. The presence of a competent woman in a masculine domain may suggest that men are not unique in possessing the attributes associated with success in masculine domains.

Finally, *legitimacy threat* occurs when the status and privilege of a social group is called into question (Maass et al., 2003). Highly competent women in masculine domains may threaten the legitimacy of male privilege in the social hierarchy. After all, if there are highly competent women who have the potential to be just as successful as men in masculine domains, then women should not be underrepresented in masculine domains. Furthermore, if women and men

have equal capacities for success, then men should not be afforded greater social status than women. Researchers have found that the mere presence of a feminist (who is likely to espouse such views) is sufficient to induce masculinity threats (Dall'Ara & Maass, 1999; Maass et al., 2003). Thus, it seems likely that the mere presence of a highly competent woman in a masculine domain could call into question the greater privilege and higher status afforded to men in masculine domains, thus qualifying as a legitimacy masculinity threat.

In sum, the present theory and research derives from the assumption that highly competent women in masculine domains threaten masculinity. While empirical tests of this assumption are beyond the scope of the present research, this assumption is consistent with prior research on masculinity threats. Having established the potential that highly competent women in masculine domains may threaten masculinity, I will now discuss the consequences of masculinity threats.

### **How do Men Respond to Threats to Masculinity?**

Challenging the stability of one of the core components of masculinity can provoke anxiety in a man and motivate him to try to demonstrate and reestablish his manhood (Babl, 1979). Referring to masculinity, Vandello and colleagues (2008) argue, “anything that makes salient its precariousness, or calls one’s manhood status into question should be especially anxiety provoking” (p. 1326).

Men who are the most highly invested in masculinity are more likely to engage in compensatory behavioral responses following threats to their manhood than other men (Babl, 1979). Although both androgynous (individuals who highly identify with both masculine and feminine traits) and highly sex-typed men (as defined by the Bem Sex Role Inventory; Bem, 1974) experience anxiety following masculinity threats, only highly sex-typed men respond to

threats by further exaggerating their endorsements of masculinity and antisocial behavior (Babl, 1979). In other words, men may differ in the degree to which they feel motivated to engage in compensatory behavior when masculinity is threatened.

Men who highly identify with masculinity respond to masculinity threats in aggressive and harmful ways. These aggressive compensatory reactions, which include physical aggression, sexual aggression, and social aggression, are detrimental to women in particular and others in general. Below I review the literature to illustrate (a) the linkages between threats to masculinity and these three aggressive compensatory responses and (b) what kinds of women typically become targets of such aggression.

*Physical aggression.* Men often respond to masculinity threats with physical aggression and displays of strength in an attempt to reduce threat and restore masculinity (e.g. Babl, 1979, Bosson et al., 2009; Vandello et al., 2008). Physically aggressive compensatory responses might occur because one of the core components of masculinity is physical toughness and a willingness to aggress (Brannon, 1976; Fischer & Good, 1998; Fischer et al., 1998; Thompson & Pleck, 1986). Consistent with this notion, men show an increased desire for muscularity when outperformed by a woman on a masculine task (this occurs even when the task is nonphysical; Mills & D'Alfonso, 2007). Threats to masculinity have also been shown to be linked to the activation of physically aggressive thoughts (Vandello et al., 2008) and, among highly sex-typed men, increases in endorsement of aggression, fighting, and other antisocial behaviors (Babl, 1979). Perhaps as a result, following threats to masculinity (vs. control no threat conditions), men prefer physically aggressive activities (such hitting a punching bag) to gender-neutral tasks (e.g. a puzzle task) and are more aggressive (e.g. hit harder; Bosson et al., 2009). It seems that men consider physical aggression an appropriate response to threat because aggression conveys

that they are good, prototypical males. By engaging in physical aggression men are able to demonstrate one of the key components of masculinity.

*Sexual aggression.* Threats to masculinity have also been linked to sexual aggression and sexual harassment, particularly among men who are highly identified as masculine. Specifically, Maass and colleagues (2003) found that in conditions of legitimacy threat (manipulated by the presence or absence of a feminist), highly identified men were more likely report intentions to engage in quid pro quo harassment in a hypothetical hiring situation (i.e. requests or demands for sexual favors in exchange for employment). Additionally, men were more likely to send pornographic materials to a female target, even after she expressed discomfort about being sent pornography, following legitimacy threats, prototypicality threats, and distinctiveness threats (vs. no threat conditions)<sup>3</sup>.

Consistent with my assumption that highly competent women in masculine domains threaten masculinity, findings indicate that some groups of women are more likely than other groups of women to be targets of harassment. For instance, Berdahl (2007) found that women with more masculine personalities (i.e. dominant, independent, agentic) were more likely to be sexually harassed than women with more traditionally feminine personalities (i.e. warm, passive, communal). Women who worked in male-dominated companies were also sexually harassed more often than women in female-dominated companies, with masculine women in male-organizations being harassed the most (Berdahl, 2007). This evidence suggests that highly competent and agentic women in masculine domains threaten masculinity and subsequently become the primary targets of sexual harassment.

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<sup>3</sup> Prototypicality threat was manipulated by telling male participants that they had performed outside the range of what men typically score and inside the range of what women typically score on a masculine test. Distinctiveness threat was manipulated by telling male participants that research has shown that men, in general, have become less macho in recent years.

*Social aggression.* Agentic women are also the targets of backlash (i.e. social and economic punishments), which is a form of social aggression. Women who outperform men on stereotypically masculine tasks are more likely to be subsequently sabotaged by others, impairing their ability to acquire monetary rewards (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). In other words, people take actions to undermine the chances that highly competent women in masculine domains have the opportunity to earn future economic or social rewards. Rudman and Fairchild (2004) frame their findings as women being punished for being gender deviant (e.g. agentic or masculine rather than communal or feminine) because gender deviance threatens stereotype maintenance and the social gender hierarchy. However, an alternative set of explanations cannot be ruled out: 1) that men punish gender deviant women because these women threaten their masculinity and 2) that women punish gender deviant women because they fear men whose masculinity has been threatened.

### **Women's Awareness of the Potential to be Aggressed Against**

Women who perform well in masculine domains may be aware of the potential of becoming the target of aggressive acts and motivated to avoid such aggression. Consistent with this notion, research on backlash (a form of social aggression) shows that women who outperform men on masculine tasks are aware of their potential of to become the targets of backlash and aggression; in fact, findings show that women often hide their accomplishments in an attempt to avoid such social punishment (Rudman & Fairchild, 2007). In addition, men often harass women who are *not* direct sources of masculinity threat, as when group value is threatened (e.g. when threat occurs because men are told that men have become less macho over the years. Maass et al., 2003). As a result, it is likely that women may fear social, sexual, and physical aggression when they are not the direct source of masculinity threat.

When competent women in masculine domains fear aggression but are unable or unwilling to hide their accomplishments these women may engage in other behaviors aimed at ameliorating masculinity threats. I turn attention to these behaviors below.

### **Women's Attempts to Appease Masculinity Threat**

I use the term appeasement strategy to refer to any action that calls attention to or reaffirms the presence of the core characteristics of masculinity in a man. I argue that in order to appease masculinity threats, a woman must behave in a way that conveys that a man has power and status, is independent, not feminine, and/or tough. When a woman detects that she (or potentially someone or something else) has threatened masculinity<sup>4</sup> she may engage in behaviors designed to appease the threat and reinforce core components of masculinity. Given the complementary nature of gender roles that prescribe male dominance and female subordination, any act of female self-subordination might ameliorate threat by restoring the male sense of power and dominance. Although numerous appeasement strategies may exist, I will focus one strategy that may be particularly common among young women: self-sexualization.

#### **The Self-Sexualizing Appeasement Strategy**

Self-sexualization refers to behaviors that make salient men's dominance and power over women and, given the complementary nature of gender roles, imply women's subordinate status to men in society and normative heterosexual relationships. Gender roles dictate that women should be subordinate to men and that men are sexual actors while women are sexually acted upon (Dworkin, 1987; Kiefer & Sanchez, 2007). Therefore, a self-sexualizing appeasement strategy necessarily involves submissive sexualized behaviors. This sexualized behavior can take

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<sup>4</sup> A discussion of when women become aware of masculinity threat is beyond the scope of this paper. It is likely that verbal, nonverbal, and situational cues all contribute to the perception of threat. In the proposed study indications of masculinity threat will be manipulated by the presence of blatant indications that threat either has or has not occurred. Because the presence or absence of masculinity threat will be blatantly indicated participants should be aware whether they have threatened masculinity.

many forms including: sexual banter, sexual joking, publicly emphasizing or drawing attention to one's appearance, or flirtation.

### **Why Focus on Self-Sexualization?**

I focus attention on self-sexualizing appeasement strategies for three reasons. First, self-sexualizing behavior is common in the United States. Second, other appeasement strategies may have greater costs women's perceived competence. Third, self-sexualization may be both an "effective" and subtle way to ameliorate threat because of automatic associations between sex, submission, and power. Each point is considered, in turn, below.

### **Evidence of Self-Sexualization**

Anecdotal evidence suggests that women in masculine domains sometimes self-sexualize. For example, numerous professional female athletes have chosen to pose for men's magazines such as Maxim, the Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition, and Playboy. Posing nude (or nearly nude) conveys the message that the woman is willing to allow herself to be sexually objectified and become an object for the sexual consumption of men. It could be argued that women who excel in the typically male-dominated world of sports threaten masculinity and flaunt their sexuality in order to appear more submissive, less threatening, and less gender deviant. Levy (2005) points out that young women now live in a culture of "female chauvinist pigs" in which objectifying and sexualizing oneself is not only considered acceptable, it is encouraged. Not only are embracing "raunch culture" and self-sexualization encouraged, they are often described as a form of female empowerment (Levy, 2005). I will further address the idea of self-sexualization as empowerment in the discussion, but the "rise of raunch culture" and emergence of "female chauvinist pigs" in contemporary US society is evidence that women frequently engage in self-sexualizing behaviors.

Similarly, ethnographic accounts of women who work in restaurant kitchens (a traditionally male-dominated setting) show that women who are best liked and most successful learn to “decipher the rules of the game and play by them” (Fine, 1987, p. 145). These rules refer to the rules for conduct established by men in male-dominated settings and often include explicit sexual joking at the expense of women (Fine, 1987; Lyman, 1987). Women who fail to “play by the rules” may pose a threat to the power and status that traditionally allows men to define these rules and standards for conduct. However, women who agree to “play by the rules” and participate in sexist banter and joking may be able to make men feel that male power and status remain unthreatened. This sexist joking is self-sexualizing regardless of whether the joking is focused directly on the self (and only the self), or on women in general (sexualizing both oneself and one’s broader gender in-group). Humor researchers note that one does not have to endorse or agree with the content of jokes in order to tell them (Hay, 2001). Therefore, women may use sexist and sexual humor despite disagreeing with the content of the jokes in order to try to appease potential masculinity threats.

### **Competence and Appeasement Strategies**

Self-sexualization may be a common appeasement strategy because, unlike many other strategies, masculinity threat might be ameliorated without sacrificing perceptions of a woman’s competence. For example, to appease threat a woman could play up external factors for success (e.g. luck) or make self-deprecating comments. Both of these strategies attempt to minimize other people’s perceptions that she is competent. In a highly competitive, masculine domain in which competence is highly valued, it would be detrimental to act in a way that undermines one’s appearance of competence. Publicly downplaying one’s competence could diminish the chance of receiving promotions in the workplace.

Self-sexualization may allow women to walk the fine line of appeasing threat without compromising perceptions of competence. Given that greater physical attractiveness is stereotypically associated with greater intellectual competence (for a review, see Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991), self-sexualization might allow women to maintain perceived competence by emphasizing their physical attractiveness. However, women who self-sexualize must walk the fine line between sexualizing themselves enough to appease threats and maintain perceived competence without sexualizing themselves to the point that they invoke the stereotype of the “bimbo” or “dumb blonde” (Vescio & Callahan, 2009). Investigating the threshold of when observers begin to associate sexualized behavior with incompetence is beyond the scope of this project, however, the “what is beautiful is good” phenomenon (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972) suggests that women might be able to emphasize their physical attractiveness (via self-sexualizing behaviors) without appearing incompetent to others.

### **Automatic Power and Sex Associations and the Subtle Nature of Self-Sexualization**

The use of sexualizing behavior may also appease masculinity threat at a more subtle, automatic level. Men are socialized to take on sexually dominant roles while traditional gender roles prescribe female sexual submissiveness (Dworkin, 1987; Kiefer & Sanchez, 2007). Therefore both men and women have implicit associations between sex and power.

The content of the automatic associations between sex and power do, however, vary as a function of gender. Women have implicit associations between sex and submission. Women, but not men, who are primed with sex-related words are faster to identify submissive (e.g. comply, submit) words than dominant (e.g. power, assert) or neutral words (Sanchez, Kiefer, & Ybarra, 2006). Given that power and dominance are key components of masculinity, women may be motivated to appease threat by engaging in sexualizing behavior or telling sexual jokes because

of these automatic associations between submission and sex. Men who are high in the likelihood to sexually harass (based on the Likelihood to Sexually Harass scale; Pryor, 1987) have automatic associations between sex and power (Bargh, Raymond, Pryor, & Strack, 1995). Therefore sexualization may be a subtle and implicit way to communicate both female submissiveness and male power and dominance to the men most likely to harass women.

In summary, research findings are consistent with the notion that competent women in masculine domains threaten masculinity. When masculinity is threatened, men respond with physical aggression, sexual aggression, and social aggression (i.e., social and economic sanctions). Additionally, women who perform well in traditionally masculine domains are aware of the potential for these forms of punishment and are motivated to avoid physical, sexual, and social aggression. Integrating and extending upon the aforementioned points, I propose that one way women try to avoid punishment and appease threatened masculinity is by engaging in self-sexualizing behaviors, perhaps particularly when women are low in power and depend upon a man whose masculinity has been threatened for desired outcomes.

## Chapter 2: Study Overview

In line with the foregoing points, I hypothesized that, in masculine domains, women will engage in self-sexualizing behavior if a) they perceive that they have threatened another's masculinity and b) fear punishment. When women are aware of a masculinity threat, those who are low in power should fear punishment (e.g. being denied potential financial rewards) and should therefore engage in the most self-sexualizing behavior. However, women who are high in power should not fear financial backlash and therefore should not be motivated to appease masculinity threats by self-sexualizing. Furthermore, if women are assured that masculinity has not been threatened then women should not fear punishment or be motivated to self-sexualize.

To test predictions, female participants were led to believe that they would be interacting with a male participant who they outperformed on a stereotypically masculine task. During a staged interaction, participants saw their male partner make comments that expressed threat (e.g., "oh my god, I can't believe I just got beat by a girl") or no threat (e.g., "we'll make a good team"). In addition, the power dynamics were altered to manipulate whether women fear punishment. Participants were assigned to high or low power positions, given that power can be defined as "the potential to influence others in psychologically meaningful ways" (French & Raven, 1959) through the conferring or withholding of rewards and/or punishments (Fiske, 1993; Keltner et al., 2003; Vescio et al., 2003, 2005). Thus, high power female participants would control financial resources and therefore should not fear the possibility of punishment. However, because low power participants would not control financial rewards, instead depending on the decisions of powerful others for monetary rewards, they should believe that they might be vulnerable to punishment from a male superior.

The study, therefore, used a masculinity threat (threat or no threat) X power (high or low) between participants design to examine whether competent women in masculine domains respond to masculinity threats with an effort to appease. As noted above, I was particularly interested in whether women might use self-sexualizing appeasement strategies when they fear punishment from threatened males. Therefore, two forms of self-sexualization were measured: sexualized self-presentation and sexualized joking. Sexualized self-presentation is a subtle form of self-sexualization assessed by examining how revealing clothes selected by participants were. The second form of self-sexualization, sexualized joking, involved participants choosing between sexual and nonsexual jokes to tell, which can indirectly sexualize the self via the sexualization of one's gender in-group<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Sexual joking may be unique in that sexualized jokes might simultaneously sexualize the self and women in general whereas sexualized self-presentation sexualizes only the self. Simultaneously sexualizing the self and other women might be a particularly "effective" way of appeasing masculinity threat because it suggests male dominance over both oneself and many other women.

## Chapter 3: Method

### Experimental Design

The experiment used a participant power (high, low) X masculinity threat (threat, no threat) X type of appeasement (sexualized self-presentation, sexualized joking) X appeasement order (self-presentation first, joking first) factorial design. Participant power, masculinity threat, and appeasement order were between-participant factors in this design, whereas type as appeasement was a within-participant factor.

### Participants

Participants were 205 undergraduate women at The Pennsylvania State University. Data from 10 participants were removed prior to data analysis due to suspicion. Of the remaining 195 participants, 145 identified as White, 17 as Asian, 15 as Black or African American, 9 as Hispanic or Latina, 4 as biracial or multiracial, 2 as Middle Eastern, and 3 did not indicate their ethnicity. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 41 ( $M = 19.21$ ,  $SD = 2.05$ ) and received partial course credit for taking part in the study.

### Procedure

Participants took part in the study in groups of five to eight people. In each session at least one male was present to enhance the cover story. Data collected from male participants was used in a separate study. Upon arrival, participants signed a consent form and were told they would be working with others to complete a marketing and leadership task. Participants were led to believe that success on this task predicts general academic and professional success. In addition, participants believed doing well on the task requires strong strategic thinking skills and ability to influence others. Prior research (Vescio et al., 2003, 2005) suggests that this task is perceived as a stereotypically masculine task, especially when the task is described as being predictive of career success. Participants were given 10 minutes to complete an initial skills test

consisting of 10 multiple-choice logic and quantitative problems. After completing the initial skills assessment test, participants were led to believe that they had been randomly paired with a partner with whom they would have to work on another strategic thinking task at the end of the study. In reality, all participants were assigned a fictitious male partner and all teammate interactions were staged. Importantly, all participants saw fictitious scores from the initial skills assessment task and believed that they outperformed their male teammate on a masculine task.

Participants were then randomly assigned to the leader (high power) or employee (low power) role and it was emphasized that leaders were not chosen based on initial skills assessment scores. Participants were told that the team leader would be in charge of assigning various tasks to themselves and their partner. Because participants believed that teams could potentially earn money later in the study, the leader's ability to assign tasks would play an important role in whether participants might have the opportunity to earn money.

The cover story suggested that teams are most effective when they first engage in several "getting acquainted" or "icebreaker" tasks. Participants were asked to fill out an *emotions questionnaire* while their teammate composed their icebreaker message (see Appendix A and exploratory variables for more details). Participants then received an initial email from their teammate. This email included basic likes (e.g. favorite musician), personal information (e.g. hometown), and an avatar, or cartoon representation, of their teammate.

Importantly, the email also contained the masculinity threat manipulation. Participants were randomly assigned to receive a masculinity threat or a non-threatened comment. In the masculinity threat condition, the email contained the comment "*oh my god, I can't believe I just got beat by a girl.*" This threat comment indicated that his masculinity was threatened because a woman outperformed him on a stereotypically masculine task. By contrast, the no threat

comment contained a note indicating he thought “*we’ll make a good team.*” This comment was designed to indicate that no masculinity threat is occurred. Both partner comments were pilot tested in order to confirm they conveyed appropriate levels of threat/non-threat.

Participants then completed their own icebreaker questionnaire which they believed would be sent to their male teammate. This icebreaker questionnaire contained two measures of self-sexualization and filler items used to enhance the cover story. After ostensibly sending their icebreaker information to their teammates, participants were asked to fill out a series of questionnaires about various exploratory variables (see below). Finally, participants were verbally probed for suspicion, thanked and debriefed.

## Measures

**Self-sexualization.** The primary dependent variable, self-sexualization, was operationalized in two ways: sexualized self-presentations and sexualized joking. After receiving their teammate’s icebreaker questionnaire and initial threat/no threat comment, participants constructed their own icebreaker email. Participants were randomly assigned to complete either the sexualized self-presentation or sexualized joking measure first. Next, participants completed the other measure of self-sexualization<sup>6</sup>.

**Sexualized self-presentation.** Participants created an avatar to represent themselves and send with their email messages to their teammate. All avatars were created using <http://elouai.com/candybar4/dollmakergirl.php>. Participants chose from a list of 12 preselected outfits consisting of jeans and a top. The only thing differing between each outfit was the top the avatar was wearing. Importantly, participants chose from equal numbers of bikini tops, small tank tops (with thin straps and cleavage showing), sleeveless shirts (with thicker straps and no

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<sup>6</sup>Although order effects were not expected for the self-sexualized dependent variables, the order of the two variables was counterbalanced in case participants felt that one and only one appeasement behavior was necessary to relieve threat.

cleavage showing), short sleeved shirts, long sleeved shirts, and winter coats (see Appendix B). These tops varied in the amount of skin exposed by the clothes and served as a measure of self-sexualization. Clothes were coded on a 0 (winter coat) to 5 (bikini top) scale with 5 representing the most sexualized clothing selection. Clothes were selected based on pilot testing data about how fashionable outfits were rated. With the exception of the two bikini tops, which were rated as less fashionable, all outfits were rated as equally fashionable.<sup>7</sup> After picking out clothes, participants then selected a personalized head for their avatar in order to further the cover story. The selected avatar heads were neither pilot tested nor coded.

***Sexual joking.*** The cover story also indicated that research has shown that humor is an excellent way to build group cohesion among newly formed work groups. Participants were asked to look over a list of eight jokes (four sexual and four nonsexual; see Appendix C) and select two from the list to send to their partner. All jokes were pilot tested to ensure that they were equated in terms of funniness and offensiveness. Given that sexualizing behavior is of interest, the jokes that each participant chose were coded as 0 = nonsexual or 1 = sexual jokes. The total number of sexual jokes sent (zero to two) served as the dependent variable.

***Exploratory variables.*** Participants were asked to complete a series of confidential questionnaires while their teammate ostensibly read over the icebreaker information that had just been sent to him. These questionnaires were included for exploratory purposes and no specific hypotheses or predictions pertaining to these measures were made. Instead, these questionnaires included items intended to serve a hypothesis generating rather than hypothesis testing function (e.g. to offer potential insight into the emotional effects of self-sexualization, whether self-sexualization affects self-stereotyping, and potential motivations behind self-sexualization).

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<sup>7</sup> Because bikini tops were rated as less fashionable, this provides a more stringent test of the hypothesis, as one would only predict participants to choose bikini tops over more fashionable, but less revealing clothes if a self-sexualizing appeasement strategy was driving participants clothing choices.

These exploratory measures included an emotions questionnaire that was completed prior to the exchange of ice breaker information. In addition, after the exchange of ice breaker information, participants completed items assessing their motivations as well as their perceptions of (a) the feedback from the skills test, (b) their partner, (c) team compatibility, and (d) themselves. Participants also completed a second emotions questionnaire and reported their perceptions of the jokes.

The *emotions questionnaire* contained items intended to tap anxiety (i.e., anxious, worried, stressed, nervous, fearful), insecurity (i.e., insecure, self-conscious), anger (i.e., angry, mad), optimism (i.e., optimistic, hopeful), and empowered (i.e., empowered, self-assured, confident, proud, attractive). The emotions of interest were embedded in a longer list of 40 total items (see Appendix A). Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they currently feel each emotion or cognition on a 1 (not at all) to 9 (extremely) scale.

The *motivations questionnaire* (see Appendix D) was designed to assess three motives, which include: (1) the motivation to be liked, respected, and socially included (e.g. I want my teammate to like me; I want my teammate to feel comfortable with me); (2) the motivation to be seen as feminine or attractive by their teammate (e.g. I want my teammate to think I'm feminine; I want my teammate to think I'm cute); and (3) the fear of backlash or punishment (e.g. I'm worried my teammate will treat me unfairly). Filler items regarding how masculine participants wanted to be and be perceived as were also included in order to balance femininity items and bolster the cover story that men were also taking part in the same study. All items were rated on a 1 (completely disagree) to 6 (completely agree) scale.

The *perceptions of experimental feedback questionnaire* (see Appendix E) assessed whether participants were satisfied with the results of the initial skills test and the random power

assignment. This questionnaire was included in order to determine whether women might question the legitimacy of randomized leadership assignments. All items were rated on a 1 (completely disagree) to 6 (completely agree) scale.

Participants also rated a) themselves and b) their partner on a number of traits relating to *warmth and competence* (all items taken from Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2003). Warmth items included: sincere, good-natured, warm, friendly, well-intentioned, and trustworthy. Competence items included: competent, intelligent, confident, capable, efficient, and skillful. Several filler items were also included: determined, practical, lazy, fun, tolerant, independent, competitive, and unorganized. All items were rated on a 1 (not at all) to 6 (extremely) scales.

The *teammate compatibility measure* assessed how well participants thought she and her partner would be able to work together. This measure contained 10 items (see Appendix F), each rated on a 1 (completely disagree) to 6 (completely agree) scale.

Finally, each participant also completed a *joke assessment measure*, designed to gain insight into how participants perceived the jokes they sent to their teammate (see Appendix G). The joke assessment measure replicates and expands upon pilot testing used to select the final list of jokes used in the study.

## Chapter 4: Results

Sexualized self-presentations and sexualized joking were each submitted to a separate Participant Power (high, low) X Masculinity Threat (threat, no threat) X Appeasement Order (self-presentation first, joking first) ANOVA.<sup>8</sup> A single significant effect emerged from these analyses.

A main effect of masculinity threat emerged on *sexualized self-presentation*,  $F(1, 187) = 10.92, p < .01, \eta^2 = .052$ ; participants in the threat condition chose more sexually revealing outfits ( $\bar{x} = 2.32, SD = 1.50$ ) than those in the no threat condition ( $\bar{x} = 1.66, SD = 1.44$ ). No other significant main effects or interactions emerged and the hypothesized Threat X Power interaction did not approach significance,  $F_s < 1.2, p_s > .27$ .

An analysis of sexual joking revealed no main or interactive effects that approached significance, all  $F_s(1, 187) < 1.2$ , all  $p_s > .29$ . A total of 87 participants selected two nonsexual jokes, 87 participants selected one sexual and one nonsexual joke, and 21 participants selected two sexual jokes.

### Exploratory Variables

In addition to examining whether women self-sexualized, data from a variety of exploratory variables were analyzed. For a full list of correlations between the primary self-sexualization and all exploratory variables, see Tables 1 (threat condition) and 2 (no threat condition). These correlations were calculated for exploratory purposes and were not associated with specific a priori hypotheses.

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<sup>8</sup> There is theoretical reason to suspect that self-sexualizing appeasement strategies might be a predominately White phenomenon. Specifically, women of color who are often stereotyped as hyper-sexual might avoid using self-sexualizing appeasement strategies. However, the same pattern of findings emerged when parallel analyses were performed excluding all non-White participants.

**Motivations.** Participants responses to the motivation items were factor analyzed using a principal components analysis using a varimax rotation<sup>9</sup>. The scree plot indicated a three factor solution with factors representing motives for social inclusion, to appear attractive, and avoid backlash (see Appendix D). Seven items loaded on the first factor (e.g. I want my teammate to think I'm attractive), which accounted for 21.3% of the variance. Scores for these seven items were averaged to create an Attractiveness variable ( $\alpha = .83$ ). Seven items loaded on the second factor (e.g. I'm worried my teammate is not going to give me good jobs), which accounted for 19.9% of the variance. Scores for these items were averaged to create a Fear of Backlash factor ( $\alpha = .86$ ). Finally, 4 items loaded on the third factor (e.g. I want my teammate to include me in tasks), which accounted for 17.1% of the variance. I averaged across these four items to create a Social Inclusion variable ( $\alpha = .86$ ). Two items (I want my teammate to think I'm fun; I want my teammate to think I'm cool) cross-loaded and were therefore excluded from further analyses.

To examine whether social inclusion, attractiveness, or fear of backlash motives might qualify as a mediator between masculinity threat and sexualized appeasement strategies, each subscale was submitted to a Power X Masculinity Threat X Appeasement Order ANOVA. If a main effect of threat emerged (paralleling findings for sexualized self-presentation) then meditational analyses would have been performed following Baron and Kenny's (1986) recommendations. While the placement of the motivations survey after the sexualized self-presentation variable would have placed limitations on the ability to draw conclusions about a true mediation, no parallel main effects actually emerged on any of the three subscales. None of the motivations met the preconditions of a mediator. In other words, the parallel threat main effect did not approach significance in any of the three analysis, all  $F_s < 2.1$ ,  $p_s > .14$ .

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<sup>9</sup> One item was excluded from analyses because of an ambiguous meaning and poor correlations with other items: "I want my teammate to respond to me based solely on my scores."

In order to further examine potential motivations associated with self-sexualizing appeasement strategies, data were separated by threat conditions. Correlations were then calculated between self-presentation, joking, social inclusion motivations, attractiveness motivations, and fear of backlash motivations (see Tables 1 and 2). In the no threat condition, there were no significant correlations between the self-sexualization variables and any of the motivation variables. By contrast, in the masculinity threat condition, sexualized self-presentation was significantly correlated with the attractiveness motivation. More specifically, among women in the threat condition, selections of more revealing outfits were associated with greater desires to be viewed as attractive.

**Partner evaluations.** Data from the partner evaluations survey were factor analyzed with a principal components analysis using a varimax rotation. As indicated by the scree plot, a single factor solution emerged from this analysis. Therefore, I averaged across participants responses to create a partner evaluation variable ( $\alpha = .95$ ). To examine whether men who are threatened by female competence are perceived differently than men who do not express threat, partner evaluations were then submitted to a Power X Masculinity Threat X Appeasement Order ANOVA. No significant main or interactive effects emerged from this analysis ( $\bar{x} = 4.6$ ,  $SD = .63$ , all  $F_s < 2.75$ ,  $p_s > .10$ ).

**Teammate compatibility.** Teammate compatibility ratings were submitted to a principal components factor analysis using a varimax rotation. Again, the scree plot revealed a single factor solution and I reverse-scored appropriate items before averaging across items to create a single teammate compatibility index ( $\alpha = .86$ ).

To examine whether participants who used self-sexualized anticipated better working relations with their teammate than women who did not sexualize themselves, correlations

between self-sexualization and teammate compatibility were analyzed separately for participants in the threat and no threat conditions.<sup>10</sup> If women believed their self-sexualization would appease masculinity threats and effectively improve working relationships then one might expect a positive correlation between self-sexualization and teammate compatibility in threat conditions. However, no significant correlations emerged for either threat condition between teammate compatibility and sexualized self-presentations ( $r_s < .15$ ,  $p_s > .13$ ) or sexual joking ( $r_s < .17$ ,  $p_s > .08$ ).

**Self-evaluations.** Self ratings were submitted to a principal components factor analysis using a varimax rotation. Only one factor emerged that accounted for more than ten percent of the variance. This single factor had a reliability coefficient of  $\alpha = .91$ . Self-evaluations were then submitted to a Power X Masculinity Threat X Appeasement Order ANOVA, however, no significant effects emerged (all  $F_s < 3.30$ ,  $p_s > .70$ ).

To gain insight into whether self-sexualizing appeasement strategies affected self-perceptions, correlations were estimated within threat and no threat conditions. This was done separately for warmth and competence items despite the emergence of a single factor solution in order to investigate whether women could self-sexualize following threats without sacrificing feelings of self-competence. As shown in Tables 1 and 2, within threat conditions, correlations were estimated between sexualized self-presentation, sexual joking, warmth, and competence.<sup>11</sup> Within the threat condition, an unexpected positive correlation between sexual joking and self-competence was the only significant correlation to emerge. Similarly, within the no threat

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<sup>10</sup> A Threat X Power X Appeasement Order ANOVA was not used for these analyses because participants' expectations about compatibility might depend on whether they a) attempted to appease a threat and b) felt their appeasement would be effective.

<sup>11</sup> Warmth and competence variables were created by averaging across items used in previous research on the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). Warmth items included sincere, warm, well-intentioned, good-natured, friendly, and trustworthy ( $\alpha = .89$ ). Competence items included competent, intelligent, skillful, confident, efficient, and capable ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

condition, only the unexpected positive correlation between sexual joking and self-rated competence emerged as significant.

**Emotions.** To explore whether self-sexualizing behaviors were associated with particular emotions or cognitions, data was separated by threat condition and correlations were calculated between emotion/cognition factors of interest and both types of self-sexualization variables.

A self-consciousness variable was created by averaging participants' scores on the Time 2 self-conscious and insecure items (the resulting factor had an acceptably high reliability coefficient,  $\alpha = .76$ ). Among participants in the threat condition, there was a significant positive correlation between sexualized self-presentation and self-consciousness ( $r = .25, p = .016$ ). In contrast, among participants in the no threat condition, there was a significant negative correlation between sexualized self-presentation and self-consciousness, ( $r = -.20, p = .039$ ).

Parallel analyses were carried out for additional factors, however, no other significant correlations were found.<sup>12,13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The following factors were submitted to parallel analyses: Anxiety (anxious, fearful, worried, stressed, nervous); Anger (angry, mad); Hopeful (hopeful, optimistic); and Empowered (empowered, confident, self-assured, attractive, proud). All factors had acceptable reliability coefficients ( $\alpha > .75$ ).

<sup>13</sup> As noted in the method, participants also completed a joke assessment (see Appendix G) and reported their perceptions of the experimental feedback (e.g., degree that they believed skills tests and thought they should be assigned to the power position to which they were assigned, see Appendix E). No theoretical meaningful effects emerged from these analyses. Instead, for the joke assessment two factors emerged: a funniness factor (I think the jokes I sent were funny, I think my teammate will find the jokes I sent funny, and I think my teammate will like the jokes I sent;  $\alpha = .88$ ) and offensiveness factor (I think the jokes I sent were offensive, and I think my teammate will find the jokes I sent offensive;  $\alpha = .74$ ). Both factors were submitted to a Threat X Power X Appeasement Order ANOVA. A main effect of threat emerged for both factors ( $F_s > 5.08, p_s < .025$ ) such that in threat conditions jokes sent were viewed as funnier and less offensive than in no threat conditions. Additionally, for the perceptions of experimental feedback survey (see Appendix E) a single factor emerged ( $\alpha = .70$ ) and was submitted to a parallel ANOVA. However, no significant effects emerged ( $F_s < 1.96, p_s > .16$ ).

## Chapter 5: Discussion

Consistent with the notion that women use self-sexualizing appeasement strategies to avoid aggressive responses to masculinity threats, findings from this study revealed that women selected more revealing clothing in the masculinity threat condition compared to the no threat condition. Female participants responded to teammates who expressed masculinity threats by choosing avatars with more revealing outfits than when teammates did not express masculinity threats. This finding is also consistent with previous research showing that women fear backlash and will even hide their accomplishments in masculine domains to avoid backlash (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). However, to the degree that a woman's success appears to threaten a man's masculinity and she is unable or unwilling to hide her success, she may engage in an appeasement strategy such as self-sexualization.

Interestingly, parallel findings were not found for the self-sexualization variables: sexualized self-presentation and sexual joking. In response to threat, women selected more revealing clothing, but were not more likely to select jokes with sexual content. There are a number of reasons why effects may have emerged on sexualized presentations but not joking. First, the sexualized joking sexualizes women in general (and the self perhaps only by association), whereas sexualized self-presentations sexualize the self solely and directly. In the present experimental context, the female participants were the direct source of threat to masculinity given their superior performance on a masculine task. It may be that when a woman is the direct source of threat she is more likely to appease by sexualizing herself directly (through sexualized self-presentations) rather than women in general (through sexual joking). Alternatively, the sexualization of the self through clothing versus open joking may vary in terms of subtlety and women might prefer subtle appeasement strategies to more blatant strategies. Given

the choice to use a subtle method of appeasement such as exposing cleavage versus a highly explicit sexual joke, a subtler approach may be preferable. Women who use blatant appeasement strategies may risk pushing self-sexualization to the point of being viewed as a “bimbo”, dumb blond”, or manipulative “femme fatale”. Prewritten jokes with sexual punch lines might be considered especially blatant and unnatural. Perhaps spontaneous sexual joking or banter would be considered more subtle and acceptable than telling prefabricated sex jokes (especially jokes that were previously rated as not particularly funny).

Importantly and contrary to predictions, both low and high power female participants responded with sexualized self-presentations following masculinity threats. It was hypothesized that low power women would fear backlash more than high power women, and that low power women would therefore be particularly prone to self-sexualization. Contrary to this logic, there was a significant main effect of threat on self-sexualization, which was not qualified by women’s power. It is possible that both high and low power women use appeasement strategies in the face of threatened masculinity in an attempt to reduce hostility and make interactions more pleasant. While high power women might not fear economic backlash from subordinates they may still fear social or sexual aggression from threatened men. This fear may motivate women to appease masculinity threats regardless of leader/employee roles. Women might simply be accustomed to using appeasement strategies and believe that these strategies are easier than having to deal with future hostility from their subordinate. The combination of the frequency with which women are treated as sexual objects in society and how highly masculinity is revered in our culture may contribute to why both high and low power women attempt to appease threats with self-sexualizing behavior.

Alternatively, these findings may be a product of the way that power was manipulated within the study. Participants were told that leaders would delegate tasks later on in the study and that successful teams would have the opportunity to earn additional cash prizes. Therefore, it was implied that leaders would have an impact on whether additional money would be earned but it was not made explicitly clear that the team leader would be able to distribute or withhold rewards. Before making strong conclusions that women employ similar levels of self-sexualizing appeasement strategies regardless of power, additional research should be done examining whether women with more explicit high power roles also self-sexualize. Future research is needed to explore the boundary conditions under which power may impact self-sexualizing appeasement strategies.

In sum, the findings from this initial examination of the hypothesis that women may self-sexualize in attempts to appease masculinity threats when they are low in power revealed findings that were partially consistent with predictions. Women showed stronger tendencies to subtly self-sexualize (through the selection of more revealing clothing) in masculinity threat condition than in the no threat condition, but contrary to predictions this tendency was equally strong among high and low power women. As noted above, before strong conclusions can be made regarding the tendency for both high power and low power women to self-sexualize in response to masculinity threat, additional research is needed to assure the effectiveness of power manipulations. In addition, further research is needed to elaborate the means by which women may choose to self-sexualize and to determine what dimensions are critical determinants of self-sexualization.

### **Motivations for Self-Sexualizing Appeasement Strategies**

In addition to the sexualization dependent variables, several exploratory variables were assessed at the end of the experiment. Analyses were first performed to determine whether motivations mediated the relation between threat and sexualized-self presentations. These analyses revealed no mediator, perhaps not surprisingly given their completion at the end of the experiment. However, analyses of motivation did reveal some interesting patterns that point to areas potentially worthy of subsequent attention.

First, more sexualized self-presentations were associated with greater motivations to be seen as attractive by teammates in the threat condition. However, when masculinity threats were not present, there was no significant association between sexualized self-presentations and attractiveness motivations. Due to the placement the attractiveness questionnaire it is unclear whether being exposed to masculinity threats increased participants desires to be viewed as attractive, which then lead to more sexualized self-presentations or whether being exposed to masculinity threats lead women to engage in sexualized self-presentation appeasement strategies that in turn increased women's desires to be viewed as attractive.

Additionally, fear of backlash was not associated with self-sexualization. Given that fear of backlash was measured after the opportunity to appease, it is possible that women who engaged in self-sexualization believed they had already successfully appeased masculinity threats and therefore no longer feared backlash. Therefore, additional studies in which fear of backlash is measured prior to appeasement opportunities are needed to determine whether fear of backlash motivates self-sexualizing appeasement strategies. Interestingly, in the threat condition, greater fears of backlash were associated with greater motivations to be viewed as attractive (while no significant relationship existed in the absence of masculinity threats). This finding is consistent with the idea that women who most want to be viewed as attractive (and are worried

that their partner will not view them as such) are concerned that their appearance-based sexualizing appeasement strategy might not have effectively appeased threat. One might expect elevated fears of backlash when women are concerned that their self-sexualizing strategy is not effective because their partner does not view them as attractive.

Initial data does not support the notion that women use self-sexualizing appeasement strategies because of affiliative motives. If affiliative motives drove self-sexualization then one would have expected positive correlations between self-sexualization and the social inclusion subscale of the motivations questionnaire. This would have indicated that women who self-sexualized had strong desires to be liked and included. Additionally, if affiliative motives drove self-sexualizing appeasement strategies then one would expect positive correlations between self-sexualization and teammate compatibility, indicating a desire for social harmony. However, self-sexualization was not significantly correlated with the social inclusion or teammate compatibility, suggesting that affiliative desires do not motivate self-sexualizing appeasement strategies.

Additionally, this study provides no evidence that women's self-sexualizing appeasement strategies are motivated by feelings of sexual empowerment or liberation. There were no significant correlations between self-sexualization and feelings of empowerment or confidence. Additionally, for women exposed to masculinity threats, greater sexualized self-presentations were associated with greater feelings of self-consciousness and insecurity. This suggests that women who use self-sexualizing appeasement strategies are not motivated by sexual empowerment. Rather, the selection of revealing clothing seems to have differential emotional correlates for women depending on whether these women were exposed to masculinity threats. Unlike women exposed to masculinity threats, for those in the no threat conditions greater

sexualized self-presentations were associated with lower levels of self-consciousness and insecurity. Therefore, it might be possible to argue that self-sexualization in the absence of masculinity threats might be liberating in some ways. However, data suggests that sexualizing appeasement strategies may make women feel uncomfortable. A rise in self-conscious emotions following self-sexualizing appeasement strategies may have serious negative performance implications for women that could hinder, rather than provide, opportunities for advancement in masculine domains.

### **Implications and Future Research Directions**

Self-sexualization is an important appeasement strategy on which to initially focus for several reasons. First, self-sexualizing behavior is frequent in the United States, as evidenced by the rise of “raunch culture” (Levy, 2005), highly sexualized female athletes, and ethnographic accounts of masculine domains (e.g. Fine, 1987). Second, self-sexualization may be an “effective” way to appease masculinity because of the powerful automatic associations that women and men have between sex, submissiveness, and dominance (Bargh et al., 1995; Sanchez et al., 2006). Furthermore, provided that women do not over sexualize themselves (thereby evoking stereotypes of the bimbo, dumb blond, or manipulative femme fatale), using self-sexualization as an appeasement strategy may allow women to ameliorate threats while still being perceived as competent by others and themselves. Other research confirms that even the use of blatant sexual joking as an appeasement strategy does diminish a woman’s perceived competence for third male party viewers (Schlenker & Vescio, 2010). Additionally, third party female viewers actually perceive women who use blatant sexual joking to appease threats as significantly more competent than other women (Schlenker & Vescio, 2010). Therefore, the use of self-sexualizing appeasement strategies does not appear to damage women’s perceived

competence. Despite the potential initial “effectiveness” of self-sexualizing appeasement strategies, it is reasonable to wonder whether self-sexualization may have some adverse longer-term consequences for women.

**Possible consequences of self-sexualizing appeasement strategies.** Self-sexualization may have the ironic effect of increasing sexist behavior and sexual harassment directed towards women. Self-sexualized presentations may be interpreted by some men as an external cue indicating that objectification and sexual harassment is acceptable. However, even if sexual harassment does not increase, many people might dismiss reports of sexual harassment or assault from women who use sexualizing appeasement strategies as being less serious than other cases. Examples of this can be seen in the numerous rape cases in which people have argued a woman was “asking for it” because of her provocative clothing.

Additionally, self-sexualizing appeasement strategies may impair women’s future performance on cognitive tasks. For women responding to threats, sexualized self-presentations were associated with greater feelings of self-consciousness and insecurity. Previous research indicates that when women self-objectify and experience self-conscious emotions, cognitive performance (e.g. performance on math tests) is negatively impacted (Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998). Future research should examine the full range of consequences for self-sexualizing appeasement strategies.

**Are self-sexualizing appeasement strategies empowering?** While there is much debate within feminist communities about whether self-sexualization is empowering, I argue that self-sexualization appeasement strategies are more likely to disempower and oppress than empower women. The verb *empower* is defined as 1) “to promote the self-actualization or influence of”; 2) “to provide with the means or opportunity” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2009); and 3)

“to give authority or power to; authorize” (Compact Oxford English Dictionary, 2009). One might argue that if self-sexualization frees women from real or feared punishment and alienation in masculine domains then self-sexualization could be considered an empowering strategy by providing women with opportunities to gain (or maintain) status as influential individuals in masculine domains. However, given that these appeasement strategies consist of submissive sexualized behaviors that authorize (or rather, can be perceived as authorizing) males to objectify female actors, self-sexualization could be conceptualized as further empowering men’s dominance over women. Women in masculine domains who threaten masculinity are forced to choose between inaction (thereby risking becoming the target of physical, sexual, and social aggression) and actively engaging in an appeasement strategy that may also lead to negative consequences. Initial data suggests that women who use self-sexualizing appeasement strategies following threats do not feel empowered or liberated, rather they experience increased levels of self-consciousness. Therefore, when masculinity threats occur, women may be stuck in a situation in which no good options exist. This catch-22 should not be considered empowering to women; rather it should be deemed oppressive.

**Other potential appeasement strategies.** In addition to sexualized self-presentation or sexual joking there are likely numerous alternative strategies that women might use to try to appease masculinity threats and avoid physical, sexual, and social aggression. For example, a woman may ingratiate and offer praise about men’s competence, physical strength, independence, toughness, etc. in order to reinforce the idea that men possess these key components of masculinity. Likewise, asking a man for help may provide him with a way to demonstrate that he possess masculinity’s key features. Alternatively, a woman could play up external factors for success (e.g. luck) or make self-deprecating comments. Each of these

appeasement strategies deserves attention in future work. Specifically, research should address what additional appeasement strategies are used by women, when these alternative appeasement are used, whether they are “effective” at ameliorating threat, and what consequences follow from each strategy (e.g. whether perceptions of female competence are diminished).

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

The theory and research presented here offers important insight into the ways women respond when men's masculinity is threatened. When women are aware that they have threatened the masculinity of a man, they engage in self-sexualization to try to appease masculinity threat and potentially to try to avoid punishment. Future research should examine numerous questions including whether women with more explicit forms of power appease, how women who engage in various appeasement strategies are perceived by men and other women, the "effectiveness" and consequences of various appeasement strategies, how situational factors and individual difference variables affect which appeasement strategies women employ, and whether women consciously or unconsciously employ various appeasement strategies.

Prior research on masculinity threat has focused on when masculinity threats occur and men's compensatory attempts to restore masculinity (using physical, sexual, and social aggression). However, given the frequency with which women are the targets of men's compensatory aggression, research is needed to determine how women attempt to react to masculinity threats. This research takes the first step towards learning more about women's reactions to masculinity threats by addressing women's use of self-sexualizing appeasement strategies. Thus, this research begins to move away from viewing women solely as the passive targets of male compensatory aggression; instead, encouraging a movement to view women as active agents who negotiate the potential costs and benefits of their own actions in sexist situations.

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Table 1

*Correlations within Threat Condition.*

	Joking	Social Inclusion	Attractiveness	Fear of Backlash	Partner Competence	Partner Warmth	Teammate Compatibility	Self-Competence	Self-Warmth	Insecure	Empowered	Anxiety	Anger	Hopeful	Experimental Feedback
Self-Presentation	.19	-.05	.34**	.11	-.03	.12	.08	.01	.08	.25*	.15	.17	.08	.03	.29**
Joking	1	.17	.04	-.08	.02	-.02	.10	.31**	.09	-.20	.10	-.06	-.01	.04	-.01
Social Inclusion		1	.32**	.04	.17	.23*	.32**	.26*	.22*	-.02	.18	.06	-.09	.18	.14
Attractiveness			1	.24*	.20	.34**	.18	.13	.13	.26*	.18	.25*	.15	.13	.32**
Fear of Backlash				1	-.03	.00	-.37**	-.22*	-.18	.51**	.08	.54**	.42**	-.11	.06
Partner Competence					1	.87**	.45**	-.01	.01	.04	.04	.03	-.14	.14	.00
Partner Warmth						1	.48**	-.04	.04	.07	.12	.06	-.14	.23*	.14
Teammate Compatibility							1	.25*	.28**	-.36**	.29**	-.36**	-.35**	.40**	.29**
Self-Competence								1	.67**	-.23*	.18	-.12	-.06	.25*	.26*
Self-Warmth									1	-.16	.13	-.11	-.23*	.28**	.18
Insecure Time 2										1	.00	.69**	.41**	-.05	-.03
Empowered Time 2											1	-.01	.07	.74**	.39**
Anxiety Time 2												1	.64**	-.12	.07
Anger Time 2													1	-.22*	.10
Hopeful Time 2														1	.34**

\*\*  $p < .01$ \*  $p < .05$

Table 2

*Correlations within No Threat Condition.*

	Joking	Social Inclusion	Attractiveness	Fear of Backlash	Partner Competence	Partner Warmth	Teammate Compatibility	Self-Competence	Self-Warmth	Insecure	Empowered	Anxiety	Anger	Hopeful	Experimental Feedback
Self-Presentation	.12	-.06	.03	-.17	.02	-.04	.15	.16	.12	-.20*	.02	-.11	.05	.15	.16
Joking	1	-.03	.04	-.05	.03	.05	.17	.22*	.14	-.08	.04	-.01	.04	.01	.12
Social Inclusion		1	.17	-.18	.27**	.27**	.32**	.37**	.32**	-.04	.09	.14	-.02	.08	.26**
Attractiveness			1	.12	.12	.13	.14	.23*	.25*	.04	.29**	.01	.04	.33**	.33**
Fear of Backlash				1	-.33**	-.20*	-.41**	-.36**	-.38**	.36**	-.13	.26**	.34**	-.13	-.18
Partner Competence					1	.81**	.62**	.55**	.59**	-.21*	.41**	-.07	-.24*	.45**	.26**
Partner Warmth						1	.60**	.53**	.59**	-.06	.41**	.08	-.19*	.41**	.25*
Teammate Compatibility							1	.64**	.63**	-.44**	.41**	-.23*	-.34**	.42**	.36**
Self-Competence								1	.81**	-.28**	.41**	-.08	-.26**	.44**	.45**
Self-Warmth									1	-.15	.34**	-.07	-.33**	.45**	.42**
Insecure Time 2										1	-.14	.60**	.31**	-.11	-.14
Empowered Time 2											1	-.10	-.10	.74**	.26**
Anxiety Time 2												1	.38**	-.16	-.14
Anger Time 2													1	-.14	-.10
Hopeful Time 2														1	.24*

\*\*  $p < .01$ \*  $p < .05$

## Appendix A

### Emotions Questionnaire

1. Calm
2. Angry
3. Frustrated
4. Competent
5. Distressed
6. Sympathetic
7. Sad
8. Compassionate
9. Happy
10. Hostile
11. Anxious
12. Irritated
13. Optimistic
14. Agitated
15. Confident
16. Worried
17. Excited
18. Ashamed
19. Inspired
20. Stressed
21. Insecure
22. Enthusiastic
23. Self-assured
24. Down
25. Hopeful
26. Nervous
27. Attractive
28. Determined
29. Depressed
30. Mad
31. Proud
32. Upset
33. Relaxed
34. Empowered
35. Disappointed
36. Fearful
37. Self-conscious
38. Flattered
39. Apprehensive
40. Understanding

### Appendix B: Sexualized Self-Presentations

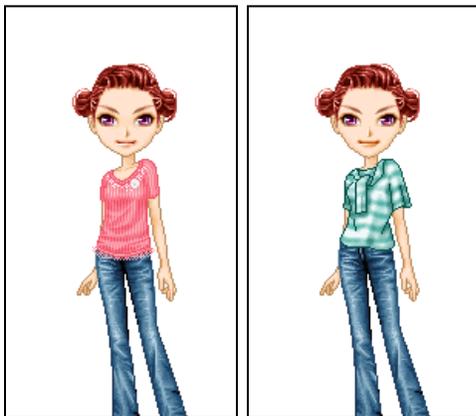
Winter Coats:



Long Sleeve Shirts:



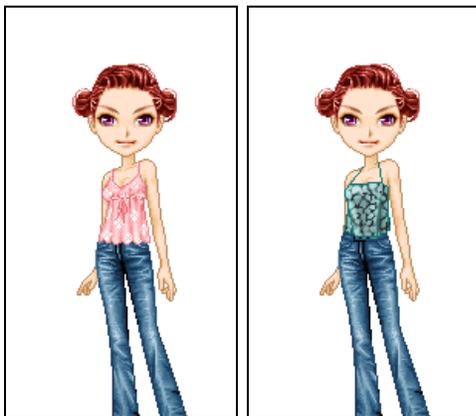
Short Sleeve Shirts:



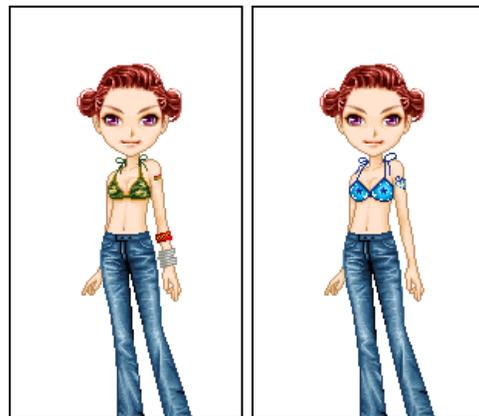
Sleeveless Shirts:



Small Tank Tops:



Bikini Tops:



## Appendix C: Sexualized Joking

### *Sexual Jokes:*

What's the best thing about a blow job?

The 15 minutes of silence.

What did Cinderella do when she got to the ball?

She choked...

Why do women wear flower print panties?

In commemoration of all the faces that were buried there.

How do you define "making love"?

It's what a woman does while a guy is screwing her.

### *Nonsexual Jokes:*

How did Helen Keller's parents punish her?

They stuck door knobs to the walls.

A doctor says, "I have terrible news Mr. Larson. You have cancer and you have Alzheimer's."

Mr. Larson says "Well, at least I don't have cancer."

How do you get a dead baby across the street?

Staple it to a chicken.

Why are Stevie Wonder's legs always wet?

Because his dog is blind too.

## Appendix D

### Motivations Questionnaire

1. I want my teammate to like me (S)
2. I want my teammate to respect me (S)
3. I want my teammate to include me in tasks (S)
4. I want my teammate to feel comfortable with me (S)
5. I think my teammate is unfair (F)
6. I think my teammate will try to undermine me/my performance (F)
7. I want my teammate to think I'm attractive (A)
8. I want my teammate to think I'm fun\*\*
9. I want my teammate to think I'm laid back (A)
10. I want my teammate to think I'm cool\*\*
11. I want my teammate to respond to me based solely on my scores\*\*\*
12. I want to look good to my teammate (A)
13. I want my teammate to think I'm cute (A)
14. I want my teammate to think I'm masculine\*
15. I want my teammate to think I'm feminine (A)
16. I want to be masculine\*
17. I want to be feminine (A)
18. I want my teammate to think I'm not uptight (A)
19. I'm worried my teammate is not going to give me good jobs (F)
20. I'm worried my teammate does not like me (F)
21. I'm worried my teammate will discriminate against me (F)
22. I'm worried my teammate will treat me unfairly (F)
23. I'm worried my teammate does not want to work with me (F)

(A) - Attractiveness Motive

(F) - Fear of Backlash Motive

(S) - Social Inclusion Motive

\*Indicates filler items.

\*\*Indicates that items cross-loaded (<.40) on multiple factors and were excluded.

\*\*\*Indicates item was excluded from analyses because of poor wording and low correlations with other items.

## Appendix E

### Perceptions of Experimental Feedback Questionnaire

1. I think I should be the team leader in this study
2. I think my teammate should be the team leader in this study (R)
3. I did well on my initial skills test
4. I am pleased with how I did on my initial skills test
5. I think the initial skills test was an accurate assessment of my abilities

(R) – Indicates item is reverse-coded.

## Appendix F

### Teammate Compatibility Scale

1. My teammate and I will make a good team
2. My teammate and I will be able to work well together
3. My teammate and I will have a difficult time getting along (R)
4. I will feel uncomfortable working with my teammate (R)
5. I look forward to working with my teammate
6. I think my teammate may feel uncomfortable working with me (R)
7. I like my teammate
8. I think my teammate wants to work with me
9. I want to work with my teammate
10. I think my teammate likes me

(R) – Indicates item is reverse-coded.

## Appendix G

### Joke Assessment Questionnaire

1. I think the jokes I sent were funny (F)
2. I think the jokes I sent were offensive (O)
3. I think my teammate will like the jokes I sent (F)
4. I think my teammate will dislike the jokes I sent\*
5. I think my teammate will find the jokes I sent funny (F)
6. I think my teammate will find the jokes I sent offensive (O)

(F) – Funniness Factor

(O) – Offensiveness Factor

\*Indicates that item cross-loaded ( $<.40$ ) on multiple factors and was excluded.