



# Sexual Orientation and Leadership Suitability: How Being a Gay Man Affects Perceptions of Fit in Gender-Stereotyped Positions

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## Abstract

The current set of studies examines perceptions of gay men's fitness for leadership positions in the workplace. In two between-subjects experiments we examined the effect of a male employee's sexuality on perceptions of his suitability for stereotypically feminine, masculine, and gender-neutral managerial positions, as well as potential mediators (perceptions of target agency and communion) and moderators (target out status) of these effects. In Study 1, 341 U.S. college student participants rated a gay male target as more communal and more suitable for feminine managerial positions than an otherwise identical heterosexual target, irrespective of his "out" status. Moreover, ratings of communion mediated the relationship between targets' sexuality and suitability for feminine leadership. No differences between gay and heterosexual targets in targets' agency or targets' suitability for masculine or gender-neutral managerial positions were detected. Study 2 used a sample of 439 U.S. adults and an ambiguous target's résumé to replicate and expand Study 1. This study provided participants with conflicting information on targets' agency and communion, and it assessed the same dependent variables of targets' agency, communion, and leadership suitability for various positions. Study 2 again found that ratings of communion significantly mediated the relationship between male targets' sexuality and perceived suitability for feminine managerial roles. These findings extend previous research on perceptions of gay men in the workplace and have practical implications for being "out" at work.

**Keywords** Sexual orientation · Leadership · Discrimination · Stereotypes · Gay men

Attitudes toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals are changing rapidly in the United States. Over the last 30 years, U.S. adults have been increasingly supportive of same-sex rights, including same-sex marriage, adoption, and military service (Gallup 2017). For example, 64% of adults today agree that same-sex marriages should be valid and accorded the same rights as heterosexual marriages, as opposed to only 27% in 1996 (Gallup 2017). State and federal policies have also begun to reflect the increasing public

acceptance of LGB individuals. For example, same-sex marriage is now recognized nationwide in the United States thanks to a landmark Supreme Court ruling (Freedom to Marry 2015). Likewise, private organizations have begun to recognize the importance of implementing policies to support LGB individuals at work. In the year 2000, a bare majority (51%) of Fortune 500 companies included protections based on sexual orientation; however, as of 2018 almost all of them (91%) have these protections (Human Rights Campaign 2018; Pichler et al. 2010).

Although attitudes toward sexual orientation minorities have become remarkably more positive in the past decade (Westgate et al. 2015), stereotyping and discrimination have not entirely disappeared (Blashill and Powlishta 2009). Of particular importance to Industrial/Organizational (I/O) psychologists are the ways subtle and overt stereotyping of and discrimination against LBG employees in the workplace affect employee satisfaction, organizational commitment, and career commitment (Button 2001; Ragins and Cornwell 2001). The presence of heterosexism in the workplace also has implications for whether LGB individuals have the desire

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or opportunity to attain leadership and managerial roles in the workplace—roles to which they might bring unique characteristics, goals, skills, experiences, or perspectives.

In general, there has been little research on the topic of LGB individuals within organizations (Ruggs et al. 2013), including on perceptions of LBG leaders (Fassinger et al. 2010). However, social science research on LGB leaders is beginning to pick up speed, and the last few years of work in this area have been more fruitful than ever (e.g., Liberman and Golom 2015; Morton 2017; Niedlich and Steffens 2015). It is important for I/O psychologists to continue vigorously pursuing research on the biases and challenges faced by a particular minority group for a number of reasons. First, such work will help researchers and practitioners better understand how to improve workplace outcomes for these employees (Ruggs et al. 2013). Second, although companies are moving toward implementing LGB-friendly practices, legislators and other policymakers need an abundance of strong research to build a successful case for the widespread and federal protection of this minority group. Third, the processes that affect LGB individuals in the workplace may be the same as those affecting other minority groups such that knowledge about those processes and outcomes will contribute to a broader understanding of discrimination and bias in the workplace.

## Stereotypes About Gay Men

According to implicit inversion theory (Kite and Deaux 1987), people expect gay men to possess many of the same traits and characteristics as heterosexual women, and they expect lesbians to have traits and characteristics similar to those of heterosexual men. In other words, sexual orientation serves as a cue for one's gender-role orientation (Blashill and Powlishta 2009). Therefore, once perceivers believe a man is gay, their expectations of his preferences, abilities, and personality invert to those of the female gender role. One reason for stereotypes of gender inversion is because people tend to exaggerate similarities among outgroups (Wilder 1981). For example, because gay men have the same sexual attraction to men as heterosexual women do, individuals assume gay men and heterosexual women must be more alike than gay men and heterosexual men are. Thus, people stereotype gay men as gender-atypical, or like women (Blashill and Powlishta 2009). Another reason for gender inversion stereotypes is that gender and sexual orientation are mutually constitutive (Parent et al. 2013). Part of what it means to be a man/masculine is to be heterosexually active and eager; heterosexual desire and behavior, meanwhile, are defined in terms of gender roles and complementarity (Eaton and Matamala 2014; Sanchez et al. 2012). Therefore, society expects gay men to be gender-atypical, and gender-atypical men to be gay.

There are two types of studies supporting implicit inversion theory: (a) studies that ask participants to rate their perceptions of gay targets and (b) studies that ask participants to guess the sexual orientation of targets. Studies in the first category find that people see gay men as more feminine and communal, and less masculine and agentic, than heterosexual targets in terms of traits, behaviors, and occupational interests (Blashill and Powlishta 2009; Burke and LaFrance 2016; Kite and Deaux 1987; LaMar and Kite 1998; Madon 1997). Parallel findings exist for lesbian women, whom participants rate higher on masculinity and competence than heterosexual women (Niedlich et al. 2015). A related form of evidence comes from the application of the stereotype content model (Fiske et al. 2002), which is widely used to capture beliefs about social groups along the dimensions of competence and warmth. Research finds that participants tend to rate gay men lower in competence (a trait central to agency, which is stereotypically masculine) and higher in warmth (a trait central to communion, which is stereotypically feminine; Abele et al. 2016; Fiske et al. 2002).

Studies in the second category, which ask participants to estimate the sexuality of targets, consistently find that male targets presented as physically or behaviorally gender-atypical were assumed to be gay, and male targets presented as gender-typical were assumed to be heterosexual (Freeman et al. 2010; Johnson et al. 2007). In recent research by Kranz et al. (2017), for example, sociable men were considered more likely to be gay than were competent men. Research also suggests there are unique stereotypes associated with “out” status that differentiate perceptions of gay men who are “in” and “out of the closet” from other subgroups of gay men (Clausell and Fiske 2005). Being in or out of the closet are phrases commonly used to refer to whether a queer person has made their sexual identity public (“out”) or not (“in”).

## Stereotypes About Leadership

In addition to using implicit inversion theory to motivate our examination of gay men as potential leaders, we employ research on stereotypes about leaders and managers. Implicit leadership theory posits that our beliefs about prototypical leaders guide our expectations for ideal leaders (Schyns and Meindl 2005). Because the traditional leader prototype in the United States is that of a heterosexual, White man (Fassinger et al. 2010; Rosette et al. 2008), it follows that the U.S. leadership ideal is also a heterosexual, White male. Gay men, therefore, may be seen as less appropriate for traditional leadership positions than heterosexual men are.

Much research has also demonstrated the existence and consequences of the incongruence between our expectations for leader and manager positions and those we have for the female gender role. Heilman's (1983, 1995) lack of fit model of gender

discrimination proposes that people view women as lacking the traits presumed necessary for success in prestigious and powerful jobs. Eagly and Karau's (2002) role congruity theory extended Heilman's work by emphasizing how both descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes about the female gender role prevent women from attaining and succeeding in leadership positions, respectively. In general, women are seen as typically more communal (i.e., warmer and more interdependent) and less agentic (i.e., more assertive and independent) than men and managers are (Eagly and Karau 2002; Heilman 1983; Schein 1973). This descriptive misfit results in less favorable evaluations of women's potential for leadership compared to men's (Eagly and Karau 2002; Lyness and Heilman 2006). Meanwhile, the prescriptive misfit between what women should be like and what leaders should be like leads to less favorable evaluations of women's actual leadership behavior compared to men's (for a review, see Heilman and Parks-Stamm 2007). Because gay men are seen as having stereotypically-feminine gender role traits and characteristics (being high in communion and low in agency), they may also have difficulty attaining and succeeding in traditional leadership roles.

Finally, there is robust cross-cultural evidence that when we "think-manager" we "think-male." The "think-manager think-male" phenomenon is one in which both men and women see successful middle managers as more descriptively similar to men than to women in terms of their characteristics, attitudes, and temperaments (Schein et al. 1989, 1996). Indeed, high-power leadership positions are seen as stereotypically masculine and requiring agentic characteristics (Eagly 2007), especially managerial roles in the workplace (Heilman et al. 1995; Sczesny 2003).

## Stereotypes About the Leadership of Gay Men

Although gay men may not have the same workplace or leadership experiences as women, the stereotype that gay men are more like heterosexual women than heterosexual men may result in gay men and heterosexual women being subject to similar biases in their paths to leadership. In a recent extension of the "think manager, think male" paradigm (Lieberman and Golom 2015), students used Schein's (1973) descriptive index to rate the gender-role stereotypes and characteristics of successful managers, heterosexual male managers, and gay male managers, among others. Data from this sample revealed a lower correspondence between ratings of successful managers and gay male managers than between ratings of successful managers and heterosexual male managers. Furthermore, ratings of gay male managers corresponded more highly with evaluations of heterosexual female managers than with those of heterosexual male managers (Lieberman and Golom 2015).

Additional research by Niedlich and Steffens (2015) specifically examined perceptions of the agency (e.g., self-confidence,

ambition) and communion (e.g., trustworthiness, open-mindedness) of gay men job applicants compared to identical heterosexual job applicants. As expected, gay men were rated as higher in communion (called "social skills" in their paper) than their heterosexual counterparts were. Interestingly, gay men were also seen as more agentic (called "competence" in their paper) than their heterosexual counterparts. However, this increase in social skills and competence did not translate into higher hireability ratings for jobs requiring these traits (Niedlich and Steffens 2015). Part of this may be because some jobs in the study were in conflict with other aspects of stereotypes about gay men. For example, the job requiring social skills was "leader of a kindergarten association," for which participants may have been reluctant to recommend gay men, irrespective of their levels of communion and agency, due to the harmful and untrue stereotype that gay men are more likely to be pedophiles than heterosexual men (Jenny et al. 1994).

In the present studies, we will focus on how descriptive beliefs about gay men's communion and agency affect perceptions of their suitability for gender-typed and gender-neutral leadership roles compared to heterosexual men, improving and expanding on previous research in a number of ways. First, much experimental research examining perceptions of LGB individuals in the workplace has manipulated a target's sexuality using a résumé that either does or does not list an employee's involvement in a LGB organization (e.g., Bailey et al. 2013; Ellis and Vasseur 1993; Horvath and Ryan 2003; Pedulla 2014). This manipulation is troublesome for several reasons, some of which other researchers have already noted (Steffens et al. 2016a, b). First, participating in an LGB club, or even leading one, does not necessarily mean an individual is a sexual minority; he or she may instead be an ally. More importantly, even if participants assume that targets involved in LGB clubs are in fact gay, lesbian, or bisexual, participation in an LGB organization (compared to no club or a non-LGB organization) is confounded with variables such as the target's out status, liberalism, and level of social activism.

Other studies have manipulated the sexual identity of employee targets by making it evident that the employee is in a same-sex partnership or marriage (versus a heterosexual partnership or marriage; Morton 2017; Niedlich and Steffens 2015; Niedlich et al. 2015). Although this manipulation does not confound sexuality with other relevant variables, it does restrict the targets in consideration to those who are in committed romantic relationships. This is concerning because gay men are stereotyped as sexually promiscuous (Felmlee et al. 2010). Therefore, studies using this manipulation only pertain to a specific subtype of gay men (i.e., those in committed relationships) whom people view as being different from stereotypical gay men (Steffens et al. 2016a, b). To address these issues, we chose to manipulate targets' sexual orientation in our research by explicitly stating each target's sexual identity in a vignette.

In addition to using an improved manipulation of targets' sexual orientation, we extend research on LGB leadership by examining U.S. samples, including samples of students and adults. Much previous research has examined only student samples (e.g., Liberman and Golom 2015) or European samples (e.g., Ahmed et al. 2013; Drydakis 2014; Niedlich and Steffens 2015; Patacchini et al. 2015). Although there are parallels between LGB culture and policies in the United States and the European countries where most work on LGB leaders has been conducted, there are also a number of differences, such as in the presence (or absence, in the case of the U.S.) of sexual orientation employment discrimination laws (Family Equality Council 2017; Sweden 2017). Moreover, the laws and overall levels of workplace discrimination experienced by members of the LGB community differ substantially by country within the European Union (Baert 2017). Thus, a U.S.-based examination of stereotypes about gay male employees, and the consequences of these stereotypes for their ability to obtain leadership positions, fills an important gap in the literature.

## Hypotheses

Drawing from implicit inversion theory (Kite and Deaux 1987), implicit leadership theory (Schyns and Meindl 2005), and ample work showing an incongruence between the female gender role and traditional leader roles (Eagly and Karau 2002; Heilman 1983; Schein 1973), we posited that perceptions of gay men as psychologically similar to women should lead perceivers to believe they are less appropriate for typical leadership positions than heterosexual men are. This may be because gay men are seen as possessing too many communal qualities (interpersonal qualities reflecting warmth and compassion that are associated with women) and/or too few agentic qualities (independent qualities reflecting competence and confidence that are associated with men) (Cuddy et al. 2008).

In addition, previous studies have shown that the traits associated with the ideal leader depend on the leader's specific function and context (i.e., school administrator compared to a military officer; Ayman and Korabik 2010). Therefore, the misfit between stereotypes associated with gay men and leadership positions may be exaggerated for leadership positions that are stereotypically masculine. On the other hand, people may see gay men as better candidates than heterosexual men for stereotypically feminine leadership positions.

Research on the suitability of atypical men and women for political leadership positions fully supports this reasoning. For example, Lammers et al. (2009) found that prototypical women and counter-prototypical men were seen as more appropriate to handle a nation dealing with stereotypically feminine issues (i.e., healthcare or social reform), whereas prototypical men and counter-prototypical women were seen as better suited to lead

a nation struggling with stereotypically masculine issues (i.e., economics or competitiveness). In sum, we hypothesized that participants will rate gay male targets as less suitable for gender-neutral and masculine managerial positions (Hypothesis 1a), as well as more suitable for feminine managerial positions (Hypothesis 1b), than otherwise identical heterosexual male targets. We further predicted that participants will perceive gay male targets as being more communal (Hypothesis 2a) and less agentic (Hypothesis 2b) than heterosexual male targets. We also expected that ratings of targets' agency (Hypothesis 3a) and communion (Hypothesis 3b) will help explain why gay male targets are seen as less suitable for gender-neutral and masculine managerial positions, as well as more suitable for feminine positions, than heterosexual men are.

We used structural equations modeling (SEM) to test these hypotheses because it allows us to examine the multiple predictors and outcomes in Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2, while simultaneously assessing the indirect effects described in Hypothesis 3. SEM also allowed us to assess model fit, which gave us the opportunity to compare competing mediational models and determine which model best described the data.

In addition to these primary hypotheses, we explored the impact of out status on perceptions of gay male targets' suitability for gender-typed and gender-neutral managerial positions. This examination was exploratory due to the dearth of research on perceptions of LGB persons at work based on their out status. In addition, being "out" in the workplace might increase perceptions of a gay male target's agency (and/or decrease perceptions of his communion) or decrease his agency (and/or increase his communion) compared to being closeted. If a gay man is explicitly "out" in the workplace, it may indicate to a perceiver that he is confident and self-assured and is not fearful of the consequences of revealing a stigmatized identity. In this case, being out at work may increase perceptions of his agency and/or decrease perceptions of his communion relative to a gay target whose out status is not made explicit or who is described as closeted. On the other hand, participants may view being out at work as an indicator that the target is too effeminate or gender-atypical to keep his identity concealed, or that he is a highly stereotypical and/or highly identified gay man who is uninterested in trying to conceal his sexual identity. In this case, being out may increase perceivers' perceptions of his communality and/or decrease perceptions of his agency compared to a gay male with unknown out status or who actively conceals his sexual identity at work. We examined these competing possibilities related to out status and their implications for beliefs about the target's suitability for masculine, feminine, and gender-neutral managerial positions.

## Study 1

First, we performed pilot testing to create descriptions of managerial positions that participants perceived as masculine,

feminine, and gender-neutral. In keeping with most psychological conceptualizations of masculinity and femininity as two as separate, orthogonal constructs (for a review, see Smiler and Epstein 2010). We identified managerial positions that a sample from our population viewed as high in femininity and low in masculinity (“feminine” positions; i.e., Social Support and Human Relations), high in masculinity and low in femininity (“masculine” positions; i.e., Economics and Competition), and similar in masculinity and femininity and not particularly high in either dimension (“gender-neutral positions”; i.e. Records and Efficiency; see the [online supplement](#) for more details). This approach has been used by other researchers (e.g., Lammers et al. 2009). (For full descriptions of the positions presented to participants, see the [online supplement](#).)

## Method

### Design and Participants

Our study was constructed as a one-factor, four-level (sexuality and outness: “gay,” “gay and out,” “gay and closeted,” and “heterosexual”) between-subjects design. Participants were 401 undergraduates (277, 69%, women; 124, 31%, men;  $M_{age} = 22.08$ ,  $SD = 5.34$ , range = 18–53) who participated in the online study for psychology course credit at a large, public, Hispanic-serving institution in the Southeast United States. After removal of outliers and participants who failed the manipulation check, which consisted of the correct identification of the sexual orientation and out status of the target, the final sample used was a total of 341 undergraduates (235, 69%, women; 106, 31%, men;  $M_{age} = 25.10$ ,  $SD = 5.56$ , range = 18–53). A majority (222, 65%) self-identified as Hispanic or Latino/a, 42 (12%) identified as White, 37 (11%) identified as Black, 21 (6%) as multi-racial, 7 (2%) as Asian, and 7 (4%) identified as “other.” There were no significant differences across genders in reported age,  $t(339) = 1.93$ ,  $p = .06$ , or race/ethnicity,  $\chi^2(5) = 8.63$ ,  $p = .13$ .

### Procedure, Materials, and Measures

We chose to manipulate targets’ sexual orientation by explicitly stating each target’s sexual identity in a vignette. The use of vignettes is justified because the goal of our study is to examine explicit processes and outcomes associated with the manipulation of the target’s sexual orientation and out status (Aguinis and Bradley 2014). We randomly assigned participants to read one of four vignettes about a fictional male employee within a fictional company. Sexual orientation was manipulated by describing the target as either a “straight (i.e., heterosexual) man”; a “gay man”; a “gay man, and [he] ‘came out’ to his fellow colleagues at work a while back”; and a “gay man, and [he] is ‘in the closet’ to his fellow colleagues at work”). A sample vignette (see the [online supplement](#) for

full descriptions of the different targets) portraying a “gay and out” target is:

Joe is a 34-year old middle manager at Northern Industries Corp. He lives in a residential area only 20 minutes from his work with his Labrador Retriever, Sam. Joe has worked at Northern Industries Corp. for 8 years and has risen gradually in rank over his tenure. Joe is a gay male, and “came out” to his fellow colleagues at work awhile back. At this time, Northern Industries Corp is considering promoting Joe to an upper management position.

Next, participants learned that there were six managerial positions open within the company, each with identical pay (\$75,000 per year) and workload (40 h per week), specifications that were also present during pilot testing of these managerial positions. This is an advance over prior work that did not control for prestige/salary of jobs and job titles when measuring perceptions of the hireability of LGB individuals into stereotypically-masculine or feminine roles (e.g., Niedlich and Steffens 2015). After reading the employee vignette, each participant responded to questions regarding the target’s communion, agency, and suitability for six open managerial positions within the company. Subsequently, they responded to questions regarding their own homonegativity and were then asked demographic questions (e.g., age, gender). The primary goal of our study was to examine the effect of targets’ sexuality on communal and agentic traits and managerial suitability. Therefore, the heterosexual target served as the baseline in all dummy coding, giving us three predictor variables: “gay target (vs. heterosexual),” “gay out target (vs. heterosexual),” and “gay closeted target (vs. heterosexual).”

**Communion and Agency** To assess targets’ communion and agency, we used Abele et al. (2008) list of adjectives associated with communion and agency. The communal traits were caring, helpful, loyal, polite, sensitive, sympathetic, trustworthy, and understanding. The agentic traits were able, active, assertive, creative, independent, intelligent, rational, and self-reliant. Participants were asked to describe the extent to which the target likely possessed each of the 16 traits on a bipolar, fully-labeled scale from 1 (*Definitely not*) to 5 (*Definitely yes*). A composite was created for communion ( $\alpha = .88$ ) and agency ( $\alpha = .84$ ) by averaging across all items that were associated with the trait (Schumacker and Lomax 2010); higher scores represent higher levels of communion and agency, respectively.

**Managerial Suitability** Participants rated the target’s suitability for each of the six managerial positions (two feminine, two masculine, and two gender-neutral) using a one-item measure, “How suitable is Joe for this position?” This was assessed on a bipolar, fully-labeled scale from 1 (*Extremely unsuitable*) to 7

(*Extremely suitable*). Composites for each managerial type were created by averaging across each pair of suitability ratings wherein higher scores indicate greater suitability. The internal reliability indices were acceptable for the feminine ( $\alpha = .78$ ), gender-neutral ( $\alpha = .75$ ), and masculine ( $\alpha = .71$ ) managerial composite measures.

**Homonegativity** We assessed participants' general prejudice toward gay men using the Modern Homonegativity Scale (Morrison and Morrison 2003). In this scale, participants are asked to rate their level of agreement with statements, such as "Gay men have become far too confrontational in their demand for equal rights," on a bipolar, fully-labeled scale from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). A composite homonegativity score was created by averaging all items ( $\alpha = .89$ ) such that higher scores indicate higher levels of homonegativity. Previous research supports the use of homonegativity as a control variable when examining perceptions of gay male leaders. Morton (2017) found that participants who were more homonegative rated gay male leaders more negatively than their heterosexual counterpart; this is in contrast to less homonegative participants whose ratings of the gay and heterosexual leader did not differ significantly. Other research also supports the notion that derogations of gay male leaders can negatively impact their subsequent evaluations (Goodman et al. 2008). Thus, we controlled for participants' level of homonegativity in both studies.

## Results

### Structural Model Specification and Correlational Analysis

All analyses were conducted using MPlus 6.12 with Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML) to handle any missing data and bootstrapping to better estimate standard errors of the regression parameters and indirect effects. A Wald test was used to compare regression parameters from

the dummy-coded predictors to the mediator and outcome variables and found no significant differences,  $\chi^2(10) = 6.78, p = .75$ , suggesting that outness was not moderating the relationships. Since outness was not the focus of the current study, all experimental conditions with a gay target were collapsed. The correlations among the variables assessed in the current study can be found in Table 1. These correlations indicate that there is a significant, positive effect of sexuality on communion and suitability for feminine managerial positions, but the anticipated negative effects on agency and suitability for gender-neutral and masculine managerial positions did not manifest through these bivariate correlations.

The mediational model included a dummy-coded predictor variable comparing all gay target conditions (coded as "1") to the condition with a heterosexual target (coded as "0") as the predictor, communion and agency as the mediators, and the three outcome suitability ratings for (a) feminine, (b) neutral, and (c) masculine leadership positions. The model is statistically overidentified. The fit indices indicated an acceptable model fit (see Table 2a). A modification index suggested including a direct path from the dummy-coded predictor to the suitability ratings for feminine managerial positions, demonstrating that communion may not serve as the only mediator. The fit indices for this final, modified model indicated a better model fit,  $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 8.17, p = .004$ .

Because research shows that heterosexual men are more intolerant of gay men than heterosexual women are (Kite and Whitley Jr. 2003), we assessed whether the current model paths were different for female and male participants. Invariance tests were then conducted for female and male participants. To do so, we compared a constrained model (equality constraints on all direct paths for men and women) to an unconstrained model (paths were allowed to vary across men and women). The unconstrained model did not display a better fit than the constrained model, suggesting that the model was the same for female and male participants,  $\Delta\chi^2(17) = 15.84, p = .54$ .

**Table 1** Correlations among study variables, Study 1

Variables	Correlations						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gay	–						
2. Communion	.18**	(.84)					
3. Agency	.06	.52***	(.88)				
4. Feminine leadership suitability	.11*	.23***	.24***	(.78)			
5. Neutral leadership suitability	.01	.22***	.23***	.78***	(.75)		
6. Masculine leadership suitability	.09	.22***	.29***	.61***	.65***	(.71)	
7. Homonegativity	.03	–.04	–.02	.03	.04	.05	(.89)

Gay represents the dummy variable comparing the gay target conditions to the baseline (Heterosexual). Values in parentheses on the diagonal represent the internal consistency (as measured by Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) of the measure

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Table 2** Fit indices for factor analyses and models

Analysis	$\chi^2$ (df)	$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	$p_{close}$	CFI	TLI	SRMR
(a) Study 1							
Hypothesized mediational model	9.41 (3)*	3.14	.08	.16	.99	.94	.02
Final mediational model	4.08 (2)	2.04	.05	.35	1.00	.97	.01
(b) Study 2							
Communion and agency CFA	142.67 (80)***	1.78	.05	.44	.97	.96	.06
Leadership suitability CFA	415.26 (233)***	1.78	.04	.90	.99	.99	.04
Hypothesized mediational model	1006.03 (565)***	1.78	.04	1.00	.98	.98	.06
Final mediational model	1001.68 (564)***	1.78	.04	1.00	.98	.98	.06

Fit indices included: Overall Chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ), Root Mean Square of Approximation (RMSEA), p-close for RMSEA ( $p_{close}$ ), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)

\*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$

## Hypothesis Testing

To test Hypothesis 1, we examined the total effects of the mediation model. Total effects represent the overall effect of our dummy-coded predictor on the outcome variables (MacKinnon 2008). As predicted, the gay targets were seen as significantly better suited for the feminine managerial positions than the heterosexual target was ( $B = .36$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $p = .03$ ). Participants did not rate the gay targets as significantly less suited for the neutral ( $B = .04$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $p = .80$ ) or masculine managerial positions ( $B = .30$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $p = .08$ ). Hypothesis 1 was thus partially supported. Participants perceived the gay targets as significantly more communal than the heterosexual target ( $B = .26$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $p = .001$ ). However, the opposite effect was not seen for agency; gay targets were not perceived as significantly less agentic than the heterosexual target ( $B = .08$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $p = .23$ ). Hypothesis 2 was thus only partially supported.

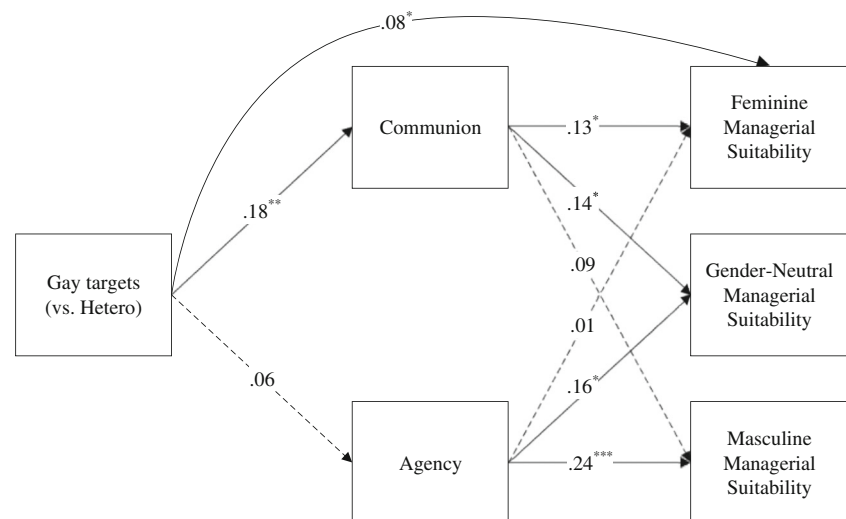
To test the mediating effects of communion on the suitability ratings for the managerial positions, indirect effects were examined. The indirect effect of the predictor through communion on suitability ratings for the feminine managerial

positions were significant ( $B = .08$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p = .03$ ). The indirect effects of the predictor through communion on suitability ratings for the gender-neutral managerial positions ( $B = .08$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $p = .07$ ) and masculine managerial positions ( $B = .05$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p = .20$ ) were not significant. As anticipated, none of the indirect effects of the predictor through agency on the suitability ratings were significant ( $ps > .24$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was partially supported (see Fig. 1).

## Discussion

As expected, both men and women participants rated gay male employees (regardless of their out status) as more stereotypically feminine than heterosexual male employees and as more suited for feminine leadership positions. Moreover, perceptions of femininity mediated the positive effect of being gay (vs. heterosexual) on the target's suitability for feminine leadership positions. Contrary to expectations, we did not find that participants rated gay male employees as less stereotypically masculine than heterosexual employees, nor as less suited for gender-neutral and masculine leadership positions.

**Fig. 1** Study 1 final mediational model. Standardized regression coefficients are presented. For presentation purposes, correlations among the predictor or outcome variables are not shown. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$



These results suggest a possible advantage to being a gay man in terms of perceptions of fit for leadership positions. Holding the status and pay for all leadership positions constant in the vignettes, gay men in our study were seen as having higher levels of femininity and fitness for feminine leadership positions, but not lower levels of masculinity nor fit for gender-neutral or masculine leadership positions.

One limitation in our first study was that most participants self-identified as Hispanic or Latino/a and all were college students. Because Hispanics are the largest and fastest growing minority in the United States (Pew 2014), our findings can certainly be generalized to a large number of individuals. In fact, it is important to capture the perceptions, experiences, and behaviors of this group because it will soon be a key part of the majority population. However, we recognize that any sample primarily composed of one ethnic/racial group cannot represent the whole of the U.S. population. When considering the characteristics of Hispanic cultures relevant to our study that might limit generalizability to other cultures, one might consider Hispanic gender role norms and norms around sexuality, such as machismo (Arciniega et al. 2008). However, recent research has argued and found that Latino American masculinity is very similar to European American masculinity (Kimmel 2008; Stephens and Eaton 2014). For this reason, we expect perceptions of gay men from a Hispanic-majority sample to demonstrate highly similar properties to those generated by a primarily White sample. Similarly, findings from college student samples may not generalize to older or less educated samples (Peterson and Merunka 2014), especially on topics related to social and political ideologies. Thus, our next study used a large sample of U.S. adults of varying ages.

Second, we explored stereotypes about gay employees in Study 1 by providing minimal information about otherwise identical gay and heterosexual employees and assessing perceptions of the targets' traits and leadership suitability. This is an approach similar to that taken in research by Davison and Burke (2000), which revealed that stereotypes direct judgment and decision-making when participants have little information to utilize. It is well-established that stereotypes are employed when perceivers have minimal ability (or motivation) to think carefully about a social target (Bodenhausen et al. 1994).

However, because we provided a small amount of information about the targets, participants may have suspected we were interested in their perceptions of the target based on his sexual orientation. In this case, our failure to obtain the predicted differences between gay and heterosexual targets in masculinity and fit for masculine and gender-neutral leadership positions may have been the product of social desirability concerns. Indeed, there was little individuating or diagnostic information that participants could use to justify low ratings of the gay employee's agency (Dovidio and Gaertner 2000; Yzerbyt et al. 1994). Thus, in our next study, we provided additional, albeit ambiguous, information about the target's

competence and warmth to further conceal the study hypotheses and increase the experimental realism for participants (Aguinis and Bradley 2014).

Finally, in Study 1 all agentic and communal traits were positive in valence. This is a potential problem because we are interested in the semantic dimensions of communion and agency, which include socially desirable traits (such as being confident) and socially undesirable traits (such as being stubborn; Prentice and Carranza 2002), rather than overall valence. Although we did not find that all positive traits were higher for gay than heterosexual targets in the first study (i.e., participants rated gay men as having more positive communal traits, but not more positive agentic traits), a stronger test of the effects of stereotypes about gay men's agency and communion should include negative and positive agency and communion. In that case, we would expect participants to rate gay men higher than heterosexual men on both positive and negative communal traits, whereas heterosexual men would be seen as possessing more positive and more negative agentic traits. Thus, in Study 2 we examined positive and negative communal and agentic traits as additional mediators.

## Study 2

Our second experiment examined the effect of stereotypes about gay men on gay and heterosexual targets' leadership suitability among a sample of U.S. adults recruited online. In Study 1, the impact of stereotypes about gay male employees on leadership suitability were assessed by providing minimal information about otherwise identical gay and heterosexual targets and assessing perceptions of target traits and managerial suitability. Although stereotypes affect social judgments in situations where minimal information is available, they are also likely to guide judgments and processing in ambiguous situations where there is conflicting information that enables multiple interpretations (Heilman 2012; Kunda and Thagard 1996). For example, a classic study by Darley and Gross (1983) examined the impact of stereotypes about socioeconomic status (SES) on perceptions of a girl's academic performance by providing participants with her SES and a videotape of her performance that included indicators of high and low competence. They found that participants interpreted the ambiguous performance more positively when her SES was high than when it was low.

In Study 2, we followed this tradition by examining the effect of stereotypes about gay male employees on perceptions of their agency, communion, and managerial suitability using ambiguous target profiles that contained indicators of high and low agency as well as high and low communion. In this way, we expected participants to use stereotypes as a functional means for simplifying a complicated analysis (Gaertner and



Dovidio 2011). This is an approach similar to that taken in Moss-Racusin et al. (2012).

## Method

### Design and Participants

The study was constructed again as a one-factor, four-level (sexuality and outness: gay, gay and out, gay and closeted, and heterosexual) between-subjects design. Research has found that, based on demographic data, “Mechanical Turk workers are at least as representative of the U.S. population as traditional subject pools, with gender, race, age and education of Internet samples all matching the population more closely than ...internet samples in general” (Paolacci et al. 2010, p. 414). Research also finds that MTurk participants are older, more ethnically diverse, and more likely to have work experience than college student samples (Behrend et al. 2011; Buhrmester et al. 2011) and “more representative of the U.S. population than in-person convenience sample” (Berinsky et al. 2012, p. i). Thus, using an MTurk sample to assess perceptions of female and male workers in the United States was a superior choice to a college student sample, in-person convenience sample, and other internet samples.

A total of 478 MTurk workers (225, 51%, women; 253, 49%, men;  $M_{age} = 35.80$ ,  $SD = 11.63$ , range = 18–70) participated in the online study. As described in Study 1, we first conducted an outlier analysis and manipulation check. The final sample used in the analyses included a total of 439 MTurk workers (205, 47%, women; 233, 53%, men;  $M_{age} = 35.75$ ,  $SD = 11.74$ , range = 18–70). A majority (342, 78%) self-identified as White or Caucasian, 35 (8%) identified as Asian, 26 (6%) identified as Black, 22 (5%) as Hispanic or Latino/a, 13 (3%) as multi-racial, and 1 (.2%) as “other.” There were no significant differences across genders in reported age,  $t(437) = 1.58$ ,  $p = .11$ , or race/ethnicity,  $\chi^2(6) = 10.82$ ,  $p = .09$ .

### Procedure, Materials, and Measures

We recruited and compensated participants using an online work platform (MTurk), and compensated them \$1.25 for their participation in our 12–15-min study. To assure that our participants would devote a high level of attention to our study, we specified that all users needed to have a 95% approval rate on MTurk. Participants completed our experiment online using Qualtrics survey software. We randomly assigned participants to read one of four vignettes about a male employee. Sexual orientation and out status were manipulated using a vignette as in Study 1. In addition to the vignettes used in Study 1, however, we also presented participants with an employee profile detailing the target’s performance from the past year. This profile contained positive and negative indicators of competence, a central feature of agency

(Abele et al. 2016; i.e., “he attended Harvard, yet graduated with a 2.53 GPA”), and positive and negative indicators of warmth, a central feature of communion (Abele et al. 2016; i.e., “he was required to attend mandated customer service retraining 101 in 2014, but also won a cooperative team player award in 2014”; see the [online supplement](#) for the complete employee profiles).

After reading the employee profile, each participant responded to questions regarding the target’s communion, agency, and suitability for six open managerial positions within the company. Subsequently, they responded to questions regarding their own homonegativity and were then asked demographic questions (e.g., age, gender). The same hypotheses from Study 1 were tested. We assumed that the additional and conflicting information on targets’ communion and agency in the employee profiles in this second study would allow participants to mask, and thus more freely use, their stereotypes, resulting in gay targets being seen as more communal and more suited for feminine managerial positions as well as less agentic and less suited for gender-neutral and masculine managerial positions. Dummy coded variables again served as the predictors in the model, exactly as we did with Study 1.

**Communion, Agency, and Homonegativity** An additional list of negatively-valenced adjectives was added to the positively-valenced adjectives from Study 1 to establish targets’ communion and agency. Abele et al. (2008) provided four additional negative trait words associated with communion and four negative trait words associated with agency. We also relied on a list of proscriptive, or undesirable, trait words for men (negative communal traits) and women (negative agentic traits) developed by Prentice and Carranza (2002). The negative communal traits were emotional, weak, insecure, and shy, and the negative agentic traits were arrogant, controlling, rebellious, and dominant. All trait ratings were presented in random order, and the scale used was unipolar and fully-labeled from 1 (*Not at all*) to 7 (*Extremely well*), measuring how well the participant felt each of the trait words described the target. We expanded this scale from the 5-point scale in Study 1 to capture more variability. The indices indicated a good model fit (see Table 2b). Participants’ levels of prejudice toward gay men in general was again assessed using the Modern Homonegativity Scale and controlled for ( $\alpha = .95$ ; Morrison and Morrison 2003).

**Leadership Suitability** We used 7-point scales to assess leadership suitability. We presented leadership positions to participants in random order. In addition, instead of using one item to assess suitability for each managerial position, we used four items for each position to model in measurement error in a hierarchical latent factor model. The three additional items were: (a) “How effective would Joe be in this position?,” (b) “How successful would Joe be in this position?,” and (c) “How well does Joe fit in

this position?" First-order constructs represented suitability for each position (e.g., all four observed suitability items for the Efficiency managerial position loaded onto a first-order Efficiency Suitability latent factor), and second-order constructs represented suitability for feminine leadership suitability, neutral leadership suitability, and masculine leadership suitability (e.g., both the Records and Efficiency Suitability latent factors loaded onto a second-order Neutral Leadership Suitability latent factor). We conducted a CFA to ensure that the proposed factor structure fit well. Given that the correlation between the second-order constructs of neutral and masculine leadership suitability was so high ( $r = .96$ ), the two were combined into one masculine leadership suitability latent construct (Brown 2006). The indices indicated a good model fit (see Table 2b). Although we did not create composites for communion, agency, or the suitability ratings as in Study 1, the internal consistency indices for all measures in Study 2 attained a sufficient level ( $\alpha s > .70$ ; see Table 3).

## Results

### Structural Model Specification and Correlational Analysis

Although our initial hypothesis was that agentic and communal traits, both negatively- and positively-valenced, would mediate the relationship between target sexuality and suitability ratings, when these mediators were used as predictors of the suitability ratings, the negatively-valenced communion and agency traits did not significantly predict the outcomes above and beyond the positively-valenced communion and agency traits ( $p s > .40$ ). Because none of the negatively-valenced traits predicted either ratings of managerial suitability, only the positively-valenced communion and agency variables were retained in the mediation model for further analyses. Furthermore, there was no moderating effect of target outness, as seen in Study 1, so the conditions with gay targets were collapsed again,  $\chi^2(8) = 10.13, p = .26$ . The correlations among the variables assessed in the current study can be found

in Table 3. These correlations indicate that there is a significant, positive effect of sexuality on positively-valenced communion and suitability for feminine managerial positions, but the anticipated negative effects on positively-valenced agency and suitability for the masculine managerial positions again did not manifest through these bivariate correlations.

The model is statistically overidentified. The indices indicated a good model fit (see Table 2b). As in Study 1, a modification index recommended including a direct path from the dummy-coded predictor to the suitability ratings for feminine leadership positions, again suggesting that communion is not a full mediator. The fit indices for this modified model indicated a better model fit,  $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 4.34, p = .04$ . Structural invariance tests indicated that men and women did not perceive these relationships differently,  $\Delta\chi^2(8) = 11.81, p = .16$ .

### Hypothesis Testing

We used total effects to examine Hypothesis 1. The gay targets were seen as better suited for the feminine managerial positions than the heterosexual target was ( $B = .57, SE = .15, p < .001$ ). The gay targets were not seen as significantly less suited for the masculine managerial positions ( $B = -.11, SE = .10, p = .25$ ). Hypothesis 1 was thus partially supported. We used direct effects from the predictor variables to the mediators to assess Hypothesis 2. The gay targets were perceived as significantly more communal ( $B = .41, SE = .11, p < .001$ ), yet not less agentic, than the heterosexual target was ( $B = .10, SE = .10, p = .31$ ). Hypothesis 2 was thus partially supported.

To test the mediation effects of communion on the suitability ratings for the managerial positions, we examined indirect effects. The indirect effect of the dummy-coded predictor through communion on the suitability ratings for the feminine managerial positions was significant ( $B = .30, SE = .09, p = .001$ ). Communion did not mediate the effect of sexuality to masculine managerial positions ( $B = -.05, SE = .03, p = .11$ ). As anticipated, neither of the indirect effects of the predictor

**Table 3** Correlations among study variables, Study 2

Variables	Correlations							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gay	–							
2. Positively-valenced communion	.18***	(.86)						
3. Negatively-valenced communion	.11	.38***	(.75)					
4. Positively-valenced agency	.07	.68***	.08	(.85)				
5. Negatively-valenced agency	-.13*	-.02	.65***	.01	(.70)			
6. Feminine leadership suitability	.21***	.65***	.17*	.46***	-.18**	(.97)		
7. Masculine leadership suitability	-.05	-.31***	.06	.59***	.05	.26***	(.95)	
8. Homonegativity	.01	.00	.14*	-.13*	.16**	-.08	-.15**	(.95)

Gay represents the dummy variable comparing the gay target conditions to the baseline (Heterosexual). Values in parentheses on the diagonal represent the internal consistency (as measured by Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) of the measure

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$

through agency on the suitability ratings was significant ( $p > .32$ ). This partially supports Hypothesis 3 (see Fig. 2).

## General Discussion

Little research has examined how perceptions of LGB employees can affect their ascension to leadership positions. The current studies tested whether gay male employees may be seen as more suitable for feminine leadership positions and less suited for gender-neutral or masculine leadership positions than heterosexual men as a function of stereotypes about their traits and characteristics. Across two separate experiments with two different participant pools in the United States, our data indicates that, whether they are “out” at work or not, gay men are perceived as more stereotypically feminine, but not less stereotypically masculine, than their heterosexual counterparts are, by both female and male participants. Moreover, these traits help to explain why participants perceive gay men as more suited for stereotypically feminine leadership positions than heterosexual men are, holding the status and salary of all leadership positions constant. Overall, there seems to be a net positive bias when considering a gay candidate versus a heterosexual candidate for leadership positions.

The presence of a net positive bias in favor of gay men employees, with gay employees being seen as more communal and more suitable for feminine leadership positions than heterosexual employees are, but no less agentic or less suitable for masculine and gender-neutral positions, is consistent with much prior work. Gay men are routinely seen as warmer and more feminine than heterosexual men are (Burke and LaFrance 2016), and gay job applicants and employees are seen as warmer (Everly et al. 2016; Wilson et al. 2017) and more feminine (Pedulla 2014) than their heterosexual counterparts are viewed. Although not all research has found that

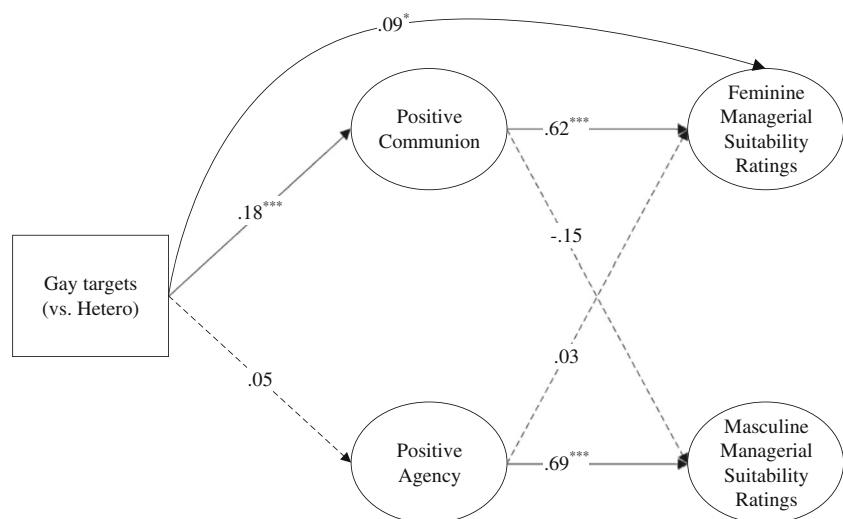
gay male employees are viewed as more communal than heterosexual employees (e.g., Morton 2017), so far these studies seem to be the exception rather than the rule. Moreover, even some of this work has found, contrary to initial expectations, that gay men leaders are not seen as less effectiveness than their heterosexual counterparts (Morton 2017). Nonetheless, the “gay male advantage” uncovered in the present series of studies on leadership, and also apparent in one recent study of employee hiring (Everly et al. 2016), albeit positive at face value, may be a precarious one given that feminine jobs are still generally lower status and lower in pay than masculine jobs (Riach and Rich 2002).

## Limitations

One potential critique of the present studies is a lack of realism. The first study, for example, gave only a short vignette describing the target. However, the second study provided participants with a résumé as well as a vignette, and Study 2 recruited adult participants of varying ages and backgrounds in the United States—features that add to the external validity of the research findings. In addition, our studies had superior internal validity compared to many previous studies because our manipulation of sexual orientation was direct rather than indirect, and it was not confounded with the target’s political/social beliefs and engagement or with other individual difference characteristics. Our research shows that although sexual orientation may not always affect a person’s suitability for leadership roles, it can cause men and women in the United States to see gay men as more suited for feminine positions due to the belief that gay men are higher in psychological femininity than heterosexual men are.

Another limitation is the potential for socially desirable responses among participants after an explicit mention of the target’s sexual orientation. Homonegativity was measured in

**Fig. 2** Study 2 final mediational model. Standardized regression coefficients are presented. For presentation purposes, correlations among the predictor or outcome variables are also not shown. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$



each study because of the potential influence it may have on actual outcomes for gay men in the workforce. With 12 questions, the possible range on this scale is 12–60. In Study 1, for example, participants' scores on this measure ranged from 12 to 58 ( $M = 29.27$ ,  $SD = 8.62$ ). The average question yielded a score of 2.44, just below the scale midpoint, and right where the original scale validation from 15 years ago located most college men and women (Morrison and Morrison 2003). Therefore, it does not appear that participants were responding in a socially desirable manner in our study and that their responses to the critical study stimuli should not merely reflect socially-desirable responses. Study 2 had a similar range for homonegativity.

### Future Directions

One future direction to explore is whether there are differential effects of target's sexuality on workplace judgments based on whether participants are applying stereotypes through thoughtful or non-thoughtful means, as well as whether or not they are trying to correct for their stereotypes (Wegener et al. 2006). The manipulations of sexual orientation in our studies were post-conscious, so participants may have exerted some effort to suppress stereotypes about gay men or otherwise avoid their use (Devine and Monteith 1999). If the target's sexual orientation was only non-consciously salient, if it had been hinted at rather than directly communicated, or if there were clear norms in favor of using stereotypes in this scenario, we might have found significant negative biases against the gay male employee. However, social norms tend to favor opposing prejudice against LGB and transgender individuals (Monteith et al. 1996), and evaluators in a real-world context would most likely attempt to give non-prejudiced judgments, adding to the generalizability of our findings.

An additional area for future research is to continue exploring how intersecting identities affect evaluations of LGB people as leaders. All people have multiple social identities, including gender, racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, and class identities, among others. The recognition that these identities intersect and interlock to produce unique and emergent experiences at work and elsewhere is known as “intersectionality” (Cole 2009; Rabelo and Cortina 2016). Pedulla (2014) has already examined how being gay has different consequences for Black men than for White men in the workplace. Specifically, he found that being gay actually increases salary recommendations for Black men employees, partly because participants see Black men as less threatening when they are sexual minorities. Future research should continue to probe how specific interactions between sexual orientation and other identities or social groups (e.g., age) might affect people's perceptions of leaders, including their communion, agency, fit for various leadership positions, hireability, and effectiveness.

Another topic with the potential to advance research on out status and the coming out of LGB individuals at work is the concept of “gaydar.” *Gaydar* is defined as the ability for someone to perceive the sexual orientation of an individual by the manner in which they speak, look, and act and what their interests are (Rieger et al. 2010). Rule and Ambady (2008) demonstrated that people are able to, with higher accuracy than chance, place self-identified gay and heterosexual individuals in their respective social categories by simply looking at a picture of their face for 50 milliseconds. Cues to sexual orientation can include factors such as vocal pitch and masculinity and femininity ratings of people's faces (Freeman et al. 2010; Rieger et al. 2010). If people can accurately identify members of these social groups at a glance, as shown in prior studies, they could have a significant effect on LGB individuals' potential and current career paths due to discrimination faced in the workplace (Tilcsik 2011). Future research should investigate how gaydar affects potential mobility within the company using standardized facial pictures, video recordings, etc.

Relatedly, although the current study focused on stereotypically-feminine and masculine traits as mediators for suitability across different leadership positions, it is likely that there are other ways in which gay men and heterosexual men are stereotyped to differ. These mediators may also serve to explain how biases about other sexual minorities (e.g., lesbians, bisexuals) operate. However, we invite future researchers to explore these and use our study as a springboard to further understand how coming out can influence perceptions of the individuals belonging to these groups. Furthermore, in the current study we provide a limited perspective on how people perceive gay male leaders and the prejudices they may face in the workplace. Although our findings were generally favorable, prejudice may still occur when considering other processes in the workplace prior to and after a promotion to a leadership position. For example, people may see gay men as being adequately suited for masculine leadership positions, and highly suited for feminine ones, but the likelihood of their promotion to these positions may not reflect this perspective, especially if they are in competition with other well-qualified candidates. Future research should explore these other processes to understand more broadly how sexual minority discrimination functions.

### Practice Implications

The current findings may inform approaches to future leadership research among both researchers and practitioners. Most high-level leadership roles in the United States continue to be male-dominated and male-typed (Catalyst 2017). Because people stereotype gay men as being feminine, they should also be seen as less suitable for typical leadership positions, and especially for masculine leadership roles (Kite and Deaux 1987). Indeed, some researchers have found that gay male

applicants are viewed as less competent than are heterosexual applicants (Horvath and Ryan 2003) and that gay men are discriminated against for jobs emphasizing stereotypically-male traits (Ahmed et al. 2013; Tilcsik 2011). Similarly, our initial prediction in the present research was that participants would rate gay men as both more communal and less agentic than heterosexual men. However, we did not detect an effect of sexual orientation on agency in either of our studies.

Part of this uncovered pattern may be because competence, agency, and masculinity (like warmth, communion, and femininity) are so often confounded, or used interchangeably, in social psychological research. Among other things, our studies examined how perceptions of target's agency (which includes competence; Abele et al. 2016) affected perceptions of that target's suitability for masculine jobs, because stereotypically masculine jobs are seen as requiring agency. Nonetheless, agency, competence, and masculinity are distinct constructs (Abele et al. 2016). Moreover, these constructs may be especially divergent for gay men. This differentiation is evident in recent research by Burke and LaFrance (2016), which shows that although gay men are seen as lower on the trait "masculine" than are heterosexual men, gay men are seen as higher on the trait of "competence" than heterosexual men. Moreover, gay men were higher in their competence than in their masculinity, whereas heterosexual men had comparable levels of competence and masculinity (Burke and LaFrance 2016). Moving forward, despite the often-high correlations among masculinity, agency, and competence (Kachel et al. 2016), researchers may want to examine these independently, perhaps especially in investigations of gay men, for whom these traits may have unique meanings.

In addition, people do not always view gay men as a homogenous group (Clauzell and Fiske 2005; Fingerhut and Peplau 2006). In research by Fingerhut and Peplau (2006), for example, when participants were asked to describe a gay man, most of their descriptions were associated with feminine terms and activities. When participants were asked to rate the characteristics of gay male targets in different social roles (e.g., truck driver, hairdresser), however, they found that knowledge of those roles influenced perceptions of his levels of masculinity or femininity toward or away from the global stereotype about gay men. This finding may help to explain why participants in our research did not appear to see the gay targets as any less agentic than the heterosexual targets, or less suited for the masculine or gender-neutral managerial positions, because these were targets who had a steady history of achievement and commitment in their work roles.

Finally, as society moves toward becoming more globalized and egalitarian, our stereotypes about typical and successful leaders are changing. In today's work world, transformational leadership, which embraces positive characteristics stereotypically assigned to both women and men, has become a new ideal leadership style in many contexts (Koenig et al. 2011).

Transformational leadership is characterized as emphasizing inspiration, morale, motivation, and morals for one's followers (Burns 1978; Northouse 2016), and it is not as stereotypically masculine as many past conceptions of successful leaders. Research has found positive correlations between transformational leadership and a leader's overall effectiveness (Lowe et al. 1996), and meta-analyses of leadership have even found that female leaders are more transformational than male leaders on average. In fact, a recent study found that, contrary to their initial hypotheses, a male leader who exhibited a "feminine" leadership style was perceived to have more satisfied followers than a man who using a "masculine" style (Eagly et al. 2003; Embry et al. 2008). Therefore, gay male employees, by virtue of being seen both as more stereotypically feminine and as no less stereotypically masculine than heterosexual men, may be increasingly appreciated for their potential as transformational leaders who embody the positive traits of both women and men. In addition, they may be seen as less threatening to the status quo than a female leader because, although they are perceived as stereotypically feminine, they are still men.

## Conclusion

Compared to otherwise identical heterosexual male leaders, we found that perceptions of gay male leaders include possessing more feminine traits and being better suited for feminine-typed leadership positions, with feminine traits helping to explain why they are perceived as better suited for feminine-typed leadership positions. We did not find the anticipated perception that gay male leaders possess less masculine traits and are less suited for masculine-typed or gender-neutral leadership positions. The gay male advantage in leadership we seem to have found in our studies is positive at face value. However, this gay male advantage in perceptions may not necessarily translate into a gay male advantage in selection or promotion. More research needs to be conducted to assess the robustness of our finding and to further understand the bottom-line outcomes of such biases for sexual minority employees and leaders.

**Compliance with Ethical Standards** There was no source of funding for the studies, and there are no conflicts of interest. All participants in the studies conducted by the authors were treated in compliance with the ethical standards of APA and they each provided their informed consent to participate. No part of this manuscript has been published in any other outlet as of yet.

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