

# Why Do They Have to Flaunt it? Perceptions of Communicative Intent Predict Antigay Prejudice Based Upon Brief Exposure to Nonverbal Cues

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## Abstract

Perceivers use gender-atypical nonverbal cues to categorize others as lesbian/gay, and the same cues help to explain the occurrence of antigay prejudice. Although these patterns replicate across recent studies, their proximal causes have received little attention. It remains unclear, for example, why the gender-atypical appearances common among sexual minority individuals arouse negative evaluations. Here, we tested whether perceptions of communicative intent—believing that targets' visible features are deliberately enacted in order to convey aspects of their identities—may help to explain observed links between sexual orientation categorization, gender typicality, and prejudice. In Study 1, gender-atypical body motions were associated with the perception that targets were intentionally trying to communicate their identity, and perceptions of communicative intent predicted expressions of antigay prejudice. Study 2 replicated these effects with static facial images. Collectively, these findings highlight communicative intent as an important factor predicting antigay prejudice in the early moments of social perception.

## Keywords

social perception, social vision, sexual orientation perception, antigay prejudice, flaunting, communicative intent

In 2007, the Philippine National Police invited gay men and lesbians to join their ranks. The message was simple: *You are welcome!* However, this message was accompanied by a caveat: *If you flaunt, you will be fired.* Chief Superintendent Samuel Pagdilao stated, “If they sway their hips while marching . . . that will be a ground for separation.” Growing scientific consensus supports Pagdilao’s assumption that important personal information, including sexual orientation, is communicated nonverbally (Tskhay & Rule, 2013). However, Pagdilao’s comments further imply that such nonverbal cues are deliberative and may compel discrimination. On this point, empirical research is decidedly absent. Here, we test (1) whether the cues perceivers use to categorize sexual orientation are perceived to be deliberately communicative and (2) whether those perceptions are associated with prejudice against individuals categorized as lesbian or gay.

The mechanisms by which sexual orientation is communicated to observers have garnered considerable attention from researchers and the public alike. Early discourse implied that discerning a person’s sexual orientation required an explicit declaration from them. This logic was implicit in the U.S. Armed Forces’ “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, which suggested that sexual orientation was irrelevant to military service unless it was discussed openly. Similar logic prevailed in empirical studies linking sexual orientation concealment to mental and physical health deficits (Cole, Kemeny, Taylor,

Visscher, & Fahey, 1996; Ragins, Singh, & Cornwell, 2007; for reviews, see Lick, Durso, & Johnson, 2013; Pachankis, 2007), which generally implied that sexual minority identities remained concealed prior to explicit disclosure.

Although early discussions implied that sexual orientation disclosure required a clear declaration, recent research has revealed that sexual orientation is readily communicated through nonverbal channels. Indeed, cues ranging from hand gestures to gait patterns and body morphologies provide sufficient information for perceivers to categorize strangers’ sexual

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orientations with above-chance accuracy (Ambady, Hallahan, & Connor, 1999; Johnson, Gill, Reichman, & Tassinary, 2007; Lick, Johnson, & Gill, 2013). Static facial cues compel accurate sexual orientation categorizations as well, even when those categorizations are made after extremely brief exposures (e.g., 50 ms; Rule & Ambady, 2008; Rule, Ambady, & Hallett, 2009) or based upon isolated portions of the face (Rule, Ambady, Adams, & Macrae, 2008). The mechanisms guiding these judgments have also become increasingly clear, with numerous studies indicating that gender-atypical body motions and facial features (i.e., masculine women, feminine men) drive sexual minority categorizations (Freeman, Johnson, Ambady, & Rule, 2010; Johnson et al., 2007; Lick, Johnson et al., 2013; Stern, West, Jost, & Rule, 2013).

The gendered cues that observers use to discern others' sexual orientations are relevant not only for social categorizations but also for broader social evaluations. Indeed, gender-atypical features have been linked to harsh evaluations across the life span, including reports of parental rejection (Landolt, Bartholomew, Saffrey, Oram, & Perlman, 2004) and peer bullying (Ploderl & Fartacek, 2009). Furthermore, gender-atypical adults who identify as sexual minorities report higher rates of victimization than do their gender-typical peers (Corliss, Cochran, & Mays, 2002). Most relevant to the current article, recent studies have implicated gender-atypical appearances in the occurrence of antigay prejudice following brief exposure to facial photographs, especially for lesbian women (Lick & Johnson, in press-a).

Having demonstrated that the very gender-atypical cues informing lesbian/gay categorizations are also associated with prejudice, researchers have begun to investigate more proximal factors underlying these relations. For example, one series of studies highlighted the role of perceptual disfluency in antigay prejudice: Gender-atypical appearances made sexual minorities difficult to process in the early moments of social perception, spawning negative evaluations (Lick & Johnson, 2013). Other findings have suggested that individuals categorized as sexual minorities might face prejudice because their gender-atypical appearances are somewhat rare, and observers tend to dislike features with which they have limited perceptual exposure (Lick & Johnson, in press-b).

A third possibility that forms the basis of the current research is that visible cues to sexual orientation are perceived as deliberate attempts to flaunt one's sexuality. This hypothesis is plausible insofar as many of the cues that inform sexual orientation judgments are at least somewhat subject to conscious control. Indeed, one recent study revealed that gay men and lesbians could intentionally modify the gender typicality of their gait in a manner that derailed the accuracy of observers' social judgments (Lick, Johnson et al., 2013). Furthermore, Rule and colleagues (2008) found that although perceivers exhibited above-chance accuracy when categorizing men's sexual orientations based upon facial features, they were only aware of their accuracy when judgments relied on hairstyle, a decidedly volitional cue. Other studies have shown that observers readily differentiate spontaneous from deliberate nonverbal behaviors (Allen & Atkinson, 1981; Manusov & Rodriguez, 1989). Thus, the cues that convey sexual orientation to observers are at least somewhat malleable, and observers may be attuned to this fact.

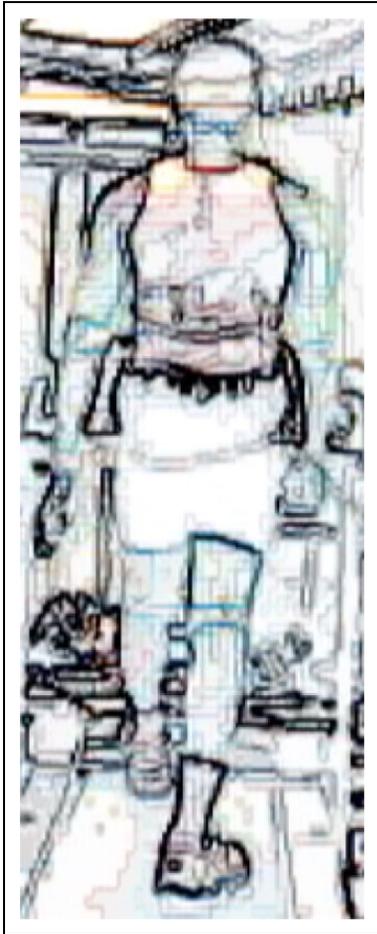
We propose that the malleability of nonverbal cues to sexual orientation may help to explain some forms of antigay prejudice. Our opening example provides anecdotal support for this possibility: Pagdilao threatened discriminatory action against lesbian/gay soldiers if their sexual orientations were conveyed nonverbally, in part because he construed gender-atypical body motions as deliberate attempts to advertise sexual minority identities. Theoretical accounts further corroborate this association between believing that sexual minorities flaunt their sexual orientations and prejudice (Herek, Jobe, & Carney, 1996; Lo & Healy, 2000). Moreover, a growing body of empirical work has revealed that endorsing essentialist beliefs about sexual orientation (i.e., believing that sexual orientation is fixed) predicts low levels of antigay prejudice, whereas endorsing nonessentialist beliefs about sexual orientation (i.e., believing that sexual orientation is malleable) predicts higher levels of antigay prejudice (Haslam & Levy, 2006; Jayaratne et al., 2006). Although this evidence suggests a general relationship between beliefs in the malleability of sexual orientation and antigay prejudice, no studies have tested the specific prediction that gendered nonverbal cues are perceived as deliberate attempts to advertise a minority identity and are therefore predictive of antigay prejudice. Here, we test this hypothesis in two studies examining various nonverbal cues to sexual orientation.

## Study 1

### Method

**Participants.** One hundred fourteen Internet users (61% female) completed the study. Participants were 37.92 years old on average (standard deviation [*SD*] = 13.32 years), and most were White (6% Asian, 8% Black, 6% Latino, 3% Biracial) and straight (95%). In only one instance did excluding participants who identified as sexual minorities alter the significance of results. We have noted this instance but included sexual minority participants in all other analyses.

**Stimuli.** Stimuli were 10-s dynamic figural outlines of walk motions from a rear perspective that were created using three-dimensional motion capture technology. Johnson and colleagues (2007) created these stimuli by affixing infrared markers to the major body joints (e.g., shoulders, elbows, knees) of 16 participants (8 men—4 gay and 4 straight; 8 women—4 lesbian and 4 straight) and measuring the coordinates of each marker in three-dimensional space as participants walked on a treadmill at a comfortable, self-chosen pace. We used these coordinates to derive objective measures of each walker's gait (see below). We also created a digital video recording of each walk for perceivers to evaluate. To do so, we sampled the first 10 s of each digital recording and transformed them into dynamic figural outlines using the Find Edges feature in Adobe Premier. This procedure resulted in 16 10-s video clips that retained participants' movements but obscured most personal details (e.g., clothing brand, skin color; see Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Sample stimulus from Study 1.

**Procedure.** We recruited U.S.-based participants from Mechanical Turk (mTurk), which is an increasingly common sampling tool that provides data as reliable or better than those afforded by traditional undergraduate samples (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). The mTurk announcement (Human Intelligence Task [HIT]) described a study about perceiving other people, with no mention of sex, gender, prejudice, or sexual orientation. After accepting the HIT, participants were redirected to the survey hosting website Qualtrics, where they viewed each target 3 times, providing a unique set of judgments in each block. Stimuli were presented randomly within each block, and the order of judgments was counterbalanced across the participants.

In one block, participants viewed each video and categorized the target's sexual orientation as lesbian/gay or straight by pressing one of two buttons that appeared below the video. In another block, participants evaluated each target on eight 7-point semantic differential scales. We modeled these items after Anderson's (1968) study of the most potent descriptors of other people, and they were: inappropriate–appropriate, improper–proper, respectable–indecent (reverse scored), unseemly–seemly, unacceptable–acceptable, shocking–appealing, offensive–approved, and in poor taste–in good taste. Because these words contained some of the most liked and

disliked descriptors from a list of 555 traits (Anderson, 1968), we reasoned that they captured prejudice to the extent that targets categorized as lesbian/gay received more negative evaluations than targets categorized as straight. In a third block, participants rated how intentional each target's gait appeared. They were instructed as follows: "Sometimes, a person's walk is what it is—it looks that way without any conscious effort. At other times, a person's walk is a deliberate and intentional way for them to convey something important about their identity. Below, you will judge how intentionally you think these people are walking in order to advertise something about themselves." We purposefully did not mention sexual orientation here to reduce demand characteristics. After reading these instructions, participants responded to 6 items, indicating how natural, deliberate, revealing, artificial, expressive, and intentional the target's gait appeared (1 = *Not at all* to 7 = *Extremely*). Upon completing their judgments, participants provided demographic information before being debriefed.<sup>1</sup>

## Results

We tested our hypotheses about perceptions of communicative intent and antigay prejudice using random coefficient multilevel models. Although we included all random intercepts and random slopes to account for the nested structure of the data, we were primarily interested in fixed effects; thus, we do not discuss random effects further. To model dichotomous outcomes, we used SAS PROC GLIMMIX with quasi-likelihood estimation. To model continuous outcomes, we used SAS PROC MIXED with reduced maximum likelihood estimation. For all models, we report unstandardized regression coefficients and their related significance tests.

We computed within-subject reliability for the evaluative judgments and communicative intent items using methods described by Cranford et al. (2006). Both scales showed high within-subject reliability ( $R_C = .93$  and  $.85$ , respectively) so we summed them to create continuous composite scores on which higher values indicated more positive evaluations and stronger perceptions of communicative intent, respectively. Based on the three-dimensional motion capture data, we computed an objective measure of gendered walk motions for each target (hereafter, objective gender typicality). Specifically, we computed a single index for the motion of the shoulders relative to the hips, where 0 represented equivalent motion (a neutral gait), positive values indicated greater hip motion relative to shoulder motion (a feminine gait), and negative values indicated greater shoulder motion relative to hip motion (a masculine gait; Johnson et al., 2007). We then multiplied this value by  $-1$  for female targets so that high scores indicated gender-atypical gaits for both sexes.

When used as predictors, perceived sexual orientation and target sex were effect coded (*straight* =  $-0.5$ , *lesbian/gay* =  $0.5$ ; *male* =  $-0.5$ , *female* =  $0.5$ ) and continuous variables were grand mean centered. We initially tested target sex as a factor in all models, but it only emerged as a significant moderator once. Therefore, we noted this effect but subsequently dropped target sex as a predictor from all models.<sup>2</sup>

## Gender Typicality Predicts Evaluative Biases

Previous research found that gender-atypical individuals recall facing harsh evaluations throughout the life span (Fagot, 1977; Horn, 2007). We sought to buttress these claims by testing whether targets with gender-atypical walk motions were evaluated negatively in the early moments of social perception. Specifically, we regressed evaluations onto objective gender typicality. As expected, gender-atypical targets were evaluated more negatively than were gender-typical targets based solely upon their body motions,  $B = -0.05$ , standard error [ $SE$ ] = 0.02,  $t = -2.24$ ,  $p = .026$ .<sup>3</sup>

## Gender Typicality Predicts Sexual Orientation Categorizations

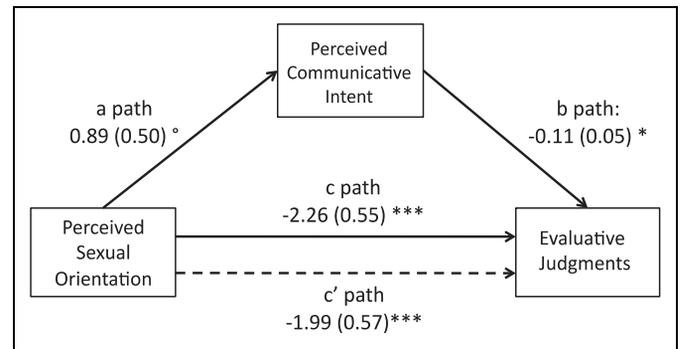
Aside from their implications for global evaluations, gendered nonverbal cues also impact social categorizations, including sexual orientation categorizations (Johnson et al., 2007; Lick, Johnson et al., 2013). To replicate existing findings on this topic, we regressed perceived sexual orientation onto objective gender typicality. As expected, targets with gender-atypical gaits were more likely to be categorized as lesbian/gay than were targets with gender-typical gaits,  $B = 0.02$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ ,  $t = 2.36$ ,  $p = .019$ , odds ratio [OR] = 1.02.

## Gender Typicality Predicts Communicative Intent

We have argued that the gender-atypical gaits perceivers use to categorize targets as lesbian/gay may be perceived as deliberate attempts to communicate one's identity to observers. To test this hypothesis, we regressed communicative intent onto objective gender typicality. As expected, gender-atypical walk motions were perceived to be more communicative than were gender-typical walk motions,  $B = 0.10$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $t = 5.84$ ,  $p < .001$ . This effect was qualified by a significant two-way interaction with target sex,  $B = 0.11$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $t = 3.21$ ,  $p = .001$ . Among both men and women, gender-atypical walk motions were perceived to be more communicative than were gender-typical walk motions, although the effect was stronger for women,  $B$ s = 0.04 and 0.15,  $SE$ s = 0.02 and 0.02,  $t$ s = 1.69 and 6.17,  $p$ s = .091 and <.001, respectively.

## Perceptions of Communicative Intent Help to Explain Antigay Prejudice

Thus far, we have found that the gendered nonverbal cues perceivers used to categorize targets as lesbian/gay and to evaluate them negatively were also perceived to be deliberate. These findings are consistent with the notion that perceptions of communicative intent may help to explain expressions of antigay prejudice. To test this possibility directly, we employed the multilevel mediation approach recommended by Bauer, Preacher, and Gil (2006), which uses Monte Carlo simulations with 10,000 draws to estimate a confidence interval (CI) for the indirect effect. As predicted, the indirect effect of



**Figure 2.** Mediation model for Study 1 demonstrating a significant indirect effect of Perceived Communicative Intent. ° $p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

communicative intent was significant ( $p = .030$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.75, -0.04]$ ), indicating that negative evaluations of targets categorized as lesbian/gay were statistically explained by the fact that their walk motions were perceived to be intentionally communicative (Figure 2).

## Discussion

Recent studies have demonstrated that individuals categorized as lesbian/gay face prejudice in part because they appear gender atypical (Lick & Johnson, in press-a). Furthermore, anecdotal reports imply that gender-atypical body motions may be perceived as deliberate attempts to flaunt one's sexuality. Here, we tested these observations in tandem. As expected, the gender-atypical walk motions of targets categorized as lesbian/gay were perceived as deliberate attempts to communicate their identities, and these perceptions predicted negative evaluations directed toward individuals categorized as lesbian/gay. Collectively, these findings reveal that perceptions of deliberately communicative nonverbal behavior may have implications for social evaluations of sexual minorities.

## Study 2

Although Study 1 provided initial evidence for an association between perceived communicative intent and antigay prejudice, it was limited in several respects. For instance, our analyses relied on a single form of nonverbal behavior known to predict sexual orientation categorizations (i.e., body motion). However, perceivers also rely on overall impressions of facial masculinity/femininity to render sexual orientation judgments, such that gender-typical phenotypes tend to compel straight categorizations, whereas gender-atypical phenotypes tend to compel lesbian/gay categorizations (Freeman et al., 2010). Moreover, Study 1 examined an objective measure of gender typicality estimated from walk motions. Although this measure was empirically rigorous, subjective perceptions of gender typicality may also play a role in antigay prejudice. Indeed, if a target is not perceived to be gender atypical, then they may not be categorized as gay, thereby escaping prejudice. Study 2

was designed to address both of these issues by replicating our previous findings with facial photographs and subjective ratings of gender typicality.

## Method

**Participants.** Seventy-nine Internet users (57% female) completed the study. Participants were 34.41 years old on average ( $SD = 10.95$  years), and most were White (6% Asian, 5% Black, 6% Latino, 4% Biracial) and straight (95%). The pattern and significance of results remained identical when excluding participants who identified as sexual minorities, so we included them in all analyses.

**Stimuli.** Stimuli were facial photographs of 16 real people (8 men—4 gay, 4 straight; 8 women—4 lesbian, 4 straight). The photos were a random subsample of stimuli from Johnson and Ghavami (2011), who collected images from U.S. dating websites. Determinations of each photo's sex and sexual orientation were based on self-labels contained within the profiles. All of the targets were White and devoid of facial hair and visible piercings, and the images were cropped to depict only the face and standardized for size prior to presentation.

**Procedure.** Procedures were nearly identical to Study 1 with two exceptions. First, we edited instructions for the communicative intent items to pertain specifically to facial features. The modified instructions read: "Sometimes, a person's facial appearance is what it is—it looks that way without any conscious effort. At other times, a person's facial appearance is a deliberate and intentional way for them to convey something important about their identity. In this set of judgments, you will decide how intentional each person's facial appearance is across several domains." After reading these instructions, participants responded to the 6 items described in Study 1, indicating how natural, deliberate, revealing, artificial, expressive, and intentional each target's facial features appeared (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *extremely*). The second change in Study 2 was the addition of a fourth block of judgments in which participants rated the gender of each face on a 7-point scale (1 = *masculine* to 7 = *feminine*). As before, stimuli were presented randomly within each block, and the order of judgments was counterbalanced across participants.

## Results

Our analytic plan was identical to Study 1 with one exception: Rather than examining the objective gender typicality of targets' features, we examined subjective perceptions of gender typicality. As noted earlier, participants evaluated each target's gendered appearance, with higher scores indicating more feminine judgments. We reverse scored this value for female targets to yield a common gender typicality index on which high scores indicated more atypical appearances for both sexes (hereafter, perceived gender typicality).

Both the evaluative judgments and communicative intent scales showed acceptable within-subject reliability ( $R_C = 0.94$  and  $0.74$ , respectively), so we summed them to create continuous composite scores on which higher values indicated more positive evaluations and more intentionally communicative appearances. Categorical predictors were effect coded as described in Study, respectively 1, and continuous predictors were grand mean centered.

We again examined target sex as a factor in all models. Many of these interactions were statistically significant, and we discuss them as they arise. If target sex is not mentioned in a given model, then the interaction was not significant and we removed it for the sake of parsimony.

### Gender Typicality Predicts Evaluative Biases

To test whether gender-atypical targets received harsh evaluations on the basis of their facial appearance, we regressed evaluations onto perceived gender typicality. Targets perceived to be gender atypical were evaluated more harshly than were targets perceived to be gender typical,  $B = -3.29$ ,  $SE = 0.26$ ,  $t = -12.70$ ,  $p < .001$ . Importantly, this effect was qualified by a two-way interaction with target sex,  $B = -1.23$ ,  $SE = 0.27$ ,  $t = -4.62$ ,  $p < .001$ . Both men and women who were perceived to be gender atypical received harsher evaluations than did those perceived to be gender typical, but the effect was stronger for female targets,  $Bs = -2.66$  and  $-3.88$ ,  $SEs = 0.29$  and  $0.28$ ,  $ts = -9.14$  and  $-13.69$ ,  $ps < .001$ , respectively.

### Gender Typicality Predicts Sexual Orientation Categorizations

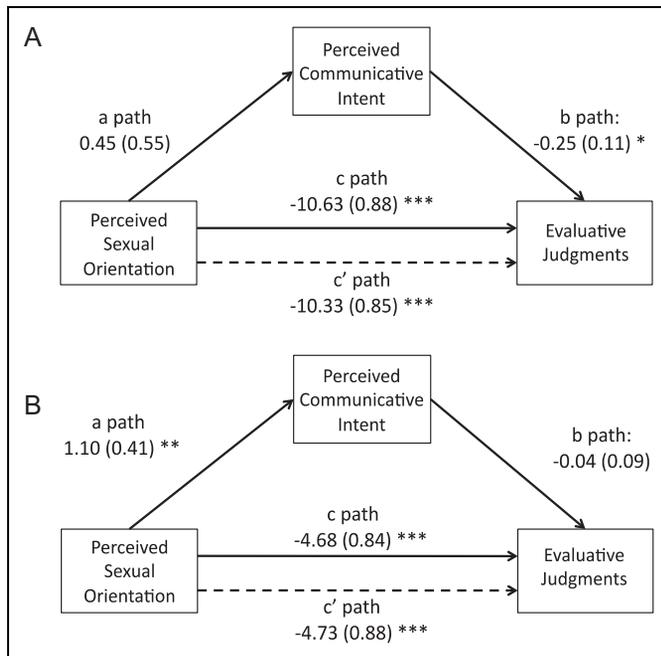
Next, we sought to replicate recent findings indicating that perceivers rely on gendered facial features to infer targets' sexual orientations (Freeman et al., 2010). Specifically, we regressed perceived sexual orientation onto perceived gender typicality. As expected, targets perceived to be gender atypical on the basis of their facial appearance were more likely to be categorized as lesbian/gay than were targets perceived to be gender typical,  $B = 0.83$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $t = 15.95$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $OR = 2.29$ .

### Gender Typicality Predicts Communicative Intent

Third, we tested whether the gender-atypical features perceivers used to infer that targets were lesbian/gay were perceived to be intentional by regressing communicative intent onto perceived gender typicality. As expected, facial features perceived to be gender atypical were rated as more deliberately communicative than were facial features perceived to be gender typical,  $B = 0.41$ ,  $SE = 0.15$ ,  $t = 2.67$ ,  $p = .009$ .

### Perceptions of Communicative Intent Help to Explain Antigay Prejudice

Having found that the gender-atypical facial cues perceivers used to categorize targets as lesbian/gay and evaluate them



**Figure 3.** Mediation models for Study 2, demonstrating a significant indirect effect of Perceived Communicative Intent for female targets (a) but not male targets (b). Although the *a* path in (A) is not statistically significant, this does not preclude the indirect effect from being significant (Hayes, 2009; Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010).  $^{\circ}p < .10$ .  $^*p < .05$ .  $^{**}p < .01$ .  $^{***}p < .001$ .

negatively were also perceived to be intentional, we turned to our primary hypothesis that communicative intent may help to explain antigay prejudice. Using the multilevel approach recommended by Bauer and colleagues (2006), we found that Communicative Intent significantly mediated the link between perceived sexual orientation and evaluations ( $p < .001$ , 95% CI [-1.30, -0.45]). Importantly, however, we suspected that this effect might be driven primarily by female targets because they were judged especially harshly when perceived to be gender atypical. Examining separate models for male and female targets, we found that communicative intent significantly mediated the link between perceived sexual orientation and evaluations for women ( $p = .007$ , 95% CI [-1.87, -0.30]) but not for men ( $p = .416$ ; 95% CI [-0.89, 0.37]; Figure 3).

## Discussion

Study 2 extended our finding that perceptions of communicative intent predict expressions of antigay prejudice, here using static facial images and a subjective measure of gender typicality. Overall, targets perceived to have gender-atypical facial features were categorized as lesbian/gay, and those same targets were evaluated negatively. Furthermore, targets categorized as lesbian/gay and those perceived to be gender atypical were thought to be intentionally communicating their identity via their facial appearance. The negative implications of communicative intent and perceived sexual orientation were especially pronounced for female targets. Consistent with these

findings, perceptions of communicative intent statistically mediated the association between perceived sexual orientation and social evaluations of female targets but not of male targets. Thus, the belief that lesbians' facial features were intentionally communicative predicted negative social evaluations of them.

## General Discussion

In two studies, we established that gendered nonverbal cues inform both sexual orientation categorizations and evaluative judgments, in part because those cues are perceived as deliberate attempts to flaunt one's identity. We first replicated the finding that perceivers rely on gender typicality heuristics to categorize strangers' sexual orientations. Study 1 examined an objective measure of gender typicality drawn from targets' walk motions, revealing that targets with gender-typical gaits tended to be categorized as straight, whereas targets with gender-atypical gaits tended to be categorized as lesbian/gay. Study 2 extended these findings to subjective perceptions of gender typicality drawn from static facial images. We then showed that both sexual orientation categorizations and the gendered cues that give rise to them predict broader social evaluations. Specifically, gender-atypical targets and those categorized as lesbian/gay were evaluated harshly following mere seconds of exposure to their body movements (Study 1) and facial features (Study 2). These effects were not moderated by target sex in Study 1, but they were moderated by target sex in Study 2, where perceivers expressed especially strong biases against women who were perceived to be gender atypical. Finally, and most importantly, we found that the gendered cues informing sexual orientation categorizations were perceived as being intentionally enacted to communicate one's personal identity. That is, gender-atypical individuals were not only categorized as lesbian/gay but also thought to be altering their appearance in order to convey their sexual orientations to observers. Perceptions of communicative intent corresponded with harsh social evaluations, such that communicative intent statistically mediated the association between sexual orientation categorizations and prejudiced evaluations.

Collectively, our findings offer new information about the ways in which perceptual processes may compel prejudice. It is well established that social categorizations activate stereotypes (Bargh, 1999; Devine, 1989; Gilbert & Hixon, 1991) that arouse prejudice against individuals belonging to stigmatized groups (Fazio & Dunton, 1997; Grant & Holmes, 1981; Sinclair & Kunda, 1999). Until recently, however, the perceptual processes linking social categorization to prejudice have remained relatively unclear. Our findings help to fill this gap in the literature, demonstrating that prejudice is sometimes associated with the perception that targets are deliberately communicating stigmatized identities to observers. Our findings also contribute to classic research on stigma concealability (Jones et al., 1984). Specifically, the fact that perceptions of communicative intent were associated with harsh interpersonal evaluations raises the intriguing possibility that perceivers dislike when concealable stigmas are advertised. Perhaps

perceivers expect that concealable stigmas will remain concealed, and when they are faced with information that breaks this expectation—for example, visible cues that are perceived to “flaunt” a concealable identity—they form negative impressions. In these ways, our findings build upon classic research in social psychology by highlighting some proximal reasons why sexual orientation categorizations may be associated with negative evaluations in the early moments of social perception.

It is important to note that the association between perceived communicative intent and antigay prejudice was similar for judgments of male and female targets in Study 1 but was driven primarily by female targets in Study 2. On the surface, the latter findings seem to contradict earlier work that uncovered stronger biases against gay and gender-atypical men relative to women (Bem, 1993; Feinman, 1981; Sandnabba & Ahlberg, 1999). However, they are consistent with more recent work that revealed higher rates of prejudice against lesbians relative to gay men on the basis of their appearance (Lick & Johnson, in press-a; Thompson, Sinclair, Wilchins, & Russell, 2013). We suspect that this discrepancy is related to methodological differences across studies—namely, the fact that prior work focused on behavioral descriptions of sexual minority targets, whereas our work focused on visual depictions. This distinction raises the intriguing possibility that evaluative biases manifest differently when based on behavioral versus visible gender atypicality: Perceivers may consider behavioral gender atypicality especially untoward for men, but visual gender atypicality especially untoward for women. Some data support this proposition. For example, in a recent series of studies, women were punished more harshly than men for having gender-atypical appearances, in part because gender-atypical appearances were viewed as unattractive for women (Lick & Johnson, in press-a). Other work has similarly revealed that global evaluations of women tend to be appearance based, but global evaluations of men do not (Buss, 1989). Thus, one reason for the sex difference in Study 2 may be that women are judged more strongly on the basis of their physical appearance than are men. Another possibility is that perceivers have greater variability in their expectations regarding women’s gendered appearances compared to men’s gendered appearances. If true, this variability might have allowed for stronger statistical associations to emerge for the female targets in Study 2. Although theoretically plausible, however, both of these possibilities remain speculative. Therefore, we reiterate that the basic pattern of results replicated across both the studies reported here, although we uncovered some evidence to suggest that antigay prejudice may be linked most strongly to the perception that sexual minority women are flaunting their identity nonverbally.

Aside from these theoretical contributions, the current studies also highlight avenues for future research. For example, the finding that antigay prejudice is associated with multiple related percepts that arise during social categorization may inform future efforts to reduce prejudice. Specifically, eradicating the perception that gender-atypical features are deliberately enacted could mitigate instances of interpersonal prejudice. Our findings may also have implications for prejudice directed

toward other groups that are categorized on the basis of nonverbal cues (e.g., racial minorities). Extending the current findings to different groups would enhance knowledge of impression formation and guide future research aimed at mitigating diverse forms of interpersonal prejudice.

In sum, the current studies shed light on potential mechanisms by which social categories and the cues that communicate them to observers may arouse animus. They suggest the very features that lead perceivers to categorize targets as gay may also lead them to believe that targets are deliberately flaunting their sexuality, ultimately resulting in negative impressions. These are important topics for future research, for as we hone our knowledge of the perceptual mechanics of antigay prejudice, we may gain insights that guide the development of efficacious methods for reducing such prejudice.

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### Notes

1. We opted not to use screening questions to eliminate inattentive participants because, in our previous work, these exclusions had little or no effect on results. Still, this leaves open the possibility that some participants were not giving the study their undivided attention. Because these participants would only add noise to the data, we view their retention as providing a relatively conservative test of our hypotheses.
2. It is not necessary for sexual orientation perceptions to be accurate in order to motivate prejudice. Indeed, a person categorized as gay is likely to face prejudice even if that categorization is incorrect. We therefore focus on perceived sexual orientation in the analyses reported here. Still, we realize that targets’ actual sexual orientations and the accuracy of perceivers’ sexual orientation judgments might be of interest to some readers, so we report additional analyses in an electronic supplement to this article (see Online Supplemental Material found at <http://spps.sagepub.com/supplemental>).
3. Upon excluding sexual minority participants, this effect was marginally significant,  $B = -.04$ ,  $SE = .02$ ,  $t = -1.80$ ,  $p = .072$ .

### Supplemental Material

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

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