



# Perceptions of Disease Threats Drive Physical Disgust and Avoidance of Gay and Bisexual Men

Nicole Sornson, Jenna Lee, Sarah Nigro, & Angela G. Pirlott  
Department of Psychology, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

## Introduction

Our research sought to understand heterosexuals' sexual prejudices by applying the affordance management perspective which proposes that human cognition and behavior evolved to manage the perceived threats and opportunities (affordances) posed by others. Prejudices between groups arise due to threats perceived posed by outgroups, which elicit specific emotional and behavioral reactions to manage those perceived threats (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005). We integrate this with the fundamental motives theory (Kenrick et al., 2010) to suggest the most relevant threats are the ones to survival and reproduction, e.g., disease threats. Due to their association with anal sex and HIV/AIDS, we predicted physical disgust toward gay and bisexual men is driven by perceptions that they pose disease threats which elicits disease avoidant behaviors.

## Method

**Participants:** 309 heterosexual college students (123 men and 185 women)

**Design & Procedure.** In a within-subjects design, participants rated their perceptions of affordances posed by, emotional reactions to, and behavioral inclinations toward heterosexual, bisexual and gay/lesbian men and women.

**Perceived Disease Threat**—e.g., [TARGET] is likely to have HIV/AIDS.

**Physical Disgust**—physically disgusted and physically grossed out.

**Disease Avoidant Behaviors**—e.g., avoid sharing a private bathroom with a [TARGET]; avoid using the bathroom after a [TARGET] has used it; avoid using a hotel room after a [TARGET] has used it.

## Analyses, Results, & Discussion

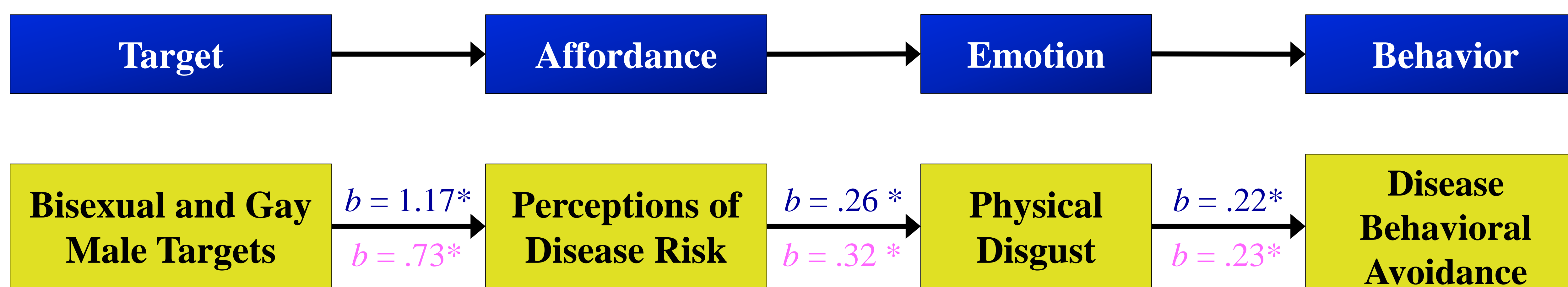
**Mixed ANOVAs.** We first performed mixed ANOVAs on each dependent variable and compared the pattern of means to determine the mediation model.

**Multilevel Mediation Analyses.** We recoded targets as gay and bisexual men versus all other targets. We next used multilevel regression analyses to predict the extent to which the targets predicted perceptions of disease threat which predicted physical disgust which predicted disease avoidant behaviors, separately for men and women.

**Results: Men.** Consistent with predictions, men perceived gay and bisexual male targets to pose disease risks, viewed them with greater levels of physical disgust, and avoided interactions which might pose transmission risks.

**Results: Women.** Less support emerged for women. They believed all groups to pose a greater disease risk relative to heterosexual female targets, viewed all non-heterosexual targets with disgust, but did report avoiding gay and bisexual male targets in interactions that might pose disease transmission risks.

## Mediation Analysis

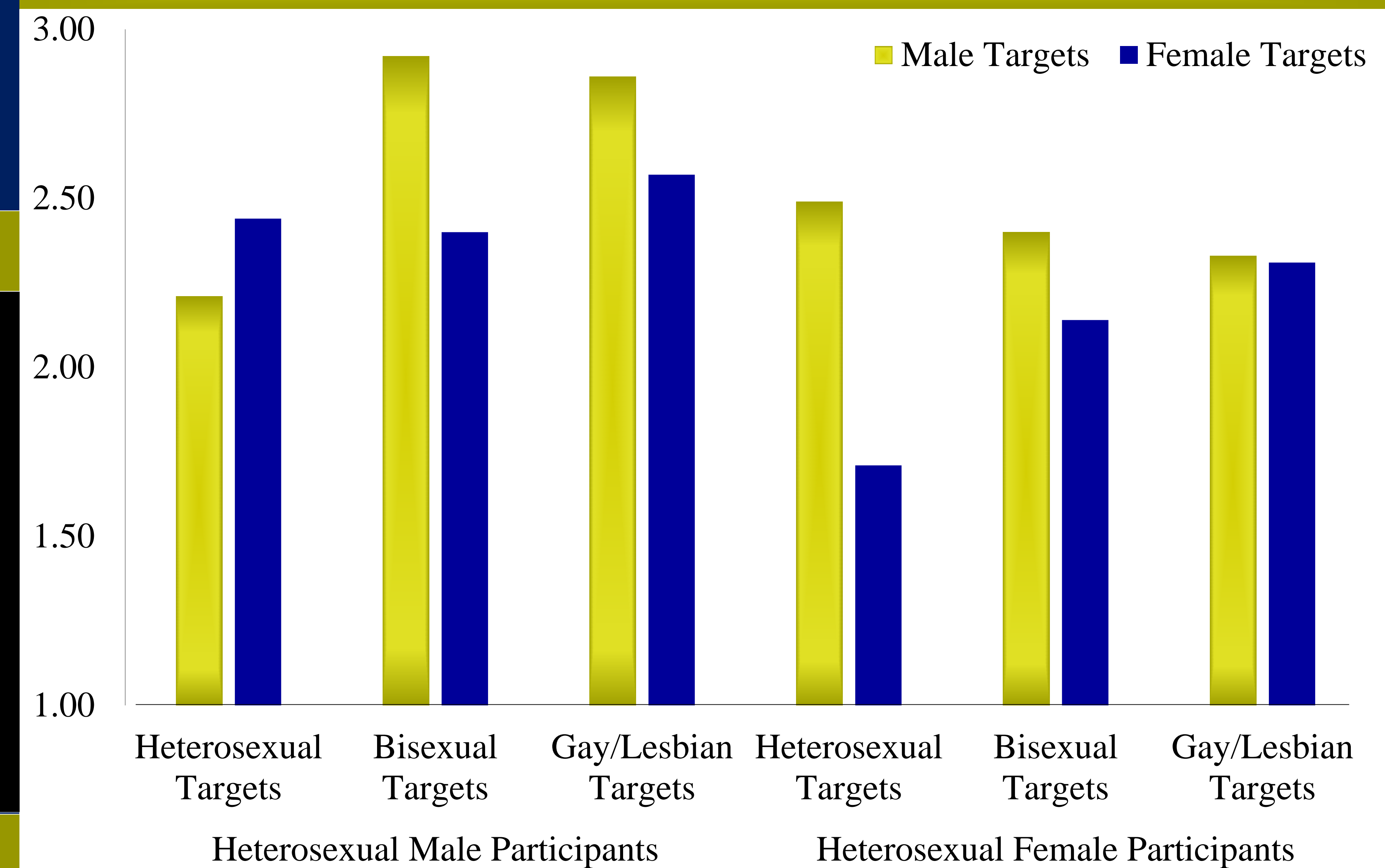


\* designates significance at  $p < .001$

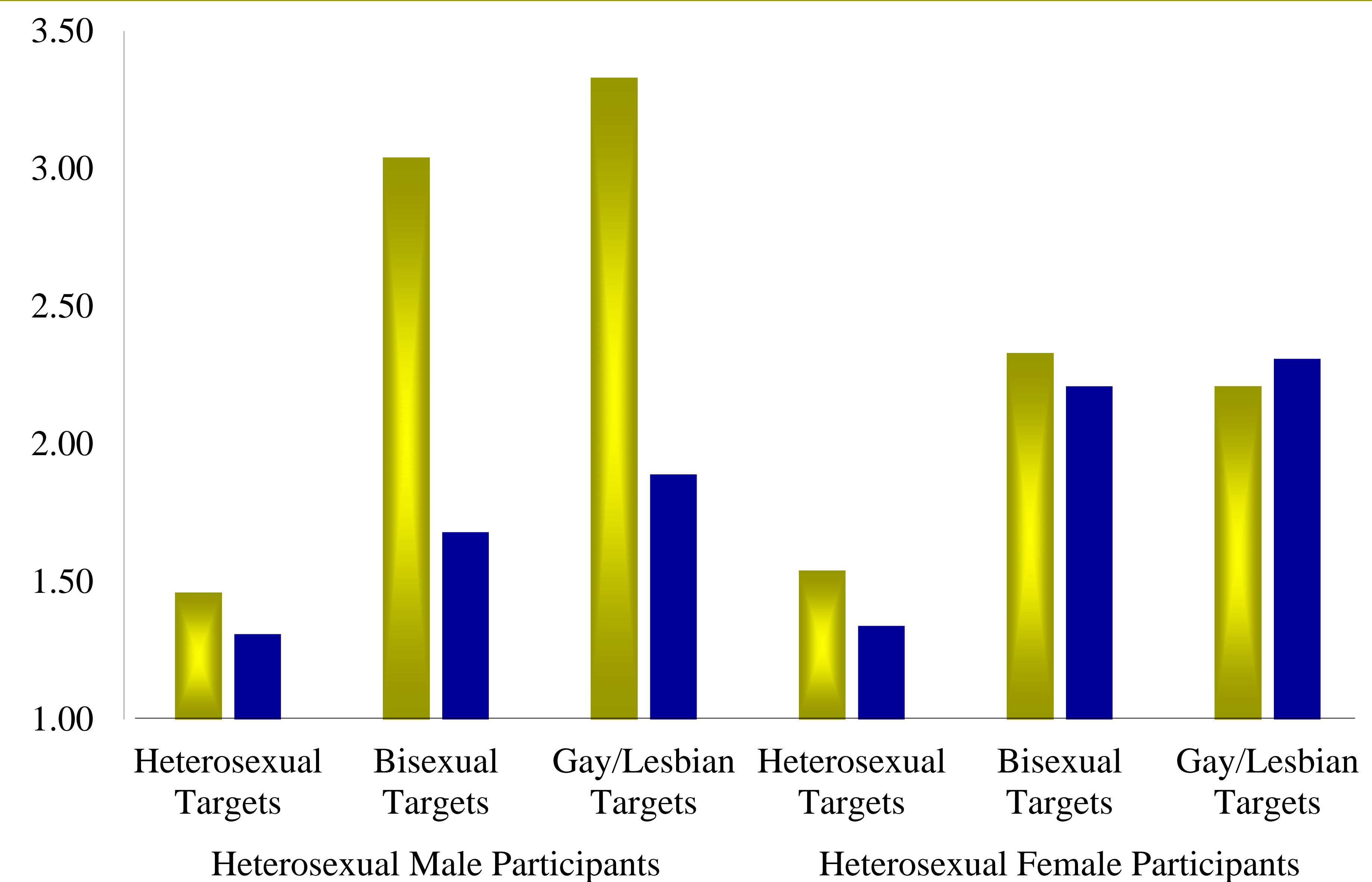
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Email: pirlotag@uwec.edu

## Perceptions of Disease Threat



## Physical Disgust



## Disease Avoidant Behaviors

