



Gender Identity Attitudes and Self-Esteem as a Function of Gender Classification

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Abstract

Within the past decade, society has begun to develop a rapidly progressive and open mindset toward gender identity and even how the word gender is defined. Past research has shown sex differences in gender identity attitudes and self-esteem; specifically, females hold more positive attitudes toward gender identity but report lower self-esteem. The current study evaluated how females' gender classification might further qualify these findings. The data was collected through means of an anonymous online survey (Qualtrics), comprised of the Gender Identity Attitudes Scale (GIAS) and two counterbalanced scales: The Self-Esteem Scale (SES) and the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ). Gender classifications were made based on median split on masculinity and femininity scales on the PAQ. Results indicated that masculinity and androgyny classifications reported higher self-esteem scores compared to feminine and undifferentiated classifications. No classification differences were found on the GIAS. These results might reflect changing socialization practices wherein females are encouraged to diverge from traditional feminine roles and interests. Concurrently, women in popular culture today tend to display more dynamic masculine or androgynous traits than what might be considered more traditionally feminine. Future research could investigate whether this pattern of results would occur with male participants.

Keywords: attitude, gender identity, assessment, transgender, characteristics, scale

Introduction

As the LGBT community has become more visible (see Kanamori, Cornelius-White, Pegors, Daniel, Hulgus, 2017) cisgender individuals have been made aware of the different manifestations of gender identity and sexual orientation. A variety of social issues have been confronted and debated regarding the rights of transgender individuals. However, there is insufficient research regarding transgender identity attitudes which may correlate with public opinion on these social issues. In recent years, transgender individuals have a conspicuous disadvantage in society through what it seems as a loss of basic civil rights. One of the many examples is the infamous bathroom bill legislation in the United States; many transgender individuals have been denied the right to use public restrooms, due in part to transphobic attitudes (Parent & Silva, 2018).

It has also been found that personality and religious beliefs impact an individual's attitudes toward transgender individuals (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012; Nagoshi et al., 2008; Tebbe & Moradi, 2012). For example, individuals identifying as Christian tend to have more negative attitudes toward a transgender individual compared to a person who is non-religious (Kanamori, Pegors, Hall, & Guerra, 2019). Other research indicates an interaction between gender and religion; negative attitudes toward transgender individuals is largely correlated to religiosity, but only for females. Males' negative opinions were found to be independent from religiosity (Kanamori et al., 2019). In addition, many individuals who do not have a interpersonal relationship with transgender individuals tend to have more negative views as well (Walch et al., 2012).

Investigating whether gender differences influence such attitudes is further confounded by researchers using *gender* and *sex* interchangeably. Although research demonstrates a *sex* difference

in gender identity attitudes, it has not investigated whether *gender* might directly influence these attitudes. As such, the body of literature on attitude differences has yet to consider the impact that one's masculinity, femininity, androgyny, or undifferentiation has on gender identity attitudes in a sample of females. In addition, research has similarly not examined the role of gender identification on self-esteem. Cross-cultural investigations typically report that females report lower self-esteem compared to males (e.g., Bleidorn et al., 2016).

The main purpose of this investigation was to examine whether the gender construct impacts self-reported gender identity attitudes among females. Because behaviors associated with masculinity are more task-oriented and directive behaviors (e.g., Bakan, 1966; Spence & Helmreich, 1978), we predict that females classified as masculine will report more negative gender identity attitudes compared to those classified as feminine. No specific predictions are made with reference to how androgyny or undifferentiation might influence such attitudes. A secondary purpose of this study was to determine whether gender classification influences self-esteem.

Method

Participants

The participants were 210 female undergraduates haphazardly selected from Valdosta State University during the Spring/Fall 2020 academic year. They ranged in age from 18-60 ($M = 21.47$, $SD = 4.46$). The present sample was 47.6% White, 44.3% Black, 5.2% Hispanic, 0.5 % Asian, 0.5% Native American, and 1.9% indicated Other. The respondents were 9.5% Freshmen, 13.3% Sophomores, 37.6% Juniors, 38.6% Seniors, and 1.0 % post-baccalaureates.

Materials

Gender identity attitudes. Participants completed the 13 item gender identity attitude scale (see Appendix A). Sample items are "I would be friends with a transgender person," "Transgender people should not be allowed to adopt children," and "I would be comfortable knowing that my romantic partner was transgender." Subjects responded to each item on a 7-point scale from (1) *Strongly Disagree* to (7) *Strongly Agree* with higher scores indicating more positive attitudes. Negatively worded items were reverse scored so that higher scores indicate more positive attitudes toward transgender identity. The reliability (internal consistency) of the scale was .95 with a coefficient of variation of .37 (Howell, 1992).

Self-esteem. Participants completed the 10 item self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965). Rosenberg's self-esteem scale is a widely used and well-validated measure of self-esteem. The scale consists of 10 items (e.g., "I am able to do things as well as most other people") that are scored on a 5-point scale from (1) *not at all* to (5) *very much*. The negatively worded questions (i.e., 3, 5, 8, 9, and 10) are recoded so that scores range from 10 to 50 with higher scores indicative of greater self-esteem. For the present study, the scale was used with state self-esteem instructions that inform participants to answer in accordance to how much each statement currently describes them. The reliability (coefficient alpha) of the SES for the was .88.

Gender classification. Spence and Helmreich's (1973) Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ) was used to classify

participants as masculine, feminine, androgynous, or undifferentiated. The PAQ consists of 24 traits with participants indicating their level of agreement with each trait on a 5-point scale from (1) *not at all* to (5) *very*. Sample traits include participants' agreement with their level of aggressiveness, kindness, warmth in relations to others, and need for security. This scale is generally considered a reliable and valid measure of an individual's gender identity (Hill, Fekken, & Bond, 2000). The reliability of the PAQ's scales is reported as ranging from .51 to .85 for Masculinity and .65 to .82 for Femininity. Examination of the androgyny scale is even more infrequent, with its internal consistency reported as .78 by Spence and Helmreich (1978). All three coefficients from the Likert formats (MF, .63; M, .79; F, .87) were higher than the corresponding coefficients from the original format (Choi, 2004). The reliability (internal consistency) in the current sample was .71 (M), .84 (F), and .60 (MF).

Procedure

The participants completed the survey either individually or in small groups ($n < 20$). Students were asked to participate in an experiment attempting to measure the attitudes toward individuals identifying as transgender in college students. If students refused, then they were thanked and not bothered any further. If students agreed, they completed a three-page survey. The transgender identity scale was always answered first. The remaining scales were counterbalanced to control for any order effects. Once participants completed the survey, they were thanked for their participation and allowed to ask any questions.

Results

Gender and Transgender Identity Attitudes

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) examined whether gender classification influenced transgender identity attitudes. The analysis was not significant, $F(3, 207) = 1.32$, $p = .269$. Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 1.

Gender and Self-Esteem

A one-way ANOVA examined whether gender classification influenced self-esteem. The analysis was significant, $F(3, 206) = 21.75$, $p < .001$. Female participants classified as androgynous reported higher self-esteem compared to those classified as masculine, feminine, or undifferentiated (see Table 2). Comparisons indicated that the self-esteem of androgynous and masculine females was not significantly different, $t(206) = 0.75$, $p = .452$ ($r < .01$). All other comparisons were significantly different, $ts(206) \geq 2.40$, $ps \leq .017$ ($rs \geq .16$).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine whether gender classification influenced female participants' gender identity attitudes or self-reported self-esteem. We expected the more nurturing traits associated with femininity "norms" would positively influence gender identity attitudes and more masculinity "norms" would negatively influence it (Keiller, 2010).

The results of the study showed that female attitudes toward gender identity was not a function of gender classification. However, there was somewhat of a ceiling effect with masculine, feminine, androgynous, and undifferentiated females reporting strong positive attitudes toward gender identity ($Ms \geq 4.11$).

We expected that female participants' self-reported self-esteem would be influenced by their gender classification. The results showed, somewhat surprisingly, that masculine and androgynous females reported the highest self-esteem with feminine and undifferentiated reporting the lowest self-esteem, respectively. One plausible explanation is androgynous females possess traits fostering a stronger sense of agency, along with traits that celebrate femininity (i.e., communal traits) resulting in a stronger and more positive identity compared to those that are sex-typed feminine.

One concern of the study involves the geographical location of the sample. The scale was developed using students from a regional university in South Georgia. This population could differ in important ways from the student populations of other colleges and universities. A second concern is that only psychology students and psychology majors were involved. Previous research shows that attitudes differ as a function of academic majors (Dansker, 2007). Because psychology majors tend to be more open in general, they may tend to be more positive in their attitudes toward transgender identity compared to other majors. The results tentatively support this hypothesis.

Descriptive Tables

Table 1

Mean Ratings of Female Participants' Self-Reported Gender Identity Attitudes

Gender classification	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Undifferentiated	41	4.74 _a	(1.38)
Feminine	50	4.37 _a	(1.85)
Masculine	50	4.11 _a	(1.54)
Androgynous	70	4.55 _a	(1.60)

Means sharing common subscripts do not differ significantly from one another ($ps > .05$).

Table 2

Mean Ratings of Female Participants' Self-Reported Self-Esteem

Gender classification	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Undifferentiated	40	30.60 _a	(7.52)
Feminine	50	34.04 _b	(7.67)
Masculine	50	39.20 _c	(6.39)
Androgynous	70	40.14 _c	(5.82)

Means sharing common subscripts do not differ significantly from one another ($ps > .05$).