Gender Bias Towards Gender Nonconforming Individuals

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Abstract

Whenever someone is a part of a marginalized group, they experience higher levels of discrimination, prejudice, and bias. A group whose distress has been increasingly researched is those who identify as gender nonconforming. Because of society's binary and biological views of gender, those who don't conform to stereotypical male or female ideals experience higher levels of gender bias. In this experiment, we researched how conforming and nonconforming gendered individuals might experience gender bias through images. Participants in a between-subjects design were sent a survey that contained 20 images of gender-conforming, gender-nonconforming, and distractor individuals. Along with each picture were 6 questions that aimed to measure gender bias. We hypothesized that people would show more gender bias when viewing gender-nonconforming images than when viewing gender-conforming images. Results found that participants did show more gender bias after viewing gender non-conforming images than gender-conforming images.

Gender Bias Towards Gender Nonconforming Individuals

There are many qualities that make humans unique from each other. People view and interpret the world through their own lens leading to unique experiences and perceptions. Many of these experiences and perceptions are shaped by someone's personal bias. Bias is present everywhere and often it is not formed from personal opinions. Biases are influenced and have been shaped by societal institutions, culture, and upbringing (Zizevskaia & Shchukina, 2018). An important topic that is often muted by strongly rooted biases is gender. From childhood, many institutions like education, the media, and even parents display limited views on gender roles and norms. These limitations can lead to distress for those struggling with the topic of gender. For those who express gender in nonconforming ways, gender bias and its effects can be even more present.

To be gender-nonconforming means an individual's gender identity does not align with society's definition of their gender (Lowry et al., 2018). Or in other words, when someone expresses themselves in a matter that is not stereotypically male or female. Society's definition of gender can include many different expectations. Gender expectations usually surround the roles, careers, appearances, and more of individuals in society. These societal expectations often first get introduced and implemented by parents. Jackson et al. (2021) explain that from birth, people are watching their parents model and educate them on gender roles. Because of how early these concepts are introduced in child development, many gender-nonconforming individuals experience distress during development while trying to create a gender identity.

Throughout development, many things can influence how someone defines their gender identity. As mentioned before, the reinforcement of a binary view of gender often begins at birth with the determination of someone's biological sex (Preece & Bullingham, 2022). Many

individuals grow up internalizing gender-conforming behaviors, appearances, and interests from what others tell them. Gender identity can then become an exchange between personal beliefs and what people think society expects from them (Lamer et al., 2022). Adding to the distress of figuring out gender identity can also be the media. Lamer and colleagues (2022) researched how viewing nonverbal gender-role bias in TV clips can have effects on younger viewers. They found that girls who viewed more traditional gender-role biases were more likely to then display these values afterward to others than those who viewed nontraditional gender roles (Lamer et al., 2022). As more individuals and youth are identifying as gender nonconforming, the negative effects of gender bias should and are being researched (deMayo et al., 2022).

Gender bias can take many forms in society (Smith & McCarthy, 2022). One of the strongest stereotypes that surround gender is appearance. Society often pushes a certain image of a long-haired, thin, white female and a short-haired, broad-shouldered, white male. Jackson et al. (2021) mentioned that pressure from the self to conform to these ideals can be greater than parental and peer pressure. Women specifically put a lot of pressure on themselves and go through body shaming, social comparison, sexual objectification, and disordered eating because of feminine gender norms (Adams et al., 2017). It's important to remember though that anyone gender nonconforming can and does experience a high amount of emotional distress (Ghassabian et al., 2022). Lowry et al. (2018) listed the many stressors that are present for youth who are gender nonconforming compared to conforming including increased exposure to violence and childhood abuse, increased suicidal thoughts and attempts, and signs of depression.

When someone is a part of a marginalized group, they are treated poorer and are often held at a larger social distance (Campbell & Brauer, 2021). Gender bias is those prejudices and inclinations towards a specific gender (Smith & McCarthy, 2022). Discriminating on the basis of

gender is not a new topic but has expanded to include many gender-diverse individuals and the effects are the same. Gender bias has been documented heavily in the workplace. Kuchynka et al. (2018) commented that stereotypes of managers and board seat members are still masculine. These stereotypes, among other gender-specific career biases, directly affect how gender-nonconforming individuals are respected in their careers.

Gender bias is an ever-growing issue that is affecting those specifically who don't conform to the gender ideals of males and females. This paper is going to be measuring gender bias as people look at images of gender-conforming and nonconforming individuals. Current research on gender bias includes important evidence on the mental health effects of being gender diverse. Also mentioned was the research on the roots of gender bias in development through media and the education system. For this research, participants were asked questions that would elicit their implicit gender biases to help provide evidence for the amount of gender bias that is still present today. It is predicted that more gender bias will be recorded when participants view gender-nonconforming images and less gender bias will be recorded when participants are shown gender-conforming images.

Method

Participants

The participants for this experiment were recruited using social media and word-of-mouth methods. On various social media platforms, posts were made inviting those who had time to take a quick survey. There were a total of 53 participants who completed the survey. On average, participants ($N = 53$) were 38 years old ($M = 38.34$, $SD = 18.78$, range: 18-79). Participants were majority female ($n = 46$) and the rest were male ($n = 7$). Participants ($N = 52$) primarily identified as "Not Hispanic or Latina" ($n = 48$). There were also 3 participants who

either did not wish to report or were unknown and 1 who identified as “Hispanic or Latina”. For race, participants primarily identified as “White, Caucasian, or European American” (n = 34). There were additional 17 participants who identified as “Black or African American”, 1 who identified as more than one race, and 1 who was unknown or did not wish to report.

Procedures

In this experiment, an online self-report survey was used. After clicking on the survey link, participants started off by reading a thank you and informed consent message. All participants consented to be a part of this experiment on this page. Next questions were asked about the participant’s age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, relationship status, current occupation, religious beliefs, and political orientation. Participants were then shown pictures in random order displaying gender-conforming and gender-nonconforming individuals. Along with these images were random controlled images. These pictures were shown one by one and underneath each were 6 questions the participants had to answer about the person in the picture. Participants ended the survey by getting debriefed and provided with information about the study.

A within-subjects design was chosen for this experiment to help better demonstrate the differences between the two conditions while viewing all the images. In the survey, for every conforming image, there was a similarly appearing nonconforming image. Therefore, it was ideal for the same participants to view both the conforming and nonconforming images to examine both responses later. Similar-looking conforming and nonconforming images were used to target the nonconforming features in the experimental group. A within-subjects design was also chosen to help limit the effects of individual variation between conditions.

Materials

This self-report survey contained 20 images and 6 questions were asked for every image. These randomly appearing images displayed individuals who are engaged in or visually represent either gender-conforming or gender-nonconforming ideals. The 20 images contained 4 conforming males, 4 conforming females, 8 nonconforming individuals that closely represented the 8 male and female conforming scenarios, and 4 distractor images. The 6 questions asked with each image were meant to measure gender bias. Sample questions for gender bias include "How intelligent do you think this person is?", "How approachable does this person seem?" and "How likely would you be to hire this person?". All of these were rated using an 8-point Likert scale where lower scores mean more gender bias. Most questions ranged from 1 "Extremely Unlikely" to 8 "Extremely Likely", but for questions like intelligence it ranged from 1 being "Severely Below Average" to 8 "Exceedingly Above Average". On average, participants scored slightly above the middle ($M = 5.98$, $SD = 0.79$) when asked about an individual's intelligence.

Results

In this experiment, participants were in both the gender-conforming and gender-nonconforming conditions. We tested the hypothesis that people would show more gender bias when viewing gender-nonconforming images than when viewing gender-conforming images using a paired-samples t-test. Participants who viewed gender-nonconforming images ($M = 6.22$, $SD = 0.73$) showed more gender bias than when they viewed gender-conforming images ($M = 6.25$, $SD = 0.73$), $t(52) = 0.64$, $p < .001$. A small effect size was found, (Cohen's $d = 0.04$). The hypothesis was supported that more gender bias would be present when participants viewed gender-nonconforming images than gender-conforming images. See Figure 1 for a provided bar graph.

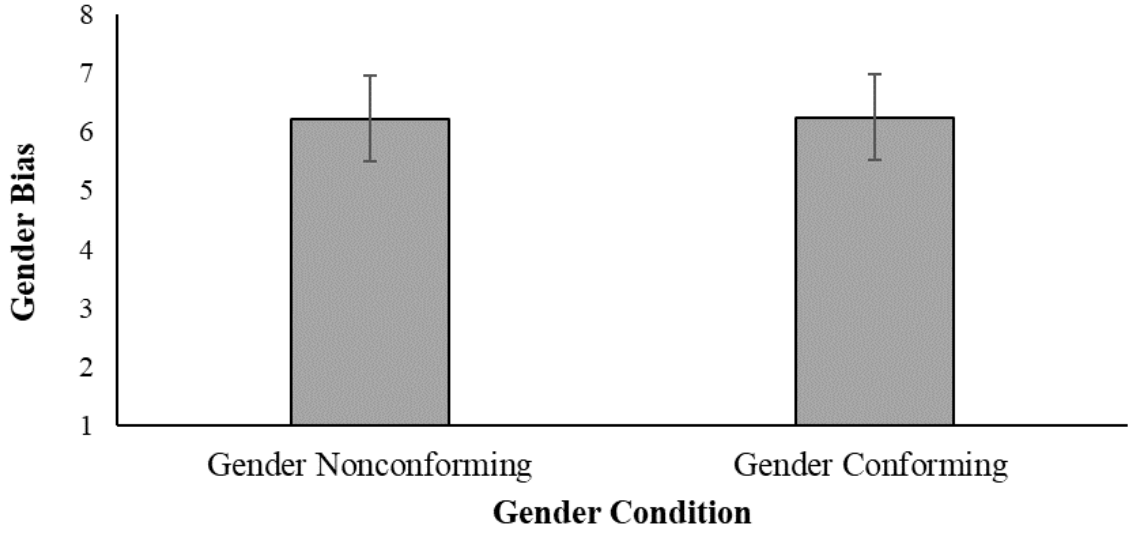

Figure 1. Mean difference of gender bias between gender conforming and gender nonconforming conditions.

Discussion

To reiterate, this experiment was aimed at researching gender bias towards individuals who identify as gender-nonconforming. To test this, a survey was sent out to recruit participants that contained 20 gender-conforming, gender-nonconforming, and distractor images. We predicted that more gender bias would be found when participants viewed images displaying gender-nonconforming individuals than gender-conforming individuals. This hypothesis was supported, so more gender bias was detected when participants viewed gender-nonconforming images than gender-conforming.

These findings can help add to the current and growing research on those who identify as gender nonconforming. Gender bias can have a variety of mental health effects, especially for younger adults. Preece and Bullingham (2022) recently researched gender stereotypes exhibited by in-service teachers in physical education. They found that PE teachers today still reinforce sub-consciously held gender stereotypes that increase gender segregation and inequality in youth

(Preece & Bullingham, 2022). As mentioned before, the education system in conjunction with other societal systems are major sources of gender stereotyping and bias. This has left those who aren't gender conforming with a multitude of stressors because of feeling either unaccepted by others or themselves or both. Lots of research is already available on younger individuals' experience with gender nonconformity and gender bias, but our results from this experiment can add more information on how adults show gender bias.

Limitations and Future Directions

For this experiment, images of gender-nonconforming and gender-conforming individuals were used. The images were specifically chosen to represent their construct enough to elicit gender bias. Images of varying races were used within each condition. Pairs of similar-looking images in each condition were also used to compare the bias found while viewing both groups. The use of a more standardized image throughout the experiment could be used in future research to more confidently represent each group. Gender bias was measured with 6 questions using an 8-point Likert scale. These questions accurately measured the presence or absence of gender bias in both conditions. The findings could be better supported with a greater number of questions aimed at measuring gender bias in future research.

The external validity of this experiment is not strong considering nonrandom sampling methods were used to recruit participants. Participants were recruited mostly through word-of-mouth and social media. These techniques allowed for a smaller and less diverse group. The participants were overwhelmingly female with only 7 male participants in total. This severely limits the generalizability of the results, especially considering it’s on gender bias. In future research, a better representation of gender groups should be used to help generalizability.

A few internal validity concerns should be addressed if this experiment were to be replicated. One of the biggest concerns of internal validity in this study was demand characteristics. At the end of the survey, participants were asked before being debriefed what they thought the study was about. Many participants were able to guess that at the very least this experiment was about the judgment of others. This could have caused less gender bias to be detected if participants changed their responses to match their thoughts of the study. Another concern that should be addressed is the images used in the conditions. Because they were not standardized and were chosen by experimenters, gender bias could have been detected for reasons other than gender. Internal validity concerns that were addressed were the random assignment of the images within each survey and selection effects because of the within-subjects design.

Covariates that could have affected the results of this study and should be controlled for in future research are age and gender. It is possible that different age groups can show more or less gender bias when viewing conforming and nonconforming gendered individuals. Controlling for this possible skew in data can help better support the results found. Also, creating a better representation of genders within participants could be controlled for in the future. People who are already not gender-conforming may show less gender bias when viewing nonconforming images. This could be a start to a new research question in the future but at least should be controlled for if this study were to be replicated.

A moderating factor that could have affected how individuals viewed gender-conforming versus gender-nonconforming images is social media. As the use of social media has increased, many people are becoming more connected. This connection allows people to be exposed to more diverse individuals like different races, ethnicities, and genders. If someone were to use

social media more often, they may show less gender bias towards gender nonconforming individuals. This is a possible moderator of the manipulation but social media usage does not always mean more connection so it's just something to consider in future research.

Conclusion

The effects of bias, discrimination, and prejudice have not always been known on the population of individuals who identify as gender nonconforming. Because these people often grow up not being accepted for who they are, gender-nonconforming individuals experience increased levels of many stressors. We set out to research how viewing different gendered individuals may affect gender bias. The hypothesis was supported that participants showed more gender bias when viewing gender-nonconforming images than when viewing gender-conforming images. Future researchers should concern themselves with the internal validity of the experiment, displaying standardized gender-conforming and nonconforming images, and minimizing the demand characteristics of participants.

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