

Urban Middle School Students' Stereotypes at the Intersection of Sexual Orientation, Ethnicity, and Gender

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Heterosexual urban middle school students' ($N = 1,757$) stereotypes about gender typicality, intelligence, and aggression were assessed. Students ($M_{\text{age}} = 12.36$ years) rated Facebook-like profiles of peers who varied by gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Several hypotheses about how the gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation of target peers intersect to shape stereotypes were tested. As predicted, a peer's sexual orientation determined stereotypes of gender typicality, with gay and lesbian students viewed as most atypical. As expected, ethnicity shaped stereotypes of intelligence, with Asian American students seen as most intelligent. Gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation independently and jointly affected stereotypes of aggression. These results demonstrate the value of an intersectional approach to the study of stereotypes. Implications for future research and practice are offered.

Stereotypes are beliefs about the attributes that characterize members of a social group (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981)—what they are like and how they behave (Kang & Bodenhausen, 2015). Studies have consistently demonstrated that stereotypes can have a wide range of social consequences such as reinforcing prejudiced attitudes, influencing interpersonal interactions, and motivating discrimination (Dovidio, Glick, & Rudman, 2005; Killen, Hitti, & Mulvey, 2015). Research on stereotypes with adolescents has focused on beliefs associated with a single social category, for example, ethnicity (e.g., Cvencek, Nasir, O'Connor, Wischnia, & Meltzoff, 2015) or gender (e.g., Liben & Bigler, 2002). Research has ignored the possibility that adolescents may have different stereotypes for the boys versus the girls of an ethnic group. In addition, studies with adolescents have not examined stereotypes associated with sexual orientation. Consequently, it is not known whether adolescents hold distinct and differentiated beliefs about peers based on the combination of the peer's gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

This study examined heterosexual urban middle school students' stereotypes about boys and girls who belong to different ethnic and sexual orientation groups. The current work used an intersectional framework (e.g., Collins, 1999; Crenshaw, 1995) and drew on research from developmental and social psychology to develop and test hypotheses about how the gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation of peers jointly shape adolescents' stereotypes. Three distinct stereotype domains—gender typicality, intelligence, and aggression—were chosen to demonstrate that the ways in which social categories combine to shape stereotypes differ depending on the domain.

Understanding Adolescents' Stereotypes Using an Intersectionality Framework

During middle school, adolescents exhibit greater awareness of social group membership and intergroup relations as well as heightened sensitivity to issues of identity (García-Coll et al., 1996; Huesmann, Dubow, Boxer, Souweidane, & Ginges, 2012). As children enter adolescence, conventional beliefs about gender, gender roles, and sexuality become especially salient (e.g., Alfieri, Ruble, & Higgins, 1996; Horn, 2003) and coincide with adolescents' heightened negativity toward gender nonconformity (Craig, Peplau, Connolly, & Henderson,

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2001; Eder, 1995) and same-sex sexuality (Heinze & Horn, 2009). In addition, racial and ethnic identities become increasingly meaningful and relevant, especially for those who attend middle school in urban settings (e.g., Graham, 2006). Multiethnic urban schools therefore provide a unique context for examining how stereotypes are affected, individually or in combination, by the gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation of peers.

Research on stereotypes has typically focused on a single social category such as gender *or* ethnicity *or* sexual orientation. This approach is problematic because a single social category does not capture the experiences of every member of that category. Studies with adults have demonstrated that when a category is considered in isolation, stereotypes often reflect the experiences of the most prototypical members of that group (e.g., Ghavami & Peplau, 2013). For example, when U.S. adults are asked about a "typical woman," they usually envision a White woman, thus obscuring the experiences of ethnic minority women. When asked to think about a typical member of a racial group such as "African Americans," people usually envision the men of that group (e.g., African American men), thus ignoring the experiences of women of that group. Therefore, a single social category will necessarily render invisible the experiences of those who possess multiple minority statuses (e.g., Latinas; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008).

Increasingly, researchers have recognized that a more complete understanding of the complexity of social perception requires moving beyond a single category approach and, instead, considering the joint impact of multiple social categories. The intersectionality framework (e.g., Cole, 2009; Collins, 1999; Crenshaw, 1995) provides a starting point. Three main ideas are central to an intersectional perspective. First, each person simultaneously belongs to multiple social categories; for example, in the United States, each person has a gender, race, sexual orientation, and so on. Second, the meaning of each social group membership is filtered through the lens of the others. For example, a person's understanding of their race is constructed through the lens of their gender, and their understanding of their gender is affected by their race. Third, the meaning and salience attached to a social category are shaped by the context. This raises the possibility that, when considered jointly, the relative impact of each category is not uniform across contexts and will depend on the unique features of that domain. For example, whereas in some domains, such as intelligence, ethnicity may determine social perception, in other

domains, such as aggression, both ethnicity and gender may influence perception. Thus, to understand how social categories combine to shape stereotypes, researchers must consider multiple social categories simultaneously and attend to different domains.

A few studies with adults have applied an intersectional perspective to investigating the joint effects of gender and ethnicity on stereotypes (e.g., Goff, Thomas, & Jackson, 2008; Niemann, Jennings, Rozelle, Baxter, & Sullivan, 1994). This research has demonstrated that intersectional gender and ethnic stereotypes are unique and cannot be understood by simply adding stereotypes of gender to stereotypes of ethnicity. For example, Ghavami and Peplau (2013) found that although "women" were described as gentle, soft, and emotional, and "African Americans" as lazy, criminal, and uneducated, "African American women" were not characterized as soft, gentle, lazy, or criminal. Instead, African American women were depicted as assertive, loud, and unfeminine. These unique characteristics would have been missed had the researchers used a single category approach to document stereotypes.

To date, researchers have not examined intersectional stereotypes among adolescents by systematically comparing beliefs about boys and girls who are from various ethnic and sexual orientation groups. To demonstrate the value of an intersectional approach, this study focused on stereotypes in three domains: gender typicality, intelligence, and aggression. The goal was to assess how a peer's ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation shape perceptions in these three domains both independently and in combination.

Adolescents' Stereotypes of Gender Typicality

Gender typicality refers to the extent to which an individual's mannerisms, personality traits, physical attributes, or activity preferences are perceived to be in line with the socially prescribed gender norms. To assess gender typicality stereotypes, researchers have employed diverse methods such as a predetermined list of adjectives (e.g., Brown & Bigler, 2002) or peer nomination methods (e.g., Coie & Dodge, 1983). Regardless of the method of assessment, a robust body of research demonstrates that children and adolescents are well aware of gender stereotypes (Liben & Bigler, 2002; Martin & Ruble, 2010). Boys, but not girls, are generally described with such masculine attributes as "tough" and "aggressive." By contrast, girls, but not boys, are depicted with such feminine attributes as "gentle" and "affectionate."

Studies also show that children and adolescents understand the meaning of their *own* gender typicality/atypicality. Illustrative is Egan and Perry's (2001) study of 182 children and middle school students (Grades 4 through 8) who were asked about their own gender typicality in various domains including feeling pressure for gender conformity and attitudes toward boys and girls. These domains require an understanding of what it means to be a "typical" boy and girl, and how that understanding could be applied to the self and to others. Taken together, research with children and adolescents provides compelling evidence that middle schoolers do understand the concept of a "typical boy" and a "typical girl."

Although no studies with adolescents have investigated stereotypes of the gender typicality of gay boys, lesbian girls, or bisexual boys and girls, the adult literature is well-developed. Gay men and lesbians are consistently viewed as gender atypical (e.g., Kite & Deaux, 1987). In an early study, Madon (1997) asked college students to spontaneously generate attributes that described gay men. The most common attributes listed for gay men were "affectionate," "sensitive," and "emotional," attributes that are typically associated with femininity rather than masculinity. Other studies (e.g., Fingerhut & Peplau, 2006; Morrison & Bearden, 2007) also find that gay men are generally characterized as less similar to a "typical man" but more similar to a "typical woman." Although gay men are characterized as feminine, lesbians are often depicted as masculine. In a recent study by Cox and Devine (2015), college students were asked to choose, from a preselected list of attributes, descriptors that best characterized lesbians. Lesbians were described with such phrases as "has short hair," "does not wear makeup," and "plays softball." Other studies (e.g., Brambilla, Carnaghi, & Ravenna, 2011; Page & Yee, 1986) corroborate these findings by showing that lesbians are generally viewed as "not feminine," "lacking in maternal instincts," or "engaging in masculine behaviors and habits." Research (e.g., Pedulla, 2014) also provides preliminary evidence that adult gay and lesbian targets are viewed as gender atypical irrespective of their ethnicity. No studies have examined the gender typicality/atypicality of bisexual women and men.

Indirect evidence of a perceived association between gender atypicality and minority sexual orientation among adolescents is provided by studies of sexual orientation-based victimization in school (Aragon, Poteat, Espelage, & Koenig, 2014).

Biased language against lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals such as calling someone "fag" or "dyke" is often directed not only at peers who identify as LGB but also at those who are perceived as gender nonconforming (e.g., Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, Card, & Russell, 2010).

In sum, based on previous research, it was hypothesized that stereotypes of the gender typicality/atypicality of boys and girls will be driven by the peer's sexual orientation, irrespective of their ethnicity. Specifically, compared to heterosexual boys, gay boys will be perceived as significantly less similar to boys (lower on gender typicality) and more similar to girls (higher on gender atypicality). Compared to heterosexual girls, lesbian girls will be perceived as less similar to girls (lower on gender typicality) and more similar to boys (higher on gender atypicality). Because no research has assessed stereotypes of gender typicality for bisexual targets, no predictions were made. On one hand, the perceived gender typicality of bisexual students could fall between those of heterosexual and lesbian/gay students. On the other hand, bisexual students might be perceived as sexual minorities and so viewed as similar to gay/lesbian students.

Adolescents' Stereotypes of Intelligence

As early as second grade, children are sensitive to stereotypes about intelligence (Cvencek, Meltzoff, & Greenwald, 2011). The awareness of academic stereotypes peaks during adolescence (McKown & Strambler, 2009) and has significant consequences for peer relations and academic achievement. Research on stereotypes of intelligence has employed varied methods and has assessed adolescents' beliefs about different aspects of intelligence such as who is smart or who does well in school, with no single conceptualization of intelligence dominating the literature. Evidence suggests that stereotypes about intelligence are strongly influenced by the ethnicity of the individual. For example, some studies (e.g., Graham, Taylor, & Hudley, 1998; Okeke, Howard, Kurtz-Costes, & Rowley, 2009) have shown that peers often characterize African Americans and Latinos as "having low academic ability," "not doing well in school," and "being less intelligent." Other studies have demonstrated that Asian students are often stereotyped as a "model minority" (Kiang, Witkow, & Thompson, 2015), a group that is perceived as smarter than other ethnic groups (e.g., Cvencek et al., 2015).

Empirical studies have also documented that stereotypes of intelligence differ based on the

individual's gender. Many studies with adults showed that intelligence is typically associated with masculinity and thus with men and boys rather than with femininity, women, and girls (Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972; Eagly & Steffen, 1984). However, research in urban schools indicates that boys are not always perceived as smarter than girls. In two studies, Graham et al. (1998) asked urban ethnically diverse middle school students to nominate peers who "work hard and get good grades." In both studies, participants nominated more girls than boys.

In addition, indirect evidence suggests that the joint impact of gender and ethnicity may affect stereotypes of intelligence. For instance, Hudley and Graham (2001) provided middle school students with hypothetical scenarios of high and low achieving youth such as those who "do very well in school" versus those who "do just enough to get by." Students were then presented with photographs of boys and girls who were African American, Latino, and White and asked to select the photograph that they believed best matched each description. On average, photos of girls and White students were selected more frequently for scenarios of high achieving youth. Analysis also showed a Gender \times Ethnicity interaction: adolescents most frequently selected photos of ethnic minority boys for scenarios of academic disengagement. Studies with adults (e.g., Ghavami & Peplau, 2013; Niemann et al., 1994) corroborate these findings.

To date, researchers have not assessed the role of an individual's sexual orientation in stereotypes of intelligence. If stereotypes of intelligence are gendered and a key stereotype of lesbian and gay individuals is gender atypicality, then sexual orientation may influence stereotypes of intelligence. For example, if girls are perceived as smarter than boys and gay boys are stereotyped to be more like girls, then gay boys might be stereotyped as smarter than heterosexual boys. However, given the lack of any empirical research on this issue, tests of sexual orientation were considered exploratory.

In sum, it was predicted that ethnicity would shape stereotypes of intelligence with Asian Americans being viewed as significantly smarter than peers from other groups. Given that the available research on the role of gender in stereotypes of intelligence is mixed, two possible patterns of results were explored. On one hand, boys could be perceived as smarter than girls. On the other hand, girls could be perceived as smarter than boys. No specific predictions were made about sexual

orientation or the joint impact of gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation in shaping stereotypes of intelligence.

Adolescents' Stereotypes of Aggression

One of the most fully researched areas in developmental science is aggression, in part, because of its significant effects on a wide range of psychosocial and academic outcomes among youth. Using different conceptualizations of aggression and diverse methods of stereotype assessment, a consistent finding is that boys are stereotyped as more aggressive than girls. In an early study, Crick, Bigbee, and Howe (1996) asked third- through sixth-grade students about their beliefs about aggression. When asked who would use aggression when mad, 65% of participants said boys would do so, and only 25% said girls would use aggression when mad. Other studies corroborate this gendered nature of perceived aggression (e.g., Crick, 1997; Giles & Heyman, 2005).

Stereotypes of aggression also vary along ethnic lines. For example, in a study of middle school students, Graham, Bellmore, and Mize (2006) asked participants to nominate peers who "start fights or push other kids around," "put other kids down or make fun of others," and "spread nasty rumors about other kids." Students categorized 41% of African Americans and 37% Latinos as aggressive compared to only 22% of White, Asian, and multiethnic students (collectively). Studies with adults also find an association of ethnicity and aggressiveness. In an illustrative study, Ghavami and Peplau (2013) showed that African Americans were stereotyped as more aggressive than any other ethnic group. Asian Americans, on the other hand, were described as *not* "aggressive" or "tough." Latinos and Whites fell in between these two groups, with Latinos closer to African Americans and Whites closer to Asians.

To date, no studies have assessed whether and how adolescents' stereotypes of aggression vary based on the peer's sexual orientation. If gay boys and lesbian girls are stereotyped as gender atypical, then gay boys may be seen as less aggressive and lesbian girls as more aggressive than their heterosexual peers. Might sexual orientation impact perception of aggression of boys and girls of various ethnic groups? Adult person perception research (e.g., Johnson & Ghavami, 2011) suggests that minority sexual orientation, a category that is associated with gender atypicality, should most strongly affect perception of aggression of boys and girls of

those ethnic groups that are prototypical of aggression. Among boys, African Americans are perceived as the most aggressive ethnic group and thus African American boys are the prototype of aggression. Gay African American boys, therefore, should be viewed as less aggressive compared to heterosexual African American boys. By contrast, among girls, Asian Americans are perceived as the least aggressive ethnic group and thus Asian American girls are the prototype of (non)aggression. Lesbian Asian American girls, therefore, should be viewed as more aggressive than heterosexual Asian American girls.

In sum, it was expected that peers' gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation would shape perceptions of aggression both independently and jointly. It was predicted that boys would be characterized as more aggressive than girls and that African Americans and Latinos would be seen as more aggressive than Asian Americans and Whites. It was also predicted that sexual orientation and gender would interact such that gay boys would be viewed as less aggressive than heterosexual boys and lesbians would be viewed as more aggressive than heterosexual girls.

The Current Study

The current study investigated how gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation categories combine to shape early adolescents' stereotypes about gender typicality, intelligence, and aggression. This study focused on the stereotypes held by urban ethnically diverse adolescents who self-identified as heterosexual. There were two reasons for the decision to include heterosexual participants only. First, the larger sample of middle school students included very few participants who self-identified as nonheterosexual. Second, the complexity of the research design required a substantial number of participants in each condition. Furthermore, focusing on the beliefs of heterosexuals toward sexual minorities is consistent with other studies of adolescents and adults (e.g., Heinze & Horn, 2014; Worthen, 2013). As a result, this study does not provide information about how the stereotypes of nonheterosexual students may be affected by gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. This limitation notwithstanding, assessing the stereotypes of heterosexual students is an important first step toward understanding the beliefs of the dominant group, which may, in turn, shape the social disadvantage of the minority group.

Middle school participants were randomly assigned to view five different Facebook-like profiles of fictitious peers. Using the Facebook format, participants were given explicit information about the person's sexual orientation, gender, and race/ethnicity. The task for participants was to offer their first impressions of this person on the dimensions of intelligence, aggression, and gender typicality/atypicality. Furthermore, manipulation check questions were included to ensure that participants accurately understood the featured person's sexual orientation, gender, and race/ethnicity. This method made it possible to test specific hypotheses about how explicit information about gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation combined to determine stereotypes in specific domains. It was expected that the featured students' sexual orientation would determine stereotypes of gender typicality, with gay and lesbian students viewed as most atypical. Although ethnicity and gender were expected to independently and jointly shape stereotypes of intelligence, ethnicity was expected to exert a stronger impact with Asian American students seen as most intelligent. Finally, it was hypothesized that gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation independently and jointly would affect stereotypes of aggression.

Method

Data Source and Participants

The data for this study come from the Peer Relations project, a school-based study that examines how urban ethnically diverse middle school students understand their own social and academic experiences and how they perceive others who belong to various groups. In the spring of 2012, focus groups were conducted ($N = 40$) with sixth- and eighth-grade students from a large urban middle school in the southwestern United States. The purpose of the focus groups was to develop age-appropriate measures about intergroup attitudes based on gender, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation. In the fall of 2012, a pilot study was conducted ($N = 117$) with sixth- to eighth-grade students from a different large urban middle school in the southwestern United States. The purpose of the pilot study was to test the appropriateness of the measures for this age group and to address any logistical or feasibility issues. This extensive testing of the questions revealed no confusion about any of the measures. Indeed, students seemed to enjoy participating in the study.

In the spring and fall of 2013, sixth- through eighth-grade students from four large public urban middle schools in the southwestern United States were recruited for the main study. To maximize the racial/ethnic diversity of the sample, schools were selected that varied in racial/ethnic diversity. Across these four schools, Latinos constituted the largest group. However, the extent to which the other ethnic/racial groups were represented varied from school to school. In two schools, Latinos were the largest group followed by African Americans and Asians; Whites constituted the smallest racial group. Another school had only two ethnic/racial groups with 60% Latinos and 40% African Americans. The fourth school had Latinos as the largest group followed by Asians and Whites with African Americans as the smallest group. To reduce confounds of race/ethnicity with socioeconomic status, schools were selected to match the district's average percent of students eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunch ($M = 77\%$). Schools in the current sample ranged from 58% to 86% ($M = 71\%$) in free or reduced-price lunch eligibility.

Participants were 1963 adolescents (57% girls) enrolled in sixth through eighth grades from 116 regular education classrooms across four urban, public middle schools. Participants were proficient in English and ranged in age from 10 to 15 years ($M = 12.36$, $SD = 0.99$). Based on student self-report, 51% identified as Latino, 21% as Asian/Asian American, 11.6% as Black/African American, 8.5% as biracial/multiracial, 6.0% as White/Caucasian, 1.4% as Middle Eastern, and 0.5% as Native American. Most participants (81%) were born in the United States. Of those, 68% had a parent who was born outside of the United States. All four schools qualified for Title I compensatory education funding.

Procedure

All procedures were approved by the internal review boards of the school district and university. Active parental consent was obtained. To accommodate the linguistic diversity of the sample, parental consent forms were translated into Spanish, Korean, Mandarin, Cantonese, and Vietnamese. Of the parents who were contacted, approximately 70% returned signed consent forms (range of returned consent = 50%–87% across schools). Of the forms returned, approximately 80% of parents granted permission for their child to participate. Student assent was obtained from those students who received parental consent. All measures were

assembled in a printed booklet and administered in a science or health class by two trained researchers. The entire procedure took approximately 60 min to complete. To ensure privacy, each participant was asked to create a private space on their desk by using adjustable 12-in. high folders that the researchers provided. At the end of data collection in each school, participants were debriefed about the purpose of the study in their respective classrooms. Participants were entered into a raffle to win prizes such as school supplies. This article reports findings from the ratings of Facebook-like profiles, which was presented at the beginning of the 60-min survey.

Measures

Stereotypes

Facebook-like profiles were created to assess intersecting gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation stereotypes. Participants were told that the researchers were interested in assessing their "first impressions" about other students based on their Facebook profiles. In reality, these profiles were fictitious. The Facebook profiles varied by gender (boy, girl), ethnicity (Asian American, African American, Latino, White), and sexual orientation (heterosexual, gay/lesbian, or bisexual). To prevent participant fatigue, a well-established procedure used by social psychologists (e.g., Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007) was followed where each participant was presented with a subset of the 24 total profiles. Specifically, each participant was randomly assigned to review 5 of the 24 possible combinations and asked to offer their first impressions of each of those five profiles. Two constraints were imposed on the composition of the sets of five Facebook-like profiles. First, within each group of five profiles, all four races/ethnicities had to be represented with *no* two successive profiles representing the same racial/ethnic group. Second, all sexual orientations had to be represented within each group of five profiles: a straight boy, a straight girl, a lesbian girl, a gay boy, and a bisexual person (either boy or girl).

Capitalizing on the general format of Facebook, each profile contained a headshot photo and a name to emphasize ethnicity. The profile also contained the student's gender (e.g., sex: female). To specify the sexual orientation of the student, Facebook's format was used to indicate whether the student was interested in dating boys, girls, or both boys and girls. Additionally, the profiles contained

distractor information including a fictitious name of the middle school the student attended and a fictitious city of residence. Great care was taken to minimize the role of extraneous variables and to ensure that variables of interests determined stereotypes, following methods used in a large body of social psychological research (e.g., Johnson & Ghavami, 2011). First, for each ethnic group, five photos of boys and girls (e.g., five Asian boy photos, five Asian girl photos) were included to minimize individualized responses to any one photo. Second, to hold gender typicality constant across photos, pictures were standardized in the following manner. Two groups of 20 middle school students evaluated 80 photos (40 photos per group) on gender typicality, level of attractiveness, and ethnic stereotypicality using a 5-point Likert scale. Photos that on average were rated as a 3 on the 5-point scale on all of the three ratings were chosen. Thus, the photos used in the study were judged by students to be average with regard to gender typicality and attractiveness. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that the same photos were sometimes presented as a heterosexual student, sometimes as a gay/lesbian student, and sometimes as a bisexual student. A final point is that these Facebook profiles provide participants with explicit information about the person's sexual orientation.

After viewing each profile, students were asked a series of questions about their impressions of the student featured in the profile. First impressions were defined as "opinions we form of others after only seeing or meeting them very briefly and before knowing very much about them. These opinions could be good or bad. Everyone forms their own unique first impressions." Four questions assessing stereotypes were included. One item assessed perceived *aggressiveness*, "If you were to guess, would you say that this student is aggressive?" One item assessed perceived *intelligence*, "If you were to guess, would you say that this student is smart?" To assess perceived *gender typicality* and *atypicality*, two separate items were used, one for perceived masculinity (similarity to boys) and one for perceived femininity (similarity to girls). Treating masculinity and femininity as separate dimensions, rather than the endpoints of a single dimension, is consistent with the approach to stereotype research in adults recommended by Bem (1977). The wording of the items was, "If you were to guess, would you say that this student is similar to boys?" and "If you were to guess, would you say that this student is similar to girls?" Each item was rated on a 5-point scale from 1 (*no way!*) to 5 (*definitely yes!*).

Scores were averaged across participants to calculate mean scores for aggression, intelligence, similarity to boys, and similarity to girls for each condition.

To ensure that participants accurately perceived the social category membership of the student in each profile, three manipulation check questions were asked that corresponded to the gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation of the student in each Facebook profile. The analyses reported here are based on the responses of those participants who, for each condition presented, correctly identified all three social categories (~84% of the sample).

Participants' Self-Reported Sexual Orientation

To assess the participant's own sexual orientation, students were asked to select from the following categories: *straight*, *lesbian*, *gay*, *bisexual*, *I am unsure of my sexual orientation*, or *I am not attracted to anyone*. The final sample was limited to participants who self-identified as straight because relatively few participants identified as nonheterosexual. Of the 1,963 participants, only 206 (roughly 11%) identified as bisexual, unsure of their attractions or "not attracted to anyone." No participants identified as gay or lesbian. Given this diversity among the nonheterosexual participants and the fact that there were 24 possible combinations of gender, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation in the Facebook profiles, the nonheterosexual sample distributed across conditions was too small and lacked adequate power for appropriate statistical analysis. Consequently, the analyses were conducted on the responses of those participants who indicated that they were straight ($n = 1,757$; 89.1% of the total sample).

Results

The main goal of the study was to examine how the gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation of a peer shape adolescents' stereotypes in three domains: gender typicality, intelligence, and aggression. Because each participant was randomly assigned to evaluate 5 of the 24 conditions, observations were nested within participants. Therefore, a series of linear mixed models (West, Welch, & Galecki, 2014) with random intercepts were conducted to account for nonindependence among repeated observations for each participant. Restricted maximum likelihood was used to estimate the models. In these models, the fixed effects

included the main effects for featured students' gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, and all two- and three-way interactions among those variables. Participants' gender and ethnicity were entered as covariates in the model to control for their effects. Analysis failed to show any significant differences based on the participants' gender across the three stereotype domains. By contrast, significant differences based on the participants' race/ethnicity were found for stereotypes of intelligence and aggression but not for stereotypes of gender typicality/atypicality. Subsequent pairwise comparisons were conducted with Bonferroni corrections. Because linear mixed models are a multilevel analog of a repeated measures analysis of variance, statistics reported here are means and standard errors.

Stereotypes of Gender Typicality and Atypicality

Analysis failed to show significant differences based on the participants' gender, $F(1, 1,557) = 0.81$, $p = .37$, or ethnicity, $F(6, 1,561) = 1.33$, $p = .26$, for similarity to boys. Likewise, no significant differences based on the participants' gender, $F(1, 1,556) = 1.58$, $p = .47$, or ethnicity, $F(6, 1,562) = 0.02$, $p = .97$, emerged for similarity to girls. It was predicted that participants would view lesbian and gay students as significantly less gender typical (i.e., similar to peers of the same gender) and significantly more gender atypical (i.e., similar to peers of the other gender) than heterosexual students. In addition, it was hypothesized that this sexual orientation effect would emerge irrespective of the ethnicity of the featured students. Given that no research exists about the gender typicality/atypicality of bisexuals, two possible patterns of results were explored. On one hand, the perceived gender typicality of bisexual featured students could fall between those of heterosexual and lesbian/gay students. On the other hand, bisexual featured students might be perceived as sexual minorities and so viewed as similar to gay/lesbian targets. The data were analyzed separately for boy and girl students featured in the Facebook profiles.

Boys Featured in the Facebook Profiles

As expected and shown in Figure 1, a significant main effect of sexual orientation on perception of *similarity to boys* emerged, $F(2, 2,763) = 565.00$, $p < .001$, such that heterosexual boy students were perceived as most similar to boys ($M = 3.49$) and gay boy students as least similar to boys ($M = 2.38$). Bisexual boys fell between those two

groups ($M = 2.86$). Pairwise comparisons revealed that each of these sexual orientation groups differed significantly from the others in perceived similarity to boys (all $ps < .05$). As anticipated, no significant interaction emerged between featured students' sexual orientation and ethnicity on perception of similarity to boys, $F(6, 3,348) = 1.75$, $p > .10$.

For perceived *similarity to girls* of boy students featured in the Facebook profiles, a significant main effect of sexual orientation emerged, $F(2, 2,717) = 379.36$, $p < .001$ (see Figure 2). Heterosexual boy students were perceived as least similar to girls ($M = 1.81$) and gay boy students as most similar to girls ($M = 2.66$), with bisexual boys falling between those two groups ($M = 2.46$). All of these sexual orientation groups differed significantly from one another in perceived similarity to girls (all $ps < .05$). As anticipated, there was no significant interaction between sexual orientation and ethnicity of the students featured in the Facebook profiles ($F < 1$). In sum, these findings indicate that for boy students featured in the profiles, perceptions of gender typicality and gender atypicality depend on sexual orientation and not ethnicity.

Girls Featured in the Facebook Profiles

A significant main effect of sexual orientation on perception of *similarity to girls* was found, $F(2, 2,963) = 472.31$, $p < .001$. Figure 2 shows that heterosexual girl students were perceived as most similar to girls ($M = 3.57$) and lesbians as least similar to girls ($M = 2.52$). Bisexual girls featured in the Facebook profiles fell between those two groups ($M = 2.89$). All three of these sexual orientation groups differed significantly from one another (all $ps < .05$). No significant interaction emerged between sexual orientation and ethnicity of the featured students on perception of similarity to girls ($F < 1$).

For perception of *similarity to boys*, there was a significant main effect of sexual orientation, $F(2, 2,963) = 247.95$, $p < .001$, shown in Figure 1. Heterosexual girls featured in the Facebook profiles were perceived as least similar to boys ($M = 1.83$) and lesbians as most similar to boys ($M = 2.56$), with bisexual girls falling between those two groups ($M = 2.34$; all $ps < .05$ for the pairwise comparisons). No significant interaction was found between sexual orientation and ethnicity of the featured students on perception of similarity to boys, $F(6, 3,644) = 1.49$, $p = .176$. Taken together, perception of the gender typicality and

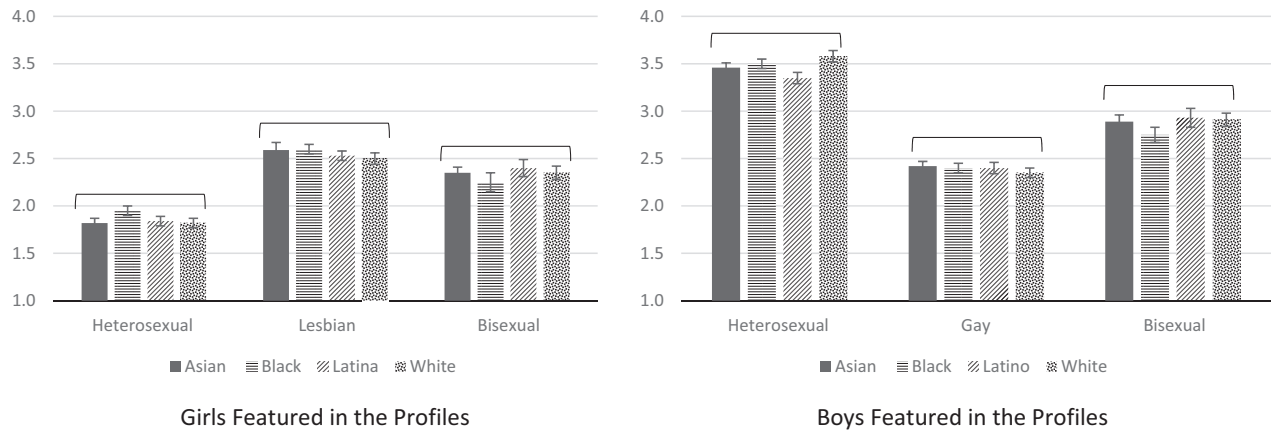


Figure 1. Ratings of similarity to boys as a function of the ethnicity and sexual orientation among boy and girl featured students.

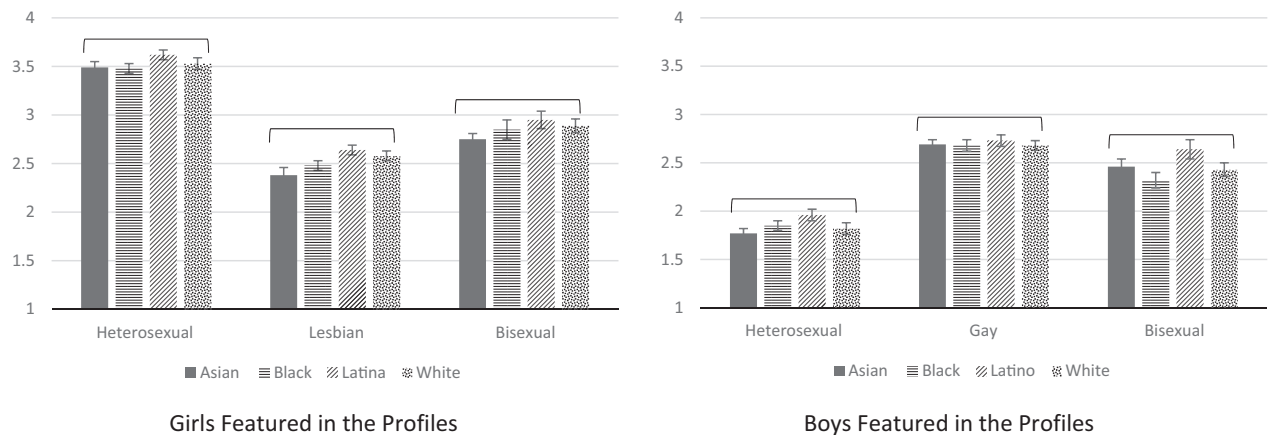


Figure 2. Ratings of similarity to girls as a function of the ethnicity and sexual orientation among boy and girl featured students.

gender atypicality of girls featured in the profiles depended on their sexual orientation and not their ethnicity.

Stereotypes of Intelligence

Analysis failed to show any significant differences based on the participants' gender. The participants' race/ethnicity significantly affected their perception of the featured students' intelligence. Compared to participants from other racial/ethnic groups, Asian American participants rated the featured students as less smart, $F(6, 1,610) = 108.10$, $p < .05$. No significant differences in perceived intelligence emerged based on participant gender, $F(1, 1,579) = 0.08$, $p = .77$. The results for stereotypes of intelligence are displayed in Figure 3. As predicted, a significant main effect of the featured student's ethnicity was found, $F(3, 6,605) = 48.19$, $p < .001$. Asian American students ($M = 3.50$) were viewed

as significantly smarter than any other ethnic group: White ($M = 3.38$), African American ($M = 3.33$), and Latino ($M = 3.27$). The featured student's gender also affected perceptions of intelligence. A significant main effect of gender, $F(1, 6,655) = 110.70$, $p < .001$, was found, such that girls ($M = 3.50$) were perceived as significantly smarter than boys ($M = 3.33$). Ethnicity and sexual orientation did not interact to affect the perception of being smart for featured students, $F(6, 7,059) = 1.18$, $p = .15$; Asian American featured students were viewed as smarter than other ethnic groups whether the featured students was heterosexual, gay/lesbian, or bisexual.

Stereotypes of Aggression

Analysis failed to show any significant differences based on the participants' gender. The participants' ethnicity significantly affected their perceptions of

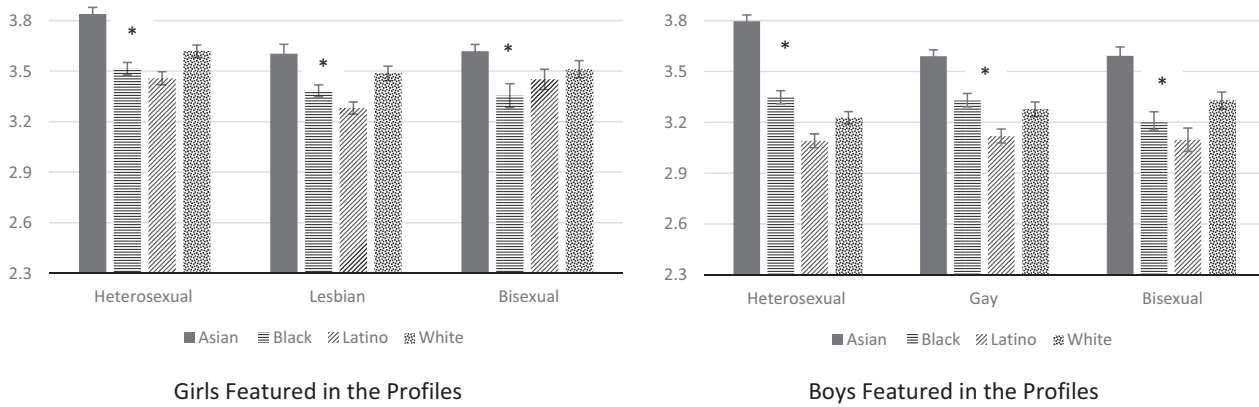


Figure 3. Ratings of being smart as a function of the ethnicity and sexual orientation among boy and girl featured students.

the featured students' aggressiveness. On average, African Americans participants, compared to participants from other racial/ethnic groups, rated the target students as significantly less aggressive, $F(6, 1,574) = 4.72, p < .05$. The participants' gender did not have a significant effect, $F(1, 1,553) = 1.04, p = .33$. The results for stereotypes of aggression are displayed in Figure 4. It was expected that featured students' gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation would shape the perception of aggression both independently and jointly. First, as predicted, a significant main effect of the featured students' gender on perception of aggression, $F(1, 6,655) = 109.70, p < .001$, was found. On average, boys ($M = 2.18$) were viewed as significantly more aggressive than girls ($M = 1.99$). Second, as expected, results revealed a significant main effect of ethnicity on the perception of aggression, $F(3, 6,696) = 28.48, p < .001$. Both African American ($M = 2.16$) and Latino featured students ($M = 2.17$) were rated as significantly more aggressive than either White ($M = 2.04$) or Asian American featured students ($M = 1.97$). Third, as hypothesized, perceived aggressiveness differed as a

function of sexual orientation and gender. For boy featured students, gay boys were viewed as significantly less aggressive ($M = 2.08$) and bisexual boys as significantly more aggressive ($M = 2.27$) than heterosexual boys ($M = 2.18$). A different picture emerged for girl featured students. Compared to heterosexual girls ($M = 1.94$), lesbian students were viewed as significantly more aggressive ($M = 2.02$). The aggressiveness of bisexual girl featured students ($M = 2.02$) did not significantly differ from either lesbian or heterosexual featured students.

These main effects were qualified by a significant three-way interaction among featured students' gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation on perception of aggression, $F(6, 7,210) = 3.525, p < .05$. The pattern of results for *boy students* is shown in Figure 4. Among heterosexual featured students, ethnicity determined perception of aggression. That is, African American ($M = 2.27$) and Latino ($M = 2.37$) boys were perceived as significantly more aggressive than both White ($M = 2.18$) and Asian American ($M = 1.92$) boys. Among bisexual students, a similar pattern of ethnic differences emerged. By



Figure 4. Ratings of aggression as a function of the ethnicity and sexual orientation among boy and girl featured students.

contrast, among gay students, no differences in perceived aggression based on ethnicity were found, $F(3, 7,330) = 2.60, p > .05$. This pattern emerged because of differing perception of the aggression of African American and Latino featured students. Pairwise comparisons revealed that gay African American and Latino boys were viewed as significantly *less* aggressive than either heterosexual or bisexual African American and Latino boys (all $ps < .05$). However, ratings of perceived aggression of White or Asian American boys did not differ significantly based on sexual orientations (all $ps > .05$).

The pattern of results for *girl students* is shown in Figure 4. Among heterosexual girl featured students, ethnicity drove perception of aggression. That is, African American girls ($M = 2.12$) were perceived as significantly more aggressive than Latina ($M = 1.96$), White ($M = 1.85$), and Asian American girls ($M = 1.8$). By contrast, no differences in perceptions of aggressiveness based on ethnicity were found for lesbian featured students, $F(3, 7,281) = 2.07, p > .05$, or bisexual featured students, $F(3, 7,083) = 0.707, p > .05$. These patterns emerged because the perception of aggressiveness of Asian American and White students differed most strongly and significantly across sexual orientations. That is, heterosexual Asian American and White girls were viewed as significantly less aggressive than both lesbian and bisexual Asian American and White girls. By contrast, ratings of the aggressiveness of Latina and African American girls did not significantly differ across sexual orientations. Taken together, these findings indicate that differences in perception of aggressiveness depend on the unique combination of the gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation of the featured students.

Discussion

This is the first study to examine whether and how the gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation of a peer independently and jointly shape stereotypes among adolescents. The simultaneous consideration of multiple social categories allowed for the identification of which categories most strongly influence perceptions in each of the three stereotype domains. First, consistent with the adult research on the gender inversion model (e.g., Kite & Deaux, 1987), sexual orientation determined adolescents' stereotypes of gender typicality. Irrespective of the featured students' ethnicity, heterosexual students were viewed as most gender typical, lesbian and gay students as least gender typical, and bisexuals fell in the middle

of those two groups. Second, ethnicity drove stereotypes of intelligence: Asian American boy and girl students were viewed as more intelligent than other students regardless of their sexual orientation. In addition, girls were perceived as smarter than boys. Third, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation independently and jointly affected stereotypes of aggressiveness.

Although girls on average were stereotyped as less aggressive than boys, this gender stereotype did not apply equally to all girls and to all boys. Lesbians were perceived as most aggressive among girls, at levels comparable to some groups of boys. Gay boys were stereotyped as least aggressive among boys, at levels similar to some groups of girls. Furthermore, although the expected ethnic differences in perception of aggression emerged for heterosexual boy and girl featured students, no such difference emerged for gay and lesbian featured students. Finally, sexual orientation *differentially* impacted stereotypes of aggression for boys and girls from various ethnic groups. When featured students were heterosexual, irrespective of gender, African Americans and Latinos were considered most aggressive, Asian Americans least aggressive, and Whites fell between those groups. However, when featured students were gay or lesbian, ratings of aggression based on featured students' ethnicity showed different patterns for boy and girl featured students. Gay African American and Latino boys were rated as significantly *less* aggressive than heterosexual African American and Latino boys. By contrast, lesbian Asian American and White girl featured students were rated as significantly *more* aggressive than heterosexual Asian American and White heterosexual girls. Thus, participants' stereotypes of aggressiveness based on ethnicity or gender reflected views about heterosexual adolescents, not sexual minority adolescents. In sum, this work documents that a single category approach often renders invisible the experiences of those adolescents whose identities sit at the intersection of multiple minority statuses.

What might explain sexual orientation's differential impact on stereotypes of aggression of boys and girls of various ethnic groups? One possibility is that perceived masculinity and femininity contribute to the observed effects. According to the adult person perception literature (e.g., Johnson & Ghavami, 2011), observers more readily notice deviations from gender norms for the most prototypical groups. In the domain of aggression, African Americans and Latinos are prototypical of aggression among boys. Asian American and White girls are

prototypical of nonaggression among girls. Therefore, the impact of *minority* sexual orientation, a category that is associated with gender atypicality, will be strongest on perception of aggression for African American and Latino boys, and for Asian American and White girls. Although studies have shown that gender atypical youth are vulnerable to peer victimization (e.g., Aspenlieder, Buchanan, McDougall, & Sippola, 2009; Toomey, Card, & Casper, 2014), to our knowledge, research has not systematically investigated whether and how the race/ethnicity of gender atypical middle school students affects their vulnerability to victimization.

This study makes methodological contributions to intersectional research on stereotypes. At present, there is no consensus about how best to translate the insights of intersectionality to the conduct of empirical research (e.g., Cole, 2009). As researchers begin to incorporate an intersectional perspective in developmental science research, creating age-appropriate and meaningful methods is critical. The current research demonstrated that the use of Facebook-like profiles can specify multiple social categories such as gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation simultaneously and in an organic, naturalistic way. Most adolescents know about Facebook (e.g., Ong et al., 2011; Yang & Brown, 2013), and this format provides a novel way to assess adolescents' intersectional stereotypes. This project showed the feasibility and the value of an intersectional approach to research on stereotypes among adolescents.

A second methodological advance in this research concerned the conceptualization of gender typicality. In research with adults, Bem (1977) argued that masculinity and femininity should be conceptualized as separate dimensions not as endpoints on a single continuum. In the current research, a distinction was made between gender typicality (how similar an adolescent is to peers of the same gender) and gender atypicality (how similar an adolescent is to peers of the other gender). These were measured with separate items, one assessing similarity to boys in general and the other assessing similarity to girls in general. As one example, results showed that on average gay boys were rated as low in similarity to boys and as more similar to girls. Thus, gay boys are perceived to deviate from what it means to be a typical boy and are viewed as more like the other gender. Assessing perception of masculinity and perception of femininity provided a clearer picture about the way sexual orientation of the peer shapes perception of gender typicality. Future research will benefit from

examining the implications of both gender typicality as well as atypicality for the way adolescents are treated.

Strengths and Limitations of the Current Work

This study focused on the stereotypes held by urban ethnically diverse adolescents who self-identified as heterosexual. It would be informative to examine whether the stereotypes held by LGB adolescents are similar to or different from those held by heterosexual adolescents. A strength of this study was the use of a large sample of middle school students, which permitted an examination of many combinations of gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Another strength of this research was sampling students from ethnically diverse urban middle schools. Nevertheless, because participants came from only four schools, this research could not assess whether and how the ethnic composition of the schools may have played a role in shaping stereotypes. Studies by social developmental psychologists (e.g., Bellmore et al., 2007; Graham, 2006) have shown that the ethnic diversity of both the school and classroom influences students' experiences of bias. For example, Latino and African American students felt safer in ethnically diverse schools and classrooms (Graham, 2006). There is also some evidence that the ethnic composition of the school may influence the extent to which lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth of color experience victimization. In a survey of middle and high school LGBT students of color, Kosciw (2004) found that LGBT students who attend schools with a large proportion of same ethnicity peers reported more sexual orientation-based victimization than those who attended more ethnically diverse schools. Given these findings, it is possible that the extent to which intersecting stereotypes become salient may depend on the ethnic diversity and the relative representation of each ethnic group in the school or the classroom setting.

Future Research Directions

There are several important future directions for research. It would be useful to investigate the joint effects of gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation on other stereotype domains, for example, those that are relevant to the school and peer context such as being popular, athletic, lazy, trustworthy, or friendly. Research is also needed to examine the consequences of stereotypes for intergroup affect or behavior among adolescents. A large body of

research with adults (e.g., Cuddy et al., 2007) shows that distinct stereotypes lead to differentiated prejudice and behavioral tendencies toward individuals of these stereotypes. For example, groups that are rated as highly competent (e.g., smart) and warm (e.g., friendly) generally elicit admiration, which in turn results in positive behavioral tendencies such as wanting to associate with them. In contrast, groups that are rated low in competence and warmth elicit pity, which in turn is associated with helping behaviors. A fruitful direction for research with adolescents would be to investigate the implications of intersectional stereotypes for intergroup relations across diverse settings.

This study assessed adolescents' global stereotypes. Future research assessing more fine-grained stereotypes would be useful. For example, in the domain of intelligence, it would be helpful to go beyond a general stereotype of "being smart" to distinguish among different types of intelligence or academic skills such as "being good at math" or "being good at English." Recent research (e.g., Brown & Leaper, 2011) about the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields reveals that boys are stereotyped as doing better in STEM classes than girls. By contrast, girls are stereotyped as better than boys in the humanities courses. To the extent that STEM fields are perceived as linked to masculinity and humanities as linked to femininity, does sexual orientation affect stereotypes about competence in the STEM fields? For example, would gay boys be viewed as good in the humanities but not in science and math? Finally, given the racialized nature of intelligence stereotypes, it would be important to examine perceptions of specific academic skills among ethnic minority adolescents.

Although this study focused on early adolescence, it did not study the development of stereotypes across time. Consequently, the current study did not investigate *when* intersectional stereotypes based on the combination of gender, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation come on line. A challenge for future research will be to determine the age at which it is reasonable to start assessing these intersectional stereotypes and to create appropriate means of assessment. For example, among younger children whose cognitive skills are still developing, the use of implicit measures of intersectional stereotypes may be useful (Ghavami, Katsiaficas, & Rogers, 2016). To illustrate, when presented with a series of options about a "princess," the likelihood that a child selects a White girl as a princess rather than a Black girl may reflect the child's awareness that gender and ethnicity are interrelated—it is not

just *any* girl that is suitable to be a princess but rather a *White girl*. Could implicit measures also be used to determine when children first understand sexual orientation and when it interacts with gender and ethnicity? Other important questions are *whether* and *how* intersectional stereotypes change across development. Although the current study showed that LGB youth are perceived as gender atypical regardless of their ethnicity, research with adults shows that stereotypes of the gender atypicality of LGB individuals are affected by both their sexual orientation and their ethnicity (Johnson & Ghavami, 2011). An important question concerns the point at which this change occurs. Longitudinal research designs would be a valuable direction for future research.

Implications for Educational Practice

An intersectional perspective on stereotypes has implications for educational practice. An important and novel contribution of this article is to show that a peer's gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation have different effects on stereotypes in different domains such as intelligence and aggression. To fully understand how social categories intersect to drive stereotypes will require an examination of the unique factors at play in each specific stereotype domain. Social psychologists (e.g., Brewer, 1988; Gawronski & Creighton, 2013) have shown that two different processes contribute to the development of stereotypes—bottom-up and top-down processes. In middle school, students may form beliefs about others through bottom-up processes such as face-to-face interactions with peers, observing teachers' behavior toward students, as well as school practices such as suspensions and expulsions. In contrast, top-down processing occurs when students have learned cultural stereotypes and beliefs, for instance, from the media. Jointly, these two processes influence stereotypes.

As an example, understanding why gay boys and lesbian girls are stereotyped as gender atypical irrespective of their ethnicity might require knowing about such bottom-up processes as how peers and teachers respond to and interact with LGB students. In addition, students' stereotypes about gender atypicality may be influenced by such top-down factors as the images of gays and lesbians portrayed in textbooks and school curricula as well as media messages about the gender typicality of sexual minorities conveyed outside of school. As another example, understanding why African American girls are perceived as aggressive at levels that are comparable to

boys may also benefit from considering both bottom-up and top-down processes. A focus on bottom-up processes might consider students' observations of how school discipline is differentially applied to boys and girls from different ethnic groups. Recent research (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Tate et al., 2014) shows that although boys including African American boys are disciplined more than girls and Whites, African American girls are disciplined at rates similar to boys. In addition, top-down processes such as the cultural stereotypes of African American women can also provide useful information. Collins (2000) argued, for instance, that the media often depict African American women as aggressive, assertive, and unfeminine.

Although of critical importance, translating research findings into the design of effective programs to promote positive school experiences for all adolescents irrespective of gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation is challenging. Existing intervention and prevention programs that focus on a single social identity such as race/ethnicity or sexual orientation might benefit from considering multiple identities simultaneously. This might mean, for example, recognizing the school experiences unique to African American boys or to Latina lesbian girls. In addition, these efforts have paid little attention to the ways in which the experiences of students may change, even in a single school day, across settings. For example, negative stereotypes about the intelligence of some ethnic groups may be prominent in academic classes but not in physical education. Stereotypes that gay and lesbian students are gender atypical may be more salient during informal interactions among students than to performance in academic classes. Efforts to create a school environment that fosters positive intergroup relations might be more successful if they acknowledge important differences among adolescents based not only on social identities but also on the specific context. Thus, we call on researchers and educators to recognize the importance of considering not only differences between groups such as boys versus girls or Whites versus African Americans, but also differences within a particular group that result from the intersection of multiple social categories such as African American gay boys.

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