


# Interactive Effects of Obvious and Ambiguous Social Categories on Perceptions of Leadership: When Double-Minority Status May Be Beneficial

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## Abstract

Easily perceived identities (e.g., race) may interact with perceptually ambiguous identities (e.g., sexual orientation) in meaningful but elusive ways. Here, we investigated how intersecting identities impact impressions of leadership. People perceived gay Black men as better leaders than members of either single-minority group (i.e., gay or Black). Yet, different traits supported judgments of the leadership abilities of Black and White targets; for instance, warmth positively predicted leadership judgments for Black men but dominance positively predicted leadership judgments for White men. These differences partly occurred because of different perceptions of masculinity across the intersection of race and sexual orientation. Indeed, both categorical (race and sex) and noncategorical (trait) social information contributed to leadership judgments. These findings highlight differences in the traits associated with leadership in Black and White men, as well as the importance of considering how intersecting cues associated with obvious and ambiguous groups moderate perceptions.

## Keywords

intersectionality, leadership, person perception, race, sexual orientation

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Despite social psychologists' long-standing interest in studying minority identities, only recently have researchers begun to focus on how multiple minority identities interact (e.g., Bowleg, 2013). For instance, a large literature has examined perceptions of Black and gay men, yet very little research has considered perceptions of gay Black men. The perceptions and experiences of individuals possessing such intersectional identities tend not to represent simple products of their constituent parts, however (Collins, 1991). We illustrated this here by investigating perceptions of leadership for individuals at the intersection of race and sexual orientation (gay and straight White and Black men).

## Perceptions of Multiple Intersecting Categories

Much research has shown that stereotypes linked to salient social categories automatically activate knowledge structures that influence individuals' perceptions, cognitions, and behaviors when they see a person (e.g., Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). Yet a growing body of work suggests that person construal is more flexible than previously believed. Person

categorization can depend on processing goals (Quinn & Macrae, 2005) and motivations (Sinclair & Kunda, 1999) that dynamically activate multiple social categories simultaneously (Freeman & Ambady, 2011). Here, we investigated perceptions based on two intersecting social categories when one is obvious to perceivers (race) and the other is ambiguous to perceivers (sexual orientation—albeit still detected better than chance; Tskhay & Rule, 2013).

Such intersecting social identities may be encoded differently than simple additive effects for each category might suggest. For example, people may favor gay Black men over their White gay or straight Black counterparts despite the multiple stigmatized identities those men possess (Remedios, Chasteen, Rule, & Plaks, 2011). Specifically, although

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perceivers may activate stereotypes related to criminality and aggression upon seeing a Black male face (Eberhardt, Goff, Purdie, & Davies, 2004), these associations may be weaker for Black targets whose faces also signal that they are likely gay. Thus, stereotypes about male homosexuality (e.g., warmth; Clausell & Fiske, 2005) may combat stereotypes about Black men (e.g., aggression; Eberhardt et al., 2004).

## Consequences for Leadership Perceptions

Although little research has considered how intersecting identities affect perceptions of leadership (but see Pedulla, 2014), Livingston and Pearce (2009) found resonant relationships between race and trait inferences among Black business leaders. Specifically, Black CEOs experienced advantages in leadership selection if their facial appearances conveyed traits (like warmth) that counteracted the stereotypes of aggression attributed to their race. Examining actual leaders, Livingston and Pearce found that Black CEOs tended to be more babyfaced than White CEOs, and that greater babyfacedness predicted higher salaries and more prestigious positions for the Black CEOs but not for the White CEOs, for whom a *less* babyish face predicted success. They thus concluded that babyfacedness may disarm perceivers and detract from simultaneously activated stereotypes of Black men as threatening.

More recently, studies by Remedios et al. (2011) showed that people whose facial characteristics countermanded racial stereotypes may enjoy unexpected advantages. Participants demonstrated greater liking and approach tendencies toward gay Black men compared with straight Black men. This work was quite distinct from that of Livingston and Pearce (2009), as Remedios et al. studied social identities rather than just facial characteristics. Remedios et al. only studied simple good–bad evaluations, however. We wanted to explore the potential *consequences* of such good–bad evaluations, here, and to understand the trait inferences that may underlie them.

Whether through elections or appointments, other people typically select who becomes a leader. Perceptions of leadership ability are therefore vital to decisions about who gets the opportunity to lead (Calder, 1977). Perhaps unsurprisingly, people tend to imagine leaders in Western society as White men (Rosette, Leonardelli, & Phillips, 2008). Specifically, Rosette et al. (2008) found that people see Whites as more effective leaders than Blacks, expect Whites to have greater leadership potential than Blacks, and assume business leaders are White in proportions exceeding the base rates for race in organizations. Such assumptions contribute to large racial discrepancies in who holds leadership positions. For example, only six Fortune 500 CEOs in 2014 were Black (“Where’s the Diversity,” 2014).

In addition to imagining leaders as White, people also traditionally associate leadership with masculinity (Schein,

1973, 1975). Because White men hold most leadership positions in the United States (“Where’s the Diversity,” 2014), the amount of masculinity perceived to be needed for success in leadership may be based on a White male standard. Furthermore, because people expect women to be more passive and nurturing than men, female leaders incur social penalties for violating gender stereotypes when they enact the assertive style typical of male leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Considering stereotypes that align male homosexuality with femininity (Madon, 1997), gay men may be treated similarly to women when they enter stereotype-incongruent domains (Pichler, Varma, & Bruce, 2010).

Although little empirical work has investigated perceptions of gay leaders, evidence suggests that gay men are underrepresented at high levels of leadership, similar to the racial underrepresentation described above. Knowing how many Fortune 500 CEOs are openly gay is more difficult than determining how many CEOs are racial minorities because sexual orientation is perceptually ambiguous. However, a recent survey reported that 83% of gay, lesbian, and bisexual workers hide their sexual identity at work, partly in the interest of professional advancement (Yoshino & Smith, 2013).

Although men perceived as gay therefore risk being seen as poor candidates for leadership because of stereotypes linking them to femininity, we propose that people may actually judge *straight* Black men as poor leaders because they perceive them as too masculine relative to the White male leadership standard. We also propose that gay Black men will be seen as better leaders than both straight Black men and gay White men. Moreover, because masculinity positively relates to perceptions of dominance (Fink, Neave, & Seydel, 2007) and negatively relates to perceptions of warmth (Perrett et al., 1998), Black men (who are stereotyped as highly masculine; Johnson, Freeman, & Pauker, 2012) might benefit from facial characteristics that temper stereotypes about their hypermasculinity when evaluated as leaders. In other words, we hypothesized that gay Black men may be seen as effective leaders because their faces convey the warmth and femininity associated with gay men, which tempers the dominant and aggressive elements of power that people associate with Black men.

Although variability based on bottom-up facial characteristics (facial morphology) is well established in categorization and evaluation *within* social categories (Livingston & Brewer, 2002), we took a different approach by investigating perceptions that differed *across* social categories (race and self-reported sexual orientation). In particular, we aimed not only to examine person perception processes at the intersection of multiple categories but also to investigate the intersection of categories high and low in ambiguity. Although people can typically categorize others’ race and sexual orientation better than chance, their rates of accuracy diverge substantially (see Remedios et al., 2011) and perceivers generally lack insight about how it is that they are

able to judge sexual orientation, leading them to feel that they are guessing (Rule, Ambady, Adams, & Macrae, 2008). Thus, the cues demarcating one's race are often obvious (but see Chen & Hamilton, 2012), whereas those distinguishing one's sexual orientation are fairly ambiguous. Studying the intersection of an obvious and an ambiguous social dimension therefore allows us to uniquely showcase the complexity of social perception by demonstrating the combinatorial effects of one of many possible social identity intersections on people's perceptions.

We examined how intersecting race and sexual orientation categories affect perceptions of leadership. Although Livingston and Pearce (2009) have already offered insight into how competing perceptions may influence leadership selection and success based on facial traits, here we focused primarily on social category memberships and the traits stereotypically associated with them (specifically, dominance, masculinity, and warmth). These traits resemble the warmth, competence, and facial maturity investigated by Livingston and Pearce but with important distinctions. First, dominance contributes to perceptions of competence in leadership, but only in particular contexts (see Re & Rule, 2016; Rule et al., 2010). Second, the facial features connoting masculinity (e.g., wide cheekbones, mandible, chin, pronounced brow-ridge, and lengthened lower facial bones; Thornhill & Gangestad, 1999) only partly overlap with those characterizing facial maturity (e.g., small eyes and pupils, eyes positioned higher in the vertical plane of the face, a smaller cranium, and long and wide features in general; Berry & McArthur, 1985) and, although the two often correlate (Boothroyd et al., 2005), they affect perception and judgment distinctly (Boothroyd, Jones, Burt, & Perrett, 2007). Third, because they could identify only a small number of Black leaders ( $n = 10$ ), Livingston and Pearce only compared the mean levels of their traits between the Black and White CEOs, whereas we aimed to achieve greater precision by correlating the trait and leadership perceptions.

We therefore investigated how traits that stereotypically characterize distinct racial (Black vs. White) and sexual orientation groups (gay vs. straight) explained differences in attributions of men's leadership abilities to test the hypothesis that, despite the stigmas associated each dimension individually, the combination of these identities could ironically lead to more positive impressions (i.e., among gay Black men). In Study 1, we examined perceptions of the leadership abilities of White and Black gay and straight male faces with particular interest in the gay Black targets. In Study 2, we examined the influence of perceived warmth (stereotypically associated with gay men) and dominance (stereotypically associated with Black men) on leadership perceptions and, in Study 3, related these to perceptions of masculinity to help explain their contribution to the leadership judgments. Finally, we assessed how leadership perceptions relate to explicit sexual orientation judgments in Study 4.

## Study 1

We began by investigating how perceptions of leadership differ by race (Black vs. White), sexual orientation (straight vs. gay), and their intersection. Consistent with previous research, we predicted that White and straight targets would be seen as better leaders than Black and gay targets (Pichler et al., 2010; Rosette et al., 2008). But we also expected that preferences for straight leaders and White leaders would reverse when race and sexual orientation intersect. Thus, we hypothesized that gay Black men would be rated as better leaders than targets from either single-minority group (i.e., gay White, straight Black).

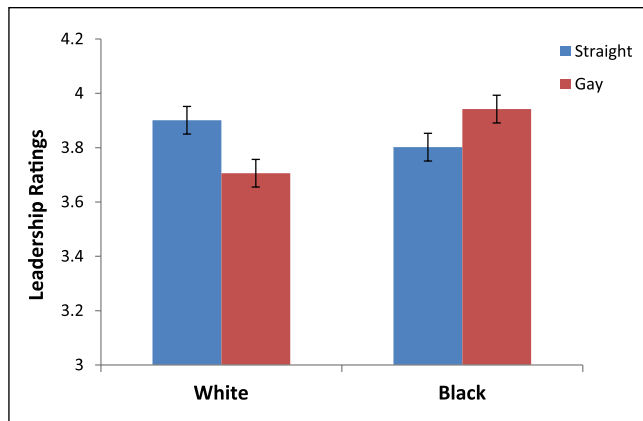
## Method

We recruited 80 U.S. residents (38 male, 42 female; 59 White, 9 Black, 12 Other;  $M$  age = 32.79 years,  $SD = 10.2$ ) from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) to participate.<sup>1</sup> This sample size afforded more than 99% power to detect an interaction effect as large as that observed in Remedios et al.'s (2011) Study 1. Stimuli consisted of 108 grayscale headshots of 18- to 30-year-old smiling men self-identified for sexual orientation on Internet dating sites used previously by Rule (2011). For the present study, a hypothesis-blind research assistant collected the first 27 images of the straight White men, gay White men, straight Black men, and gay Black men from the overall stimulus set without regard for other characteristics. Three hypothesis-blind research assistants unambiguously agreed that the targets were Black and White. The images contained no background details and pre-testing confirmed that the faces did not differ systematically on attractiveness or emotional expression (see Rule, 2011).<sup>2</sup>

Participants completed a self-paced task in which they viewed each face individually in random order within counterbalanced race-defined blocks.<sup>3</sup> Participants used a slider scale to indicate the extent to which they believed most people would think that each target face would be a good leader from 1 (*very bad leader*) to 8 (*very good leader*). Participants were not informed of targets' sexual orientation in any of our studies.

## Results

We averaged participants' responses to create subgroup leadership scores for each participant and conducted a 2 (race: White, Black)  $\times$  2 (sexual orientation: straight, gay) repeated-measures ANOVA on perceived leadership quality, with participants' subgroup means as the unit of analysis. A significant Race  $\times$  Sexual Orientation interaction supported our hypothesis,  $F(1, 79) = 19.64, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .20$ , though we did not observe the main effects of race,  $F(1, 79) = 0.52, p = .47, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .007$ , or sexual orientation,  $F(1, 79) = 0.36, p = .55, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .005$ , anticipated based on prior research. Post hoc



**Figure 1.** Mean leadership ratings by targets' race and sexual orientation in Study 1.

Note. Error bars represent  $\pm 1$  standard error.

simple effects analyses showed that participants rated the straight White targets ( $M = 3.90$ ,  $SE = .11$ ) as significantly better leaders than the gay White targets ( $M = 3.71$ ,  $SE = .11$ ),  $p < .01$ , 95% confidence interval (CI) = [.06, .33], but rated the gay Black targets ( $M = 3.94$ ,  $SE = .11$ ) as better leaders than the straight Black targets ( $M = 3.80$ ,  $SE = .11$ ),  $p < .01$ , 95% CI = [.04, .24] (Figure 1). Interestingly, they did not rate the straight White and straight Black targets significantly differently,  $p = .34$ , 95% CI = [-.11, .30], but did rate the gay Black targets as significantly better leaders than the gay White targets,  $p = .02$ , 95% CI = [.04, .44]. Most importantly, the gay Black targets received the highest leadership ratings and differed significantly from both of the single-minority groups, though not from the straight White targets,  $p = .69$ , 95% CI = [-.16, .24].

## Discussion

People perceived gay Black men as better leaders than targets from either single-minority group (i.e., gay White men, straight Black men) and rated them just as highly as straight White men. Although this does not mean that gay Black men would not suffer discrimination in attaining and performing actual leadership positions, these data suggest that this particular double-minority identity may be favored over the constituent single-minority individuals in first impressions of leadership potential. These results conceptually replicate Remedios et al.'s (2011) findings in which gay Black men were liked more than their straight and White counterparts. Individuals may therefore use similar cues to evaluate the leadership potential and likability of Black men.

Perceptions of leadership in the United States have typically been linked with power and other dominance-related traits (e.g., Funk, 1997), a relationship that is particularly relevant for face-based judgments of leadership potential (Rule et al., 2010). Thus, we take it as especially noteworthy that gay Black men received higher ratings in this domain, despite

having identities that are stereotyped as inconsistent with dominance. Given that Livingston and Pearce (2009) found differences in the ratings of traits from Black and White CEOs' faces, we investigated whether perceptions of traits stereotypically associated with race and sexual orientation might explain these distinct leadership evaluations in Study 2. We examined warmth and dominance in Study 2 because of their prominence in person perception (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Oosterhof & Todorov, 2008), and examined masculinity in Study 3 because of the established relationship between gender cues and sexual orientation in past work (Tskhay & Rule, 2015).

## Study 2

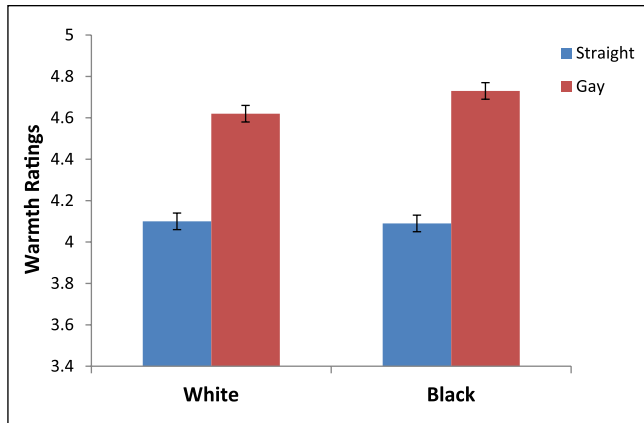
In Study 2, we hypothesized that warmth and dominance would relate to leadership perceptions differently for Black and White faces. Specifically, we expected that Black targets would receive higher leadership ratings if they looked warm and that White targets would receive higher leadership ratings if they looked dominant because these traits countermand stereotypes about those groups. We therefore expected to observe a significantly stronger positive relationship between warmth and leadership ratings for Black targets than for White targets, and expected to observe a significantly stronger positive relationship between dominance and leadership ratings for White targets than for Black targets. Such results would extend those reported by Livingston and Pearce (2009) to a new group of nonleaders, measured with greater precision. More relevant to the present research, however, they would help to explain why participants perceived gay Black targets as better leaders in Study 1. Because these traits served as partial proxies for sexual orientation in our own data (see below), we collapsed across sexual orientation when correlating the trait ratings with leadership perceptions here and in Study 3.

## Method

We recruited two separate samples totaling 161 U.S. residents from MTurk to rate the faces from Study 1 on either warmth ( $n = 79$ ; 37 male, 42 female; 61 White, 2 Black, 16 Other;  $M$  age = 37.7 years,  $SD = 14.0$ ) or dominance ( $n = 82$ ; 39 male, 42 female, 1 other; 66 White, 2 Black, 14 Other;  $M$  age = 33.22 years,  $SD = 12.0$ ). The procedure was identical to Study 1 except that participants rated the targets from 1 = *not warm (dominant) at all* to 8 = *very warm (dominant)*. These samples provided 99% power to detect an effect as large as the interaction in Study 1.

## Results

**Preliminary validation: Mean comparisons.** To confirm that perceivers judged gay targets as warmer and less dominant than straight targets, we began by averaging the dominance and



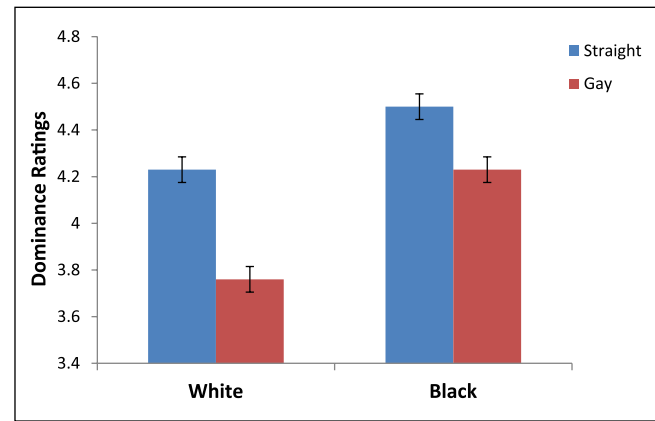
**Figure 2.** Mean warmth ratings by targets' race and sexual orientation in Study 2.

Note. Error bars represent  $\pm 1$  standard error.

warmth ratings for each subgroup within each participant and then compared the targets' scores in separate 2 (race)  $\times$  2 (sexual orientation) repeated-measures ANOVAs for each trait, again with perceivers' subgroup means as the unit of analysis.

For warmth, we observed no main effect of race,  $F(1, 78) = 0.92, p = .34, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .01$ , but did observe a large effect of sexual orientation,  $F(1, 78) = 292.00, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .79$ , such that participants rated gay targets ( $M = 4.68, SE = .08$ ) as warmer than straight targets ( $M = 4.09, SE = .08$ ), 95% CI = [.52, .65]. A significant interaction with race qualified this difference,  $F(1, 78) = 7.08, p < .01, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .08$ . Planned simple effects tests showed that the warmth difference between gay and straight targets (although highly significant for targets of each race,  $ps < .001$ ) was larger for Black targets than for White targets. We next compared targets within sexual orientation across race, finding that participants rated straight Black ( $M = 4.09, SE = .09$ ) and straight White ( $M = 4.10, SE = .08$ ) targets as equally warm,  $p > .90$ , 95% CI = [-.12, .11], but rated gay Black targets ( $M = 4.73, SE = .10$ ) as marginally warmer than gay White targets ( $M = 4.62, SE = .08$ ),  $p = .09$ , 95% CI = [-.02, .26] (see Figure 2).

For dominance, we observed a main effect of race,  $F(1, 81) = 14.86, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .16$ , such that participants rated Black targets ( $M = 4.36, SE = .13$ ) as more dominant than White targets ( $M = 4.00, SE = .11$ ), 95% CI = [.18, .56], and again observed a large main effect of sexual orientation,  $F(1, 81) = 79.74, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .50$ , such that participants rated straight targets ( $M = 4.37, SE = .10$ ) as more dominant than gay targets ( $M = 4.00, SE = .11$ ), 95% CI = [.29, .45]. Race and sexual orientation also interacted,  $F(1, 81) = 13.21, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .14$ , such that the difference between straight and gay faces was less pronounced among Black targets than among White targets (albeit significantly different for targets of each race; see Figure 3). Comparisons within sexual orientation showed that participants rated straight



**Figure 3.** Mean dominance ratings by targets' race and sexual orientation in Study 2.

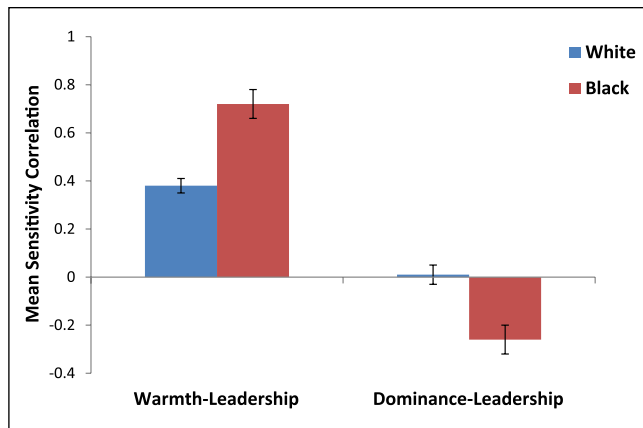
Note. Error bars represent  $\pm 1$  standard error.

Black targets ( $M = 4.50, SE = .12$ ) as more dominant than straight White targets ( $M = 4.23, SE = .10$ ),  $p < .01$ , 95% CI = [.07, .45], and rated gay Black targets ( $M = 4.23, SE = .13$ ) as more dominant than gay White targets ( $M = 3.76, SE = .12$ ),  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = [.27, .68].

These comparisons confirmed our prediction that gay targets would appear warmer and less dominant than straight targets. They further showed that the gay Black targets looked slightly warmer and substantially more dominant than the gay White targets.

**Primary analysis: Trait-leadership correlations.** Having confirmed that Black and White gay and straight faces differ in warmth and dominance, we tested our central hypothesis that warmth would positively relate to leadership ratings for Black targets and that dominance would positively relate to leadership ratings for White targets. Considering the limited number of faces, we calculated sensitivity correlations with the participant as the unit of analysis to achieve a higher level of statistical power than would have been possible in a target-based analysis. We thus correlated the extent to which each participant's warmth or dominance ratings of the faces correlated with each face's mean leadership rating from Study 1 (interrater reliability Cronbach's  $\alpha = .93$ ) separately for the Black and White faces, collapsing across sexual orientation and converting the resulting correlations to Fisher's  $z$ s for each participant.<sup>4</sup>

**Warmth and leadership.** When comparing the mean Fisher's  $z$ s to zero (i.e., the absence of a relationship) in a one-sample  $t$  test, warmth significantly predicted leadership perceptions for both Black ( $M = 0.72, SD = 0.23$ ),  $t(77) = 28.30, p < .001$ , 95% CI = [.68, .78], and White targets ( $M = 0.38, SD = 0.12$ ),  $t(77) = 26.95, p < .001$ , 95% CI = [.35, .41]. As predicted, however, a paired-samples  $t$  test showed that the sensitivity correlations for Black targets were much stronger than for White targets,



**Figure 4.** Mean sensitivity correlations between ratings of warmth and leadership and between ratings of dominance and leadership for White and Black faces in Study 2.

Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

$t(77) = 15.98, p < .001, d = 2.04$ . Thus, although warmth significantly predicted leadership ratings for both Black and White faces, participants were especially attuned to warmth when evaluating leadership for Black faces.

**Dominance and leadership.** In contrast, dominance significantly *negatively* correlated with leadership ratings for Black faces ( $M = -0.28, SD = 0.30, t(78) = 8.37, p < .001, 95\% CI = [-.35, -.22]$ ), and did not relate to leadership ratings for White faces ( $M = 0.01, SD = 0.19, t(78) = 0.49, p = .60, 95\% CI = [-.03, .05]$ ), for whom the sensitivity correlations were significantly smaller,  $t(78) = -9.71, p < .001, d = -1.19$  (see Figure 4). Although the direction and magnitude of these relationships differed from our hypotheses, the data nevertheless confirmed our prediction that dominance would relate to leadership judgments for Black and White targets differently. Dominance did not positively predict leadership ratings for White targets, so we cannot strictly conclude that the correlation between dominance and leadership was stronger for White than Black targets. Rather, the relationship was significantly more negative for Black than White targets, partially supporting our hypothesis.

## Discussion

People appear to use different traits when judging the leadership abilities of Black versus White men from their faces. Although perceivers inferred warmth to assess the leadership potential of both groups, this relationship was significantly stronger for judgments of Black men. We found nearly the opposite pattern for dominance, which negatively predicted leadership ratings for Black faces (consistent with expectancy violation; Jussim, Coleman, & Lerch, 1987) but not at all for White faces (an unexpected result based on past research; for example, Livingston & Pearce, 2009). We

therefore wondered whether another trait might predict leadership for White but not Black targets. One candidate is masculinity, as it more explicitly relates to the gay stereotype than does dominance (Madon, 1997), is strongly implicated in leadership stereotypes (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011), and is directly linked to sexual orientation in studies of facial appearance (Freeman, Johnson, Ambady, & Rule, 2010). These direct links suggest that masculinity is an important trait to investigate when examining perceptions of sexual orientation and leadership.

Most leadership theories do not consider the role of race, likely assuming the culturally common White male default when conceptualizing leadership (Gündemir, Homan, de Dreu, & van Vugt, 2014). We therefore expected that facial masculinity would be perceived as less important for Black (vs. White) leaders because stereotypes about Black identity already imbue it with high levels of masculinity (Johnson et al., 2012; Livingston & Pearce, 2009), testing the hypothesis that masculinity would positively relate to leadership ratings for White targets but not Black targets in Study 3.

## Study 3

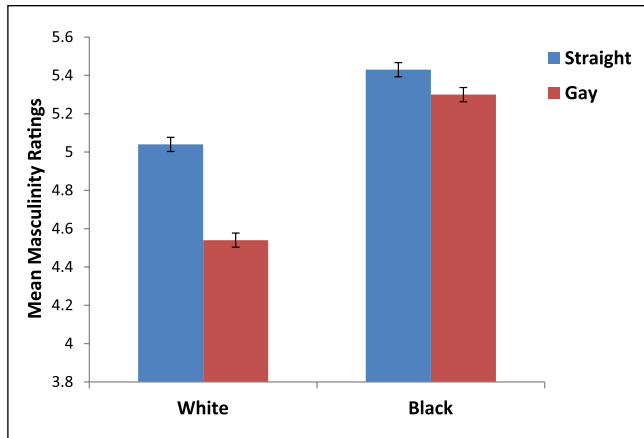
We hypothesized that masculinity would predict leadership ratings better for White faces than for Black faces. Given that dominance negatively related to leadership for Black men in Study 2, we did not expect high levels of masculinity to boost perceptions of Black leaders. But because the femininity associated with being gay may temper perceptions of the hypermasculinity associated with being Black, gay Black men might seem optimally masculine for leadership. We therefore tested whether there is an optimal level of masculinity in leadership perceptions by investigating the role of masculinity in perceptions of the faces from Studies 1 and 2 in Study 3A, and by manipulating race and masculinity using artificial faces in Study 3B.

### Study 3A

We first explored the link between race, sexual orientation, and masculinity perceptions and then analyzed the extent to which masculinity predicts leadership ratings. We hypothesized that masculinity would positively predict leadership ratings for White but not Black targets and that the two correlations would significantly differ. We also expected to observe a significant curvilinear relationship between masculinity and leadership ratings, whereby leadership ratings would decline for highly masculine faces.

**Method.** Study 3A followed a method nearly identical to Studies 1 and 2: 60 American MTurk workers (27 male, 32 female, 1 other; 48 White, 4 Black, 8 Other;  $M$  age = 34.1 years,  $SD = 12.2$ ) rated each face from 1 (*not masculine at all*) to 8 (*very masculine*), providing 99% power to observe an interaction effect of the size observed in Study 1.





**Figure 5.** Mean masculinity ratings by targets' race and sexual orientation in Study 3A.

Note. Error bars represent  $\pm 1$  standard error.

### Results and discussion

**Preliminary validation: Mean comparisons.** We averaged the participants' masculinity judgments for each target subgroup and submitted the scores to a 2 (race)  $\times$  2 (sexual orientation) repeated-measures ANOVA. This revealed main effects of race,  $F(1, 59) = 49.90, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .46$ , and sexual orientation,  $F(1, 59) = 52.38, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .47$ , whereby participants rated Black targets ( $M = 5.36, SE = .14$ ) as more masculine than White targets ( $M = 4.79, SE = .15$ ), 95% CI = [.41, .74], and straight targets ( $M = 5.23, SE = .14$ ) as more masculine than gay targets ( $M = 4.92, SE = .14$ ), 95% CI = [.23, .40]. A qualifying interaction,  $F(1, 59) = 24.16, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .29$ , showed that straight faces ( $M = 5.43, SE = .14$ )

looked more masculine than gay faces ( $M = 5.30, SE = .14$ ) among Black targets,  $p < .01$ , 95% CI = [.04, .20], but substantially more so among White targets ( $M$  straight = 5.04,  $SE = .15$ ;  $M$  gay = 4.54,  $SE = .16$ ),  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = [.36, .64] (see Figure 5).

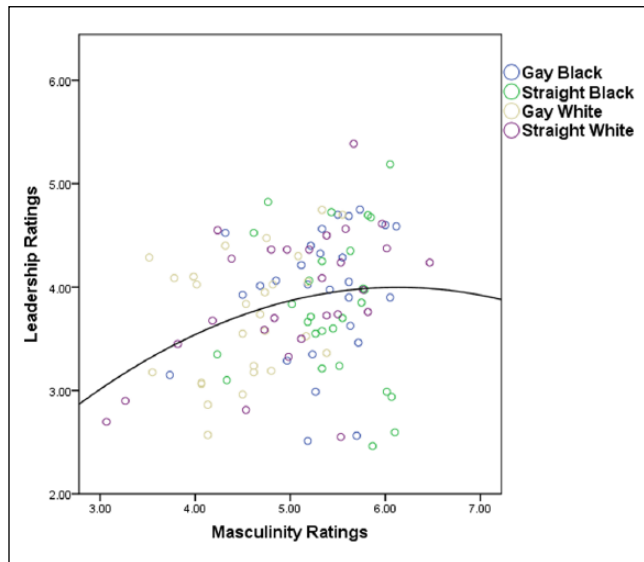
Complementary comparisons between races within sexual orientation showed that participants saw gay Black targets ( $M = 5.30, SE = .14$ ) as more masculine than gay White targets ( $M = 4.54, SE = .16$ ),  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = [.57, .96], and straight Black targets ( $M = 5.43, SE = .14$ ) as more masculine than straight White targets ( $M = 5.04, SE = .15$ ),  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = [.22, .55]. Interestingly, gay Black faces even looked more masculine than straight White faces,  $p < .01$ , 95% CI = [.10, .43].

**Primary analysis: Masculinity–leadership correlations.** Similar to Study 2, we next calculated masculinity–leadership sensitivity correlations separately for Black and White faces using the leadership ratings from Study 1. As expected, masculinity positively related to leadership for White ( $M = 0.25, SD = 0.19$ ),  $t(59) = 10.29, p < .001$ , 95% CI = [.20, .29], but not Black faces ( $M = 0.03, SD = 0.19$ ),  $t(59) = 1.28, p = .21$ , 95% CI = [−.02, .08]. The difference between these sensitivity correlations was significant,  $t(59) = 6.77, p < .001, d = 1.04$ .

Finally, we conducted a regression with the target as the unit of analysis to test the possibility of an optimal level of masculinity in leadership perceptions. We combined both target groups, regressing the average leadership ratings from Study 1 onto the masculinity ratings in a stepwise regression with masculinity as the predictor in Step 1 and its square in Step 2. Results showed that a linear model fit the data well,  $F(1, 106) = 8.66, p < .01, R^2 = .076$ , and that a quadratic model did not significantly improve the fit,  $R^2 = .084, \Delta F = 0.97, p = .33$ . As such, although the scatterplot in Figure 6 suggests that leadership perceptions may level at high levels of masculinity, the current stimuli did not provide enough power to establish a true curvilinear relationship between masculinity and leadership perceptions.<sup>5</sup>

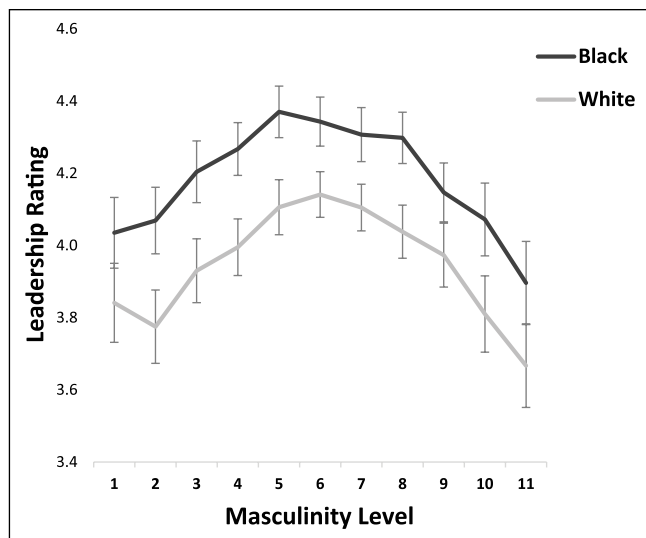
These data suggest that perceptions of masculinity influence perceptions of leadership differently for White and Black targets. Whereas masculinity positively predicted leadership ratings for White faces, the relationship between masculinity and leadership ratings for Black faces was nonsignificant.

**Study 3B.** To better understand how the intersection of race and sexual orientation contributes to leadership perceptions, we wanted to explore whether a point of optimal masculinity exists for leadership judgments. We hypothesized that gay Black men look like good leaders partly because they appear masculine enough for leadership but not *hypermasculine*. To test this, we used computer-generated faces in Study 3B so that we could manipulate masculinity while controlling for race, unconstrained by the natural variability in real faces for which race and masculinity covary (as above). We thus



**Figure 6.** Scatterplot illustrating the relationship between ratings of masculinity and leadership in Study 3A.

Note. Subgroups denoted by colors.



**Figure 7.** Significant quadratic relationship between masculinity and leadership ratings for Black and White male targets. Note. Error bars represent  $\pm 1$  standard error.

expected to observe a significant curvilinear relationship such that leadership ratings would peak with moderate levels of masculinity and decline at the upper end of the masculinity scale for faces of both races.

**Method.** We created 10 unique Black and 10 unique White faces using the random face generator function in FaceGen Modeller v.3.2.6. For each of these parent faces, we created 10 additional versions in which we systematically increased or decreased masculinity using FaceGen's shape function. All FaceGen faces vary from 0% masculine (100% feminine) to 100% masculine (0% feminine). Here, we used a range from 50% (sex ambiguous) to 90% (highly masculine), with each face varying in 4% increments. This yielded 110 White and 110 Black faces (10 Identities  $\times$  11 Versions).

We informed 81 American MTurk workers (43 male, 38 female; 67 White, 7 Black, 7 Other;  $M$  age = 34.3 years,  $SD$  = 9.4) that they would see a series of faces taken from real photographs subtly manipulated using image processing software for which we intended to assess perceptions of leadership potential. Participants then rated each of the 220 faces individually in random order from 1 (*very bad leader*) to 8 (*very good leader*).

**Results and discussion.** A 2 (race)  $\times$  11 (masculinity level) repeated-measures ANOVA of the leadership ratings revealed an unexpected significant main effect of race,  $F(1, 80) = 5.92$ ,  $p = .02$ ,  $\eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .07$ , whereby participants perceived the Black targets ( $M = 4.18$ ,  $SE = .11$ ) as better leaders than the White targets ( $M = 3.94$ ,  $SE = .09$ ), 95% CI = [.04, .43]. As predicted, however, we found a strong main effect of masculinity level,  $F(10, 71) = 10.73$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .60$ . Decomposing this main effect by examining the linear and quadratic

contrasts showed a very strong quadratic effect,  $F(1, 80) = 76.16$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .49$ , but no significant linear effect,  $F(1, 80) = 0.10$ ,  $p = .75$ ,  $\eta^2_{\text{partial}} < .01$ . As Figure 7 illustrates, a clear peak emerged near the middle of the masculinity scale for targets of each race, showing that moderately masculine targets looked like better leaders than highly masculine or sex-ambiguous targets. Masculinity level and race did not interact,  $F(10, 71) = 0.50$ ,  $p = .89$ ,  $\eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .07$ .

The strong quadratic relationship between facial masculinity and leadership perceptions suggests that the relationship between facial masculinity and perceived leadership is not linear. Rather, there may be a point of optimal masculinity for leadership perceptions.

These data differ somewhat from those based on real faces above. First, we did not observe the positive linear relationship between masculinity and leadership in Study 3A, perhaps because the faces near the high end of the scale were quite high in masculinity and may have therefore produced more drastic decreases. Second we did not observe a Race  $\times$  Masculinity Level interaction reminiscent of the Race  $\times$  Sexual Orientation interaction in Studies 1 and 2, because our experimental manipulation controlled the variability of masculinity within each race. Third, participants rated the Black targets as better leaders than the White targets, perhaps representing an artifact of the artificial faces or because participants here corrected for automatic pro-White biases by rating the Black faces more favorably (e.g., Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000). Regardless of these incidental findings, the results provided clear evidence that moderate levels of masculinity enhance perceptions of leadership potential, but that people can earn less favorable evaluations when overly masculine.

In addition to demonstrating racial differences in the facial traits associated with perceptions of leadership, the findings of Studies 1 to 3 also show that obvious and ambiguous social categories interact in person perception. Although we have not directly investigated how social categorization affects this process, these studies suggest that ambiguous information about targets' social identities (i.e., their sexual orientation) influences how people evaluate them. Yet, it remains unclear whether social categories drive these effects or whether target-group differences in leadership stem from bottom-up (appearance-based) trait inferences that simply correlate with group differences. We therefore tested this by modeling the contributions of perceived and actual social category membership on leadership perceptions in Study 4.

## Study 4

To help delineate how social categories influence perceptions of leadership (vs. inferences based on bottom-up appearance cues), we directly assessed participants' explicit sexual orientation judgments in Study 4. Because sexual orientation is perceptually ambiguous (e.g., Tskhay & Rule, 2013), we investigated the extent to which the legibility of



men's sexual orientations contributed to perceptions of their leadership ability by asking participants to both rate the leadership potential of the target faces from Study 1 and explicitly evaluate their sexual orientation. This allowed us to explore how essential it is that perceivers explicitly categorize gay Black men as gay for them to benefit in leadership evaluations, supplementing work outside of person perception in which sexual orientation is explicitly communicated but facial appearance is unknown (Pedulla, 2014).

## Method

We recruited 120 U.S. residents through MTurk, though two additional participants completed the task without collecting payment, for a final sample of 122 participants (58 male, 62 female, 2 other; 88 White, 12 Black, 22 Other;  $M$  age = 35.1 years,  $SD$  = 10.5). This sample provided more than 99% power to replicate the Race  $\times$  Sexual Orientation interaction observed in Study 1 and to replicate Rule's (2011) categorization accuracy findings. The participants completed two tasks. In one, they rated the leadership ability of each target from Study 1 following the method used there. In the other, they evaluated each target's sexual orientation from 1 (*very gay*) to 8 (*very straight*). We used a continuous scale rather than binary categorizations so that we could analyze the mean sexual orientation ratings for each target (Rule et al., 2008). Because the 8-point scale had no midpoint, participants could not give an uncommitted response, permitting scale bifurcation into gay (ratings 1-4) and straight (ratings 5-8) categorizations. Participants judged all targets in random order within counterbalanced blocks such that roughly half rated leadership first and the other half rated sexual orientation first.

## Results

**Mean comparisons.** We first conducted a 2 (race)  $\times$  2 (sexual orientation)  $\times$  2 (block order) ANOVA on the mean sexual orientation ratings to confirm that participants perceived sexual orientation accurately. Replicating past work (e.g., Rule, 2011), a main effect of sexual orientation showed that participants correctly rated straight targets ( $M$  = 5.10,  $SE$  = .08) as more straight than gay targets ( $M$  = 4.62,  $SE$  = .08),  $F(1, 120) = 151.77, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .56$ , and a main effect of race showed that participants rated Black targets ( $M$  = 5.14,  $SE$  = .08) as more straight than White targets ( $M$  = 4.58,  $SE$  = .08),  $F(1, 120) = 91.38, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .43$ .<sup>6</sup>

A Race  $\times$  Sexual Orientation interaction qualified these differences,  $F(1, 120) = 114.85, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .49$ . Although participants rated straight Black targets ( $M$  = 5.19,  $SE$  = .08) as more straight than gay Black targets ( $M$  = 5.09,  $SE$  = .09),  $p = .01, 95\% \text{ CI} = [.02, .18]$ , they rated straight White targets ( $M$  = 5.01,  $SE$  = .08) as substantially more straight than gay White targets ( $M$  = 4.16,  $SE$  = .08),  $p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = [.73, .98]$ . Thus, sexual orientation was more legible for White versus Black targets. Block order did not

qualify any of these differences, all  $F$ 's  $< 0.40, p$ 's  $> .50, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} < .01$ .

**Sexual orientation–leadership correlations.** We next investigated how perceptions of the targets' sexual orientation affected leadership ratings by estimating sensitivity correlations for each participant. First, we calculated the extent to which the targets' actual sexual orientation (dummy coded 0 = gay, 1 = straight) predicted ratings of their leadership ability separately for the Black and White targets. Critically, we also calculated the extent to which *perceptions* of the targets' sexual orientation predicted ratings of their leadership ability. We then controlled for the latter relationship so that we could determine whether actual sexual orientation continued to predict leadership ratings even when apparent differences in sexual orientation were controlled.<sup>7</sup>

Replicating Study 1, actual sexual orientation predicted leadership ratings significantly differently for Black and White targets,  $t(119) = 8.80, p < .001, d = 0.80$ . For White targets, leadership ratings positively correlated with being straight ( $M$  = 0.14,  $SD$  = 0.19),  $t(118) = 8.01, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = [.11, .18]$ . For Black targets, leadership ratings negatively correlated with being straight, however ( $M$  =  $-0.03$ ,  $SD$  = 0.14),  $t(118) = 2.27, p = .03, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-.06, -.004]$ .

Interestingly, *perceived* straightness positively correlated with leadership potential in both groups, though much more for White targets ( $M$  = 0.27,  $SD$  = 0.19),  $t(118) = 15.54, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = [.23, .30]$ , than for Black targets ( $M$  = 0.04,  $SD$  = 0.13),  $t(118) = 3.09, p = .02, 95\% \text{ CI} = [.01, .06]$ ; comparison:  $t(118) = 11.74, p < .001, d = 1.09$ . Targets who looked more likely to be straight were therefore considered better leaders, but the appearance of straightness affected leadership ratings much more for White than Black men.

Finally, we calculated partial sensitivity correlations between actual sexual orientation and leadership perceptions for each participant, controlling for the targets' mean explicit sexual orientation scores (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .97$ ). The relationship between actual sexual orientation and leadership perceptions remained unchanged for Black targets, as leadership ratings still negatively related to being perceived as straight ( $M$  =  $-0.03$ ,  $SD$  = 0.14),  $t(118) = 2.19, p = .03, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-.05, -.003]$ . But the relationship reversed for White targets ( $M$  =  $-0.05$ ,  $SD$  = 0.15),  $t(118) = 3.29, p < .01, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-.07, -.02]$ . Thus, although explicit sexual orientation judgments may influence leadership judgments for White men, they are not required to boost leadership perceptions for gay Black men.

## Discussion

Although the relationship between actual and perceived sexual orientation was tacit in Studies 1 to 3, these results suggest that individuals meaningfully perceive sexual orientation and that those perceptions can sometimes impact their evaluations of leadership. Despite considerable error in their

judgments, participants perceived both Black and White men's sexual orientation more accurately than chance (i.e., they rated straight targets as straighter than gay targets), replicating past work (Tskhay & Rule, 2013). Furthermore, White targets' sexual orientation was more legible than Black targets' sexual orientation, partly because participants perceived Black men as more likely to be straight overall (see Johnson & Ghavami, 2011; Rule, 2011).

More pertinent to our central questions about leadership, participants rated straight White men as better leaders than gay White men but rated gay Black men as better leaders than straight Black men, replicating the findings of Studies 1 to 3. Both White and Black men garnered higher leadership ratings if they *appeared* more likely to be straight (with the former relationship considerably larger than the latter). But, for White targets, controlling for explicit sexual orientation judgments reversed the direction of the sexual orientation–leadership relationship, whereas for Black targets, the relationship did not change. Thus, gay Black men need not be explicitly categorized as gay to benefit in leadership judgments, nor do leadership evaluations seem to suffer if they are. Yet given that Black targets were less likely than White targets to be perceived as gay, part of the advantage could rest on their more concealable sexual orientation. More work is needed to investigate this further.

## General Discussion

Across four studies, we found that people perceived gay Black men as better leaders than straight Black and gay White men. These judgments may stem from perceptions of masculinity and warmth. Although the faces of gay Black men appeared just as warm as the faces of gay White men (and warmer than straight men of either race), participants perceived them as more masculine than both gay and straight White men. Accounting for apparent sexual orientation reversed this relationship for White men but left it unchanged for Black men. These studies suggest that targets' sexual orientation meaningfully interacted with their race in evaluations of their leadership ability and the traits supporting those judgments. The previous literature has largely ignored possible race-based differences in leadership judgments (but see Livingston & Pearce, 2009). Although much recent research has investigated how facial characteristics predict perceptions of leadership, our findings demonstrate the importance of considering the moderating roles of target-group membership and multiple intersecting identities.

In addition, the current work joins existing research illustrating the importance of social context for judgments of leadership. For example, Little and colleagues demonstrated that the traits predicting targets' leadership selection differ depending on the context in which the perceiver imagines them (Little, Burriss, Jones, & Roberts, 2007; Little, Roberts, Jones, & DeBruine, 2012), and Rule and colleagues found that the traits that predict election outcomes and CEOs'

success differ depending on the target's culture (Rule et al., 2010; Rule, Ishii, & Ambady, 2011; see also Harms, Han, & Chen, 2012; Rule & Tskhay, 2014). The current work extends these findings by showing that the traits underlying leadership perceptions also vary for targets belonging to different social groups (i.e., race and sexual orientation).

This research similarly extends Remedios et al.'s (2011) findings that gay Black targets were better liked and more readily approached than straight Black or gay White targets. Furthermore, it provides evidence for what may underlie Livingston and Pearce's (2009) data on the beneficial influence of counterstereotypical facial structure for Black CEOs. They argued that a babyish appearance benefits Black CEOs because it may disarm White perceivers who would otherwise feel threatened by Black targets. Our findings build on this hypothesis by providing evidence that simultaneous perceptions of masculinity and warmth bolster evaluations of counterstereotypical (i.e., gay) Black targets' leadership. We also found clear and robust race differences in the traits that build into leadership judgments; buttressing the interesting but tentative results reported by Livingston and Pearce. The concurrence of masculinity and warmth—both positive but seemingly opposite traits—suggests that they may be particularly powerful contributors to the perception of gay Black men as good leaders.

Thus, researchers should continue to consider the influence of multiple social categories in person perception. This applies not just to cases in which each category is visible and obvious (Crisp & Hewstone, 2007; Johnson et al., 2012; Kulik, Roberson, & Perry, 2007; Stangor, Lynch, Duan, & Glass, 1992) but also to cases in which at least one identity is highly ambiguous (Remedios et al., 2011). Although evaluations and judgments can vary systematically within a single category based on the perceptual features of the target (Livingston & Brewer, 2002), our data show that similar processes occur at the intersection of obvious and ambiguous category dimensions. Because ambiguous target identities can influence perceivers beyond their awareness, perceivers may not realize the need to effortfully limit the effect of stereotypes associated with these identities (Rule et al., 2008).

## Potential Implications and Limitations

These findings suggest that Black men may benefit from coming out as gay in some circumstances. Despite the recent visibility of several prominent gay leaders (e.g., Apple Inc.'s CEO Tim Cook; Cook, 2014), men in leadership positions may unfortunately recognize that others will perceive them as ineffectual if they are openly gay (Blashill & Powlishta, 2009). The current work suggests that this bias may be blunted for Black men. Such speculation must be coupled with scrutiny and the recognition that gay Black men face other unique struggles (Icard, 1986; Lemelle & Battle, 2004). However, our findings do suggest the potential for gay Black men to evade some of the biases directed toward single minorities

(e.g., straight Black or gay White men). Given that context can affect the traits valued in leaders (e.g., Little et al., 2007), future work should explore the extent to which these identities affect leadership perceptions in different domains.

Although the race difference in trait–leadership correlations was robust across these studies, we also caution that the specific direction of the relationships may differ in future work. For example, dominance did not positively predict leadership ratings for White targets, inconsistent with past work (e.g., Rule et al., 2010). Although the specific direction of the trait–leadership relationships might therefore vary, the current results give us high confidence about the *relative* relationships for White versus Black targets. More research using a greater variety of stimuli is needed to draw strong conclusions about when and which traits might actively help or hinder targets in leadership perception, however.

Future studies might similarly extend this research beyond perceptions of men. Some work has considered the intersection of race and gender for female leaders. For example, although dominant White female leaders commonly suffer an evaluative backlash, Livingston, Rosette, and Washington (2012) found similar derogation of dominant Black male leaders but not dominant Black female leaders. It would be useful to know how appearance affects these judgments. For instance, sex-atypical Black women might be seen as particularly appropriate for leadership, whereas sex-atypical White women are not (e.g., Hehman, Carpinella, Johnson, Leitner, & Freeman, 2014). In other words, being female may mitigate the threatening nature of being Black, causing perceivers to view Black women as sufficiently masculine for leadership. It would also be valuable to recruit non-White participants to test whether Black perceivers would show similar preferences for gay Black targets.

## Conclusion

Here, we have provided clear and consistent evidence for an emergent property in leadership perceptions at the intersection of race and sexual orientation. Among men, people perceived members of a double-minority group (gay + Black) as having more leadership potential than targets belonging to just one minority group. We further found that perceptions of warmth and (moderate) masculinity drove these effects, a combination particularly valued for Black male leaders. Perceptions of gay Black men, who belong to two minority groups, therefore do not simply reflect the sum perceptions of gay and Black individuals. Rather, the intersection of social groups like race and sexual orientation reveals nuances in leadership perceptions and challenges assumptions that members of multiple stigmatized groups will not thrive in these roles.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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## Notes

1. Too few non-White individuals participated in our studies to meaningfully investigate the influence of participant race. Furthermore, excluding Black participants did not change the interpretation of any results and so we included their data. We did not have any hypotheses about participant gender and therefore did not analyze it.
2. To increase generalizability, we conducted a replication study with the entire set of Rule's (2011) 200 Black and White gay and straight faces. Sixty U.S. residents rated the targets' leadership potential following the same procedures outlined in the main text. One participant was eliminated for providing the same response for every target. As in Study 1, race and sexual orientation significantly interacted,  $F(1, 59) = 108.24, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .65$ , such that gay Black targets ( $M = 3.88, SE = .13$ ) were perceived as better leaders than both straight Black targets ( $M = 3.69, SE = .13$ ),  $t(59) = 4.84, p < .001, d = 0.63$ , and gay White targets ( $M = 3.69, SE = .12$ ),  $t(59) = 2.09, p = .04, d = 0.27$ , in post hoc tests.
3. Due to concerns that the blocked design may have minimized race's influence on leadership ratings, we replicated Study 1 with a design that did not block targets by race. This closely reproduced the results reported in the main text: Race and sexual orientation significantly interacted,  $F(1, 59) = 20.55, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .26$ , and post hoc tests showed that gay Black targets ( $M = 4.01, SE = .12$ ) were rated as better leaders than straight Black targets ( $M = 3.87, SE = .11$ ),  $t(59) = 2.70, p = .009, d = 0.35$ , not worse than straight White targets ( $M = 4.09, SE = .11$ ),  $t(59) = -0.90, p = .37, d = -0.12$ , but only descriptively higher than gay White targets ( $M = 3.90, SE = .12$ ),  $t(59) = 1.23, p = .12, d = 0.44$ , in this analysis.
4. Two participants in the warmth condition and one in the dominance condition gave the same response to every face in a subgroup, precluding calculation of their sensitivity correlations.
5. We used a new stimulus sample (the Chicago Face Database; Ma, Correll, & Wittenbrink, 2015) to further explore how race, masculinity, and leadership relate. Thirty MTurk workers rated the potential leadership ability of 37 Black and 36 White faces prenormed for masculinity. The participants again used masculinity more strongly for White versus Black targets,  $t(29) = 4.37, p < .001, d = 1.17$ . Furthermore, the quadratic term fit the data when regressing leadership on masculinity,  $F(2, 70) = 19.72, p < .001, R^2 = .36$ , providing a marginally significant improvement over the linear model,  $\Delta F = 3.12, p = .08$ .
6. All mean sexual orientation ratings fell above the mathematical midpoint of the scale, replicating past work showing that perceivers tend to categorize targets as straight rather than gay (Tskhay & Rule, 2013).
7. Three participants gave invariant responses in at least one block, precluding inclusion in these analyses.

## Supplemental Material

The online supplemental material is available at <http://pspb.sagepub.com/supplemental>.

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