

To the Editors,

"Guessing Sexual Orientation: Heterosexuals' Ability to Accurately Estimate their Gaydar" [Kendig and Maresca, Volume 2, Number 1] addresses the issue of pervasive homophobia in our society. While I admire the intentions of the authors, I cannot help but notice flaws with the experimental design and data interpretation.

Kendig and Maresca explain that gay men are "flamboyant, maintain a higher level of hygiene and style than heterosexual men, and appear feminine in general" (p. 72) - or so the stereotypes would have us believe. These stereotypes help to divide the men in our society into two different groups, gay and straight, with corresponding sets of feminine or masculine attributes respectively. Further, these stereotypes lead to a bias towards gay men as mere pseudo men with lowered status. In an attempt to prove these stereotypes unreliable, and the subsequent bias towards gay men unfounded, the authors ask their participants to guess the sexual orientation of various men in photos selected from personal ads in the magazine Time Out New York. When the subjects proceed to guess incorrectly the authors argue that the stereotypes are unreliable and that homophobia, stemming from these stereotypes, is unfounded.

Kendig and Maresca's problems may be related to the existence of the "Fab Five" in the TV show "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy." Stereotypes evolve within a particular context (e.g., a big red food-producing square state in the 1970s) and cannot necessarily be plucked out of that context and applied to a different one (e.g., a big metropolis in the new millennium responsible for the creation of a beverage known as an "appletini"). The fact is that in these days of metrosexuality and heterosexual "nipping," "tucking," and "sucking," Time Out New York simply does not

provide the ideal stimulus material - the men in those ads do not accurately reflect the two distinct groups of men from which the gay stereotypes were initially developed. Rather, they reflect a singular anomalous group of generically "girly" New York City men. Therefore, the principle the authors are testing has been taken out of its original context to be "disproved" and then falsely reapplied back to the original context with a generalization.

In the end, I am afraid that Kendig and Maresca's study proves little more than the fact that many men (gay and straight) in New York City know the importance of "manscaping" and regular "manni"/"petties." If the ads were from the "I Voted for Bush/Cheney Times in a Big Red Food Producing Square State Daily Paper" the gay and straight men might be a bit easier to pick apart from one another. I would just look for the flannel shirt that was pink and accented with a tasteful broach.

Keep up the good work,
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