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Integrating the Study of Transgender Spectrum and Cisgender Experiences of Self-Categorization From a Personality Perspective

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We advocate for the integration of transgender spectrum experiences alongside cisgender experiences (i.e., having the same current gender identity label as one's birth-assigned gender category) to provide hitherto unrealized insights within the psychology of gender identity development. Specifically, we propose using personality theory to understand gender self-categorization for both profiles of experience because this perspective allows the structure and stability of self-categorization to be explored in a single, extant framework. Moreover, the dominant model of gender identity development in psychology and qualitative studies within sociology and related fields both suggest that self-categorization may in fact be similar between the 2 profiles. The integration also dispels 2 persistent myths about gender self-categorization: (a) that it is binary and (b) that it is an active psychological process for transgender spectrum, but not cisgender, individuals. Finally, we translate these new theoretical insights into testable research hypotheses within the mainstream of personality research.

Keywords: cisgender, transgender, gender identity, genderqueer, nonbinary

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Gender is arguably one of the most pervasive psychological experiences—an experience that psychologists imagine to be applicable in some form or another to all people, across all known human cultures (e.g., Wood & Eagly, 2009). Additionally, gender experience is not only tied to one's internal experiences of self and identity but it is also a partial foundation for sexual attraction (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008), sexual orientation identity (Tate, 2012), and other interpersonal experiences such as prejudice and discrimination (see Wood & Eagly, 2009). There is also increasing medical (e.g., Coulter, Kenst, Bowen, & Scout, 2014; Deutsch et al., 2013; Reisner, Lloyd, & Baral, 2013) and social science (e.g., Factor & Rothblum, 2008; Kuper, Nussbaum, & Mustanski, 2012; Tate, Ledbetter, & Youssef, 2013) recognition that people differ in their experiences of gender identity as self-categorization, at the broadest level, as *cisgender* (same label for identity as birth-assigned category) and *transgender spectrum* (different labels for identity and birth-assigned category). Nonetheless, since the publication of the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM–III*) in 1980 (American Psychiatric Association, 1980), the science of psychology has cultivated an uneven and sometimes uncomfortable relationship with the idea of transgender experience and what is commonly described as "gender variant identities" (e.g., Drescher, 2010). Although it is unclear before the 1970s how clinical psychology understood gender identity variability in terms of self-categorization, the field of clinical psychology presently views this variability in a manner that is codified as *gender identity disorder* or *gender identity dysphoria* (cf. Drescher, 2010). In any case, clinical case studies by John Money, Harry Benjamin, Robert Stoller, and others in the 1970s started to make the already implicit ideas about gender identity explicitly normative, which resulted in any variations from this presumed normative model to be labeled as disorders in the United States (cf. Drescher, 2010). The implicit assumption that became explicit at that time was that having the same label for one's gender self-categorization as one's birth assigned gender category label was desirable and in this sense normative. Such a developmental profile can be considered *cisgender* to the extent that *cis* is the Latin prefix for "on the same side as." Cisgender individuals are, therefore, those whose gender self-categorization is the same label as their birth-assigned gender category—the latter starting as genital labeling that has intra- and interpersonal social implications in the United States and other cultures (see Tate et al., 2013). The interpersonal implications are why we use *gender category* rather than simply *sexual anatomy category*; but, of course, either phrase could be used. We use *cis* as shorthand for "cisgender" throughout this article. However, cis experiences are not the only ways that people experience gender self-categorization. Those whose current gender identities are different labels than their birth-assigned gender categories are considered *transgender* (as *trans* is the Latin prefix for "across" or "beyond")—and, because there are a variety of ways in which these identities might be different from birth-assigned categories, these experiences might be generally called *transgender spectrum* experiences (see Tate et al., 2013). Transgender spectrum experi-

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ences are currently abbreviated in popular U.S. discourse as *trans**. Accordingly, we use *trans** as a shorthand for "transgender spectrum" throughout this article. Thus, our use of *cis* as shorthand for cisgender creates parallel usage for the modifiers.

We provide the brief historical summary and definitions to highlight three points that will be relevant to our main argument in this article. First, it is important to note that it is unclear as to whether gender self-categorizations other than cisgender were viewed as disordered or dysphoric in the first two versions of the *DSM* (see Drescher, 2010). However, because both lay and scholarly models of homosexual experience conflate sexual orientation and gender (Kite & Deaux, 1987; Stoller, 1974), it is possible that homosexuality as a mental disorder in the first three versions of the *DSM* can be construed as also placing trans* gender self-categorization experiences into a class of mental disorders (cf. Drescher, 2010). Second, the practice of classifying trans* experiences of identity within a manual of mental health disorders can further promote a bias called *cisgenderism* (Ansara & Hegarty, 2012), in which all noncisgender (i.e., transgender spectrum) experiences are devalued. Third, by focusing the field's attention on trans* experience as mostly or appropriately under the purview of the medical and clinical sciences, researchers have missed several opportunities for basic research insights and innovation concerning gender self-categorization experience in the nonclinical disciplines of developmental, personality, and social psychology. This third point is the basis for our article: to identify these missed opportunities and attempt to rectify them from the standpoint of theory and methods used in personality psychology.

The Goal and Focus of This Article: Integration

The goal of this article is not to articulate the specific ways in which those with trans* self-categorizations may experience the world in different ways than those with cis self-categorizations. Consequently, the topics of minority stress (cf. Meyer, 2003), prejudice experience by trans* individuals (e.g., Grant, Mottet, Tanis, Harrison, Herman, & Keisling, 2011), sexual identities across trans* identities (e.g., Devor, 1993; Kuper, Nussbaum, & Mustanski, 2012), and HIV risk and other health care needs for trans* individuals (e.g., Melendez et al., 2006; Reiser et al., 2013) will not be discussed in this article. Additionally, the specific differences between the experiences of trans men and trans women will not be explored in this article because these topics have received attention in various research articles and chapters (e.g., Diamond, Pardo, & Butterworth, 2011; Gonzalez, Bockting, Beckman, & Duran, 2012; Schilt, 2006; Schilt & Connell, 2007). The reason why these perspectives are de-emphasized in this article is to underscore the missed opportunities that come from such non-integrative approaches. This article invites the reader to consider the possibility that similarity across gender self-categorization experiences might be just as informative as specificity within and difference between these self-categorization experiences. Moreover, to the extent that the very definitions of transgender and cisgender self-categorization are united in that they refer to the same underlying construct called *gender*, it behooves scholars to focus attention on the uniformities that warrant the same phenomenological label.

However, because trans* experience (including self-categorization) has been routinely studied as separate from cis experience and thus outside the mainstream of gender theorizing, this article might be viewed as advancing a controversial position. We are aware of this reaction to our article, and hope that through advancing our position more clarity about the behavioral science approaches to both cis and trans* experiences generally, and considering self-categorization specifically, can emerge—even if this article provokes initial negativity by upsetting the status quo of gender theorizing. As Tate (2013) recently noted, advancing new, alternative ideas—even if they turn out to be incorrect later—is extremely useful for theorizing in science because the new ideas require the existing positions to become more specific and thus stronger.

A New Twist on a Recent Proposal: Gender as a Bundle of Constructs

Adding welcome nuance to mainstream theorizing on gender, Egan and Perry (2001) proposed the idea that gender is best conceptualized as a multidimensional construct, a position that is consistent with both lay language and scientific approaches throughout the life and social sciences. We agree with the statement about the dimensionality, but we differ slightly in how we organize and conceptualize the constituent dimensions. Egan and Perry (2001) argue that there are five dimensions of gender: (a) membership knowledge (awareness that the self is categorized into a specific gender group); (b) gender typicality (a sense of being similar to other children with the same gender label); (c) contentment with one's gender assignment; (d) pressure to conform to gender stereotypes or expectations; and (e) intergroup bias (feeling superior to gender outgroups). We believe that gender is comprised of a different set of five major dimensions, and, consequently, we term our organization and scope *the gender bundle* and use facets (rather than dimensions) throughout to distinguish it from the multidimensional understanding of gender presented by Egan and Perry (2001). As we develop below, our facets come from examining how gender is studied in psychology and related disciplines for both children and adults, whereas the Egan and Perry multidimensional model appears to focus more on children than adults (see also Tobin, Menon, Menon, Spatta, Hodges, & Perry, 2010). The facets with our gender bundle are visually depicted in Figure 1, and described here as: (a) birth-assignment to a gender category by a cultural authority (also called *sex assignment*) (e.g., Hines, 2003); (b) one's self-categorization into a gender group (e.g., Egan & Perry, 2001; Factor & Rothblum, 2008; Kuper et al., 2012; Tate et al., 2013)—which is the meaning of *gender identity* that is the focus of this article; (c) one's recognition of and possible adherence to stereotypes and expectations associated with their own and other gender groups (e.g., Bem, 1974, 1981; Prentice & Carranza, 2002; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1974; Witt & Wood, 2010)—which is another meaning of the term *gender identity* that is not the focus of this article—and would also include social norms for gender groups (e.g., manhood, womanhood; Vandello, Bosson, Cohen, Burnaford, & Weaver, 2008); (d) one's expression of gender as embodied by the use of names and accouterments associated with gender groups (also called *gender expression* or *gender performativity*; Butler, 1990; Hamilton, 2007; Horn, 2007; Kessler & McKenna, 1978; Kite & Deaux, 1987; Lucal, 1999; Rees-Turyn, Doyle, Holland, & Root, 2008; Whitley, 1987, 2001); and (e) one's attitudinal and cognitive evaluation of members of

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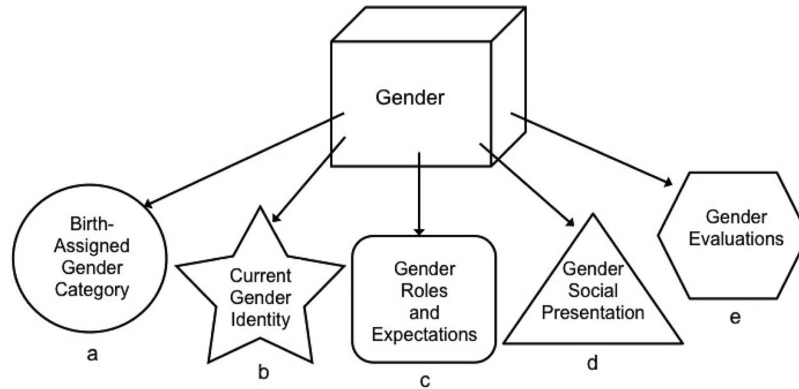

Figure 1. The facets within the bundle of constructs studied as gender within psychological science. Facets are numbered using letters (a through e) as a quick reference within the text. As indicated by their different shapes, the facets are presumed to function as separable or distinguishable from other facets. The box shape above all facets indicates that each of the facets is presumed to fit into the larger category called "gender."

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one's gender ingroup (e.g., Egan & Perry, 2001; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Tropp & Wright, 2001) and various gender outgroups—the latter also known as *gender bias* (e.g., Hill & Willoughby, 2005; Glick & Fiske, 1996, 1999, 2001). Collectively, these evaluations (ingroup- or outgroup-directed) are called *gender evaluations* in our Figure 1 (Facet e). The first facet (Facet a) is often the domain of medical science and anthropology. The remaining four facets (Facets b through e) are studied across fields such as psychology, sociology, gender studies, and sexuality studies. The bundle model is therefore meant to be a descriptive model of how experiences associated with gender are studied across a variety of disciplines for children and adults.

We selected the term *gender bundle* to refer to the group of concepts and experiences tied to gender because it conveys the important understanding that the individual facets may or may not directly influence each other—similar to the physical analogy of separate objects that are bundled together in one package. We believe that considering all facets of the gender bundle separately can provide a clearer and more precise understanding of gender overall. Furthermore, our bundle is moot as to whether the facets are truly orthogonal or simply correlated and distinguishable. We also believe that this bundle organization subsumes the Egan and Perry (2001) dimensions while simultaneously broadening their applicability. We discuss each dimension from Egan and Perry's model to show how it relates to the facet model that we propose. Egan and Perry's awareness of gender categorization dimension can be subsumed by our birth-assigned category facet (Facet a) and our current identity facet (Facet b) (see Figure 1). (It is unclear whether Egan and Perry are referring to one facet or the other, and recent research shows that adults can answer both questions [Tate et al., 2013].) Egan and Perry's gender typicality dimension is subsumed under our gender evaluations facet (Facet e; see Figure 1), specifically as an ingroup-focused evaluation. Egan and Perry's contentment with gender assignment dimension can also be subsumed under our birth-assigned category facet (Facet a), as an attitude about it. Egan and Perry's pressure to conform to gender stereotypes dimension can be subsumed under our gender roles and expectations facet (Facet c) because pressure toward conformity to gender stereotypes is one experience within the broader set of experiences provided by gender roles and expectations (see above). Egan and Perry's intergroup bias dimension is subsumed under our gender evaluations facet (Facet e) as explicitly outgroup-directed bias. Of course, ingroup-directed bias is possible to study for children and adults, and our gender evaluations facet is broad enough to cover this topic as well. Finally, our social presentation of gender facet (Facet d) broadens the Egan and Perry model (because this phenomenon is absent from their multidimensional understanding). Thus, the term gender bundle and our depiction of it in Figure 1 are meant to complement, not supplant, the existing multidimensional understanding.

Overview of This Article

To focus this article, we do not address all five facets from Figure 1. Instead, we elected to focus on two facets: (a) birth-assigned gender category and (b) current gender identity. The motivation for focusing on these two facets is twofold. One, these facets appear to be paradigmatically under the purview of personality psychology because the current identity facet (Facet b) appears to be an ideal individual difference variable on which to consider stability over time within persons. Two, profiles of gender self-categorization as cis and trans* are determined using Facet b and Facet a (see Tate et al., 2013). The remaining facets (c–e, see Figure 1) already require Facet b to exist (so that ingroup and outgroup reference points are known), and are paradigmatically social psychological to the extent that they focus almost exclusively on interpersonal relationships, interpersonal attitudes, and social signaling. Thus, in our view, we are arguing for the integration of trans* experiences with cis experiences at a logically fundamental level. By doing so, we believe that we can advance the understanding of gender identity as self-categorization in psychological science conducted in the United States, and, with appropriate modifications, in other cultures as well. In the remainder of this article, we delineate the advances that will be ushered in by approaching gender self-categorization from a personality perspective to elucidate the basic psychological processes that have been obscured or left unexamined by current practices.

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Gender Self-Categorization Can Be Modeled as a Personality Trait

To consider whether gender self-categorization as current gender identity (Facet b, see Figure 1) could be modeled from a personality perspective, it would be useful to examine modern personality trait thinking (e.g., Caspi, Roberts, & Shiner, 2005). As Caspi et al. (2005) note, modern personality theory has concerned itself with both the structure and development of personality traits (e.g., extraversion) from childhood through adulthood. Personality theories often start with temperament as an early indicator of the eventual trajectory of a particular trait (see also Rothbart, Ahadi, & Evans, 2000) and then seek to determine when and whether that particular trait remains consistent in self-reports and informant-reports (Caspi & Roberts, 2001; McCrae & Costa, 1994; Srivastava, John, Gosling, & Potter, 2003). As we develop in detail below, gender self-categorization can be modeled in exactly the same way: as a trait-like phenomenon that appears in early in childhood and continues through adulthood, and, as a phenomenon that appears to remain stable in self-reports and (to a lesser extent) informant-reports. Furthermore, one of the most important aspects of modeling gender self-categorization as a personality trait is that it allows researchers to focus almost exclusively on the structure of this phenomenon with little interference from the other facets of gender—especially, the social psychological meanings of gender identity. In the same way that personality researchers can probe the structure of extraversion as a trait without focusing exclusively or even mostly on its interpersonal consequences, manifest behavior, or on experimental manipulations of stimuli that should heighten its activation, so too can gender researchers probe the structure of gender self-categorization without focusing on its interpersonal, social psychological consequences. Therefore, we treat gender self-categorization similar to a personality trait to illuminate and isolate important theoretical insights about the structure of gender identity that can later be connected with the other facets of the gender bundle (see Figure 1). In line with the personality perspective, we begin with the structure of gender identity in childhood and expose key insights that carry through into adulthood.

An Existing Basis for Integrating Cis and Trans* Experience as Gender Self-Categorization: Gender Identity Development Literature

Within developmental psychology, there is a dominant model of gender identity development as self-categorization from birth to adolescence (see, e.g., Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Although developmentalists may disagree about the exact constituents of and best explanations for the development of gender self-categorization, most perspectives converge on the assertion that one's sense of self-categorization in terms of gender identity is not fixed from birth (see Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Kohlberg, 1966; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Martin, Ruble, & Szkrybalo, 2002). Instead, these perspectives argue that a child acquires a self-categorization in terms of gender from first being labeled within a gender group by others (e.g., "it's a boy; it's a girl") and eventually internalizes this gender label. Tate's (2012) interpretation of this dominant model is that there is no a priori reason to believe that the developmental process must appropriately end in a cisgender characterization of one's identity—even though theories of *gender constancy* within psychology (e.g., Kohlberg, 1966) make this implication (see also Tobin et al., 2010). Because developmental psychology research on children already appears to allow for any self-categorization profile of gender experience—cis or trans*—this perspective might be usefully carried throughout the life span. Traditionally, the fields of personality and social psychology have continued the study of developmental phenomena from 18 years onward. However, most social psychological research on gender identity after age 18 focuses on gender role stereotype endorsement (Bem, 1974, 1981; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1975; Witt & Wood, 2010) or the social meanings of manhood and womanhood and their psychological consequences (Vandello et al., 2008). Most personality research in adulthood has focused on how gender identity intersects with sexual identity (e.g., Diamond & Butterworth, 2008) or whether women and men differ on purportedly universal personality traits (e.g., Srivastava et al., 2003). Thus, in both the social psychology and personality literatures, a focus on the gender self-categorization dynamics that adults experience is absent. This absence makes it difficult at present to connect the developmental, personality, and social psychology fields at the gender self-categorization. Moreover, the existing (but often invisible) cisgenderism (Ansara & Hegarty, 2012) may contribute, in part, to the lack of focus on gender self-categorization for adults. As noted above, even the dominant model of children's gender self-categorization assumes that children internalize the label provided by adults (e.g., Kohlberg, 1966), and these adults expect everyone to be cisgender (Ansara & Hegarty, 2012).

Another reason for a lack of focus on gender-self categorization in adulthood may be that gender roles and expectations, social presentation of gender, and gender evaluations (Facets c–e, respectively) of the gender bundle (see Figure 1) are thought to be easier to study in adults than in children (though see Egan & Perry, 2001), making these facets an apparent priority especially within adult studies. In any event, the consequence of this dearth of gender self-categorization research for adults in psychology means that the research that does exist is largely found in sociology and gender studies (see, e.g., Califia, 1997; Nestle, Howell, & Wilchins, 2002; Roen, 2002)—fields that tend to differ in both methods and underlying approaches from psychology.

To gain conceptual traction on self-categorization in adulthood, we use the *current gender identity* phrase to avoid locking this concept to any age or developmental stage. Whenever a researcher queries a respondent's gender self-categorization, this time-point can be described as the respondent's current gender identity. The extant theorizing on the multidimensionality of gender (Egan & Perry, 2001; Tobin et al., 2010) provides an interesting possible nexus between the child and adult literatures, and, specifically, a focus on the development of a current gender identity. As noted above, Egan and Perry (2001) argue that children experience gender as contentment with gender assignment (among others; see the section entitled "A New Twist on a Recent Proposal"). This (dis)contentment dimension is a beginning step in the direction of allowing researchers to connect child experiences with adult experiences—especially for trans* profiles. Qualitative and idiographic analyses of adults with trans* profiles (e.g., Bornstein, 1998; Devor, 1997; Green, 2005; Morris, 1974; Serano, 2007), as well as demographic research in sociology (see Factor & Rothblum, 2008) show a consistent theme from personal narratives that people simply "feel" self-categorizable a woman or a man or some

other gender identity, and are therefore, discontent with the assignment to another category at birth. While attempts have been made to model the self-categorization process relative to genital anatomy and physiological development (e.g., Fausto-Sterling, 2012; Hines, 2003; Stoller, 1974), these analyses have not focused on what a self-categorization process might be on its own, if separated conceptually from birth-assigned category labels and correlates as Figure 1 depicts. Exploring current gender identity dynamics as distinguishable from birth-assigned category dynamics might provide this insight by focusing research attention on the possibility that self-reports of gender self-categorization need not be tied at the outset to anatomy or physiology. However, extant thinking appears to approach gender experience by placing paramount importance on the idea that physiology contributes to identity (e.g., Hines, 2003, 2010). Additionally, because of cisgender bias in both the social world and academia, less emphasis should be placed on informant-report than self-report, especially when the informant report is no more than a statement about the self's birth-assigned category.

Moreover, treating gender self-categorization as a personality process might provide a useful inroad to studying this facet of gender in childhood as well. As we develop in detail below, treating gender self-categorization in this way allows psychological researchers to separate the socially shared meanings of gender from the personal, private meanings of gender. Few psychological researchers dispute that gender categorization by others (e.g., "you are a girl") exists and is information to which the self has to respond on some intrapsychic level. However, the dynamics of this response at the intrapsychic level (e.g., "yes, I am a girl" or "no, I am not a girl") are poorly understood within both children and adults. However, personality theory allows for such dynamics to be examined via psychological research in ways that we develop in the next section.

Elements of Gender Self-Categorization Structure: The Assumptions of Asymmetrical Activity and Exhaustive Binary Experiences

The personality approach helps elucidate some of the tacit assumptions about how gender self-categorization is believed to operate in extant literature by focusing on the structure of this phenomenon. Specifically, scholars can extract at least two themes that shape both lay and scholarly discussions and theories of gender self-categorization experience: (a) the tacit assumption that self-categorization is an asymmetrical experience between trans* and cis profiles, and (b) the explicit assumption that gender self-categorization is a binary experience for all persons, which is to say that binary experience is exhaustive across (or covers all) persons. We discuss each under a separate heading before merging them to provide larger theoretical insights.

The Assumption of Asymmetrical Activity in Gender Self-Categorization

The tacit asymmetrical activity assumption for gender self-categorization can be seen in the language used to described cis and trans* experiences. For cis experiences, there is tacit *inactivity* in that cis individuals are virtually never described as acting on their gender self-categorization; instead, the description is usually that cis individuals' language for the self becomes constant at some point in development (e.g., gender constancy; Kohlberg, 1966). From a cis perceiver's standpoint, the "on the same side as" experience might translate into the tacit belief that the person has *remained* on the same as their birth-assigned category—in a relatively passive manner. To see additional aspects of this tacit assumption, one need only contrast the discourse on cisgender experience with the popular and academic discourse around the idea of transitioning that dominates thinking about transgender experience (e.g., Carroll, Güss, Hutchinson, & Gauler, 2012; Deogracias et al., 2007; Diamond et al., 2011; Gonzalez et al., 2012) and has since the time of Stoller's (1974) influential analysis. For discourse on transgender experience, there appears to be a perception of activity—specifically, of people changing their bodies and, thereby, their psychosocial experiences within the social world. Within various literatures, there is a practice of using the terms *female-to-male* (*FTM*) and *male-to-female* (*MTF*) to refer to trans men and trans women, respectively (e.g., Carroll et al., 2012; Deogracias et al., 2007; Factor & Rothblum, 2008). However, parallel descriptors of *female-to-female* (FTF) and *male-to-male* (MTM) to refer to cis women and cis men, respectively, might be viewed as patently unnecessary, or even redundant. Herein the implication is clear; transgender individuals are doing something with gender in an active way—they are *actively changing* from one gender to the other (so far as those discussants are concerned). At the same time, for cisgender discourse, "doing gender" for adults takes on a meaning consistent with Butler's (1990) *gender performativity*—a focus on external cues of visual presentation (e.g., attire, mannerisms) to indicate gender. Taken together, both popular discourse and a number of scholarly models of psychological experience showcase an asymmetry in how transgender and cisgender individuals are "doing gender." Doing gender focuses on Facets a and b (i.e., birth-assigned category and current gender identity) for trans* persons, while, for cis persons, doing gender focuses on Facets c and d (gender roles and expectations and social presentation of gender; see Figure 1).

We contend, however, that there has been no compelling evidence or argumentation at present that there is asymmetry in gender self-categorization across cis or trans* actors. To appreciate this argument, one need only recall the assertions of the dominant model of gender identity within developmental psychology. That model asserts that initially children do not have a coherent or consistent self-categorization in terms of gender until approximately 4 years of age (see above)—this includes all children who will be described later as cisgender (as well as those who will be described as transgender spectrum; Tate, 2012). Thus, historical controversies between the social learning and cognitive processing approaches as to which might accurately characterize how children settle on a gender self-categorization (see Howard & Hollander, 1997) imply that there is a process of psychological activity for cisgender children as well. However, what most commentators remember about such controversies is the end-stage outcome being described: that there is a final description that those assigned to the category of boy later identify as boy, and those assigned to the category of girl later identify as girl. Yet, cognitive processing, social learning, and most other psychological processes require active participation on the part of the focal individual (cf. Bussey & Bandura, 1999).

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To crystalize these considerations, we refer to cisgender persons as either *cis men* or *cis women* (alphabetically listed). The space between the words underscores the idea that *cis* is a modifier referring to the profile of one's experience—namely, a profile of active psycho-socio-cultural-linguistic development describing the starting point label and current identity label as being the same. The justification for this practice is found within the dominant developmental psychology model: there is a trajectory that can be ultimately tracked from birth (when others assign a label to the self) to the time when a person arrives at a self-assigned gender label.

Sources of Skewed Perceptions of Gender Self-Categorization Activity

In parallel to the tacit assumption of psychological inactivity for cis men and cis women, the cisgender bias has two forms that appear to have skewed scholarly perception of the actual type of activity taking place for trans* actors. One form of the cisgender bias is the labeling used and the other form is the lack of integration of extant idiographic reports from transgender persons.

Labels of trans experience that reinforce skewed perceptions. Concerning the first point (labeling), as Factor and Rothblum (2008, Endnote 1) suggest, the use of terms such as *FTM* and *MTF* to describe trans men and trans women, respectively, in many instances "places undue importance on the prior identity" (p. 252). The endnote goes on to describe an imagined parallel practice of calling gay men *heterosexual-to-gay* (*HTG*) or lesbians *heterosexual-to-lesbian* (*HTL*). This practice would be fundamentally inaccurate because it assumes that gay men and lesbians experienced their identity as truly heterosexual before some intervening event (even if that event was completely biological). Likewise, we assert that it is fundamentally inaccurate—and possibly discriminatory—to treat prior gender categories *ascribed to the self by others* as in any manner important to one's current (self-assigned) gender identity. The use of the terms *FTM* and *MTF* is likely a holdover from medical category designations focusing on genital surgeries and, therefore, might be fine in purely medical contexts that refer to genital surgeries.

However, when considering a person's gender self-categorization, genital categories might have no important bearing on this phenomenon. For instance, even while assigned to a male genital category, a number of trans women may have never experienced their self-categorization as male—even when treated in a social manner based on this category by family and close others. Likewise, even while assigned to a female genital category, a number of trans men may never have experienced their self-categorization as female—even when treated this way socially. In this manner, one can see the imprecision of the FTM and MTF terminology. "Female" and "male" are at once (a) medical categories referring to genitalia (viz., Prader Scale categories; see Hines, 2003), (b) social categories referring to groups of people, and (c) individual psychological identities and self-categorizations.

When referring to social categories and psychological identities it is unwise for scholars to add further confusion by allowing readers to believe these categories are closely tied to medical designations of anatomy because they are not. As Factor and Rothblum (2008) demonstrate, a large portion of both trans men and trans women do not have the genital reassignment surgeries that would change their medical designations—and a substantial portion do not want such surgeries even if they could afford them. Consistent with this and other (see below) extant research on transgender identity, we argue that the experience of being transgender is always psychological and social, and only sometimes medical. For this reason, we refer to persons as either *trans men* or *trans women* (alphabetically listed), with the space between the words illustrating that *trans* is a modifier referring to the profile of one's self-categorization. Specifically, the *trans* modifier describes an active path of psycho-socio-cultural development describing the starting point label (generated by others) and current label (generated by the self) that are different, without unduly focusing on identities ascribed to the self by others. This use of a space is also consistent with practices advocated by many trans men and women in blogs and personal communications, as well as some researchers (e.g., Tate et al., 2013).

Trans man and *trans woman* as terms allow for two nuances. One nuance is that they convey a movement from one sociocultural category to another but only describe and emphasize the endpoint of that movement. In this way, trans women as a category, for instance, can now include any persons who were birth-assigned to the category male or intersex. Likewise, trans men as a category can now include any persons who were birth-assigned to the category female or intersex.

The second nuance is that these terms allow for variability within the psychological experience of that self-categorization. For example, if some trans women did in fact identify with being male (as a self-categorization) in childhood while other trans women never identified with being male, then both experiences can exist within the same label being united by the final outcome—that at some point, each group of women disclosed their female self-categorizations to others. Similarly, if some trans men did in fact identify with being female (as a self-categorization) in childhood whereas other trans men never identified with being female, then both experiences can exist within the same label being united by the final outcome—that at some point, each group of men disclosed their male self-categorizations to others.

Of course, in virtually all cases being considered, medical designations and the social meanings of these categorizations for *other people* led to these individuals to be treated *as though* they were part of the social category male or female; but, their psychological experiences of fit with that social category may have varied. *MTF* and *FTM* as terms cannot easily convey these nuances. We respect individuals who identify themselves as FTMs or MTFs in social interactions. However, this social use of these terms is likely a quick (and simple) way to convey that the person has a transgender profile of identity development. Social interactions notwithstanding, language that allows for nuance is preferred in academic discourse to capture as much variegation as possible.

Lack of integrating idiographic reports as reinforcing skewed perceptions. The second point (lack of integration of idiographic reports) is apparent in how the narrative reports of trans men and trans women are not fully integrated into scholarly thinking. It has been reported that trans men and trans women identify their genders as such publicly (i.e., to others [not necessarily the self]) between 18 and 24 years old—and that trans men publicly disclose sooner than trans women, on average (Factor & Rothblum, 2008). These data by themselves might support an argument for a so-called late onset for self-categorization. How-

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ever, narrative analyses and idiographic studies have consistently argued that fear of prejudice is one of the main reasons for delaying this public disclosure—even while many report having been female or male in their own minds, at least, since a young age, usually around 4 years old (e.g., J. Green, 2005; Mock, 2014; Morris, 1974; Serano, 2007). Thus, what might appear to be the late onset of gender identification may really be actively dealing with fear of prejudice, fear of ostracism, and social anxiety. However, the public disclosure is preceded for many (though not all) trans men and women by years of private self-disclosure of the identity that is only later revealed to friends, family, coworkers, then the larger social world when a person feels that he or she can no longer live with the discrepancy of one's self-knowledge being inconsistent with others' knowledge, despite the tangible, negative costs for doing this in many cultures at present (cf., Bornstein, 1998; Green, 2005; Mock, 2014; Morris, 1974; Serano, 2007).

Given that the assumption of asymmetrical activity between cis and trans* experience is difficult to defend, and the identification of two major sources that reinforce this idea (but that are themselves untenable), we propose that it is both possible and desirable to focus on symmetry for cis and trans* experiences of gender self-categorization. In particular, we argue that a similar process of active identification with self-labels is likely happening for all children during the same developmental interval between birth and 4 years old—irrespective of the eventual description of one's developmental profile as cis or trans*.

The Assumption of Binary Gender Self-Categorization Experience as Exhaustive Across Persons

The conceptual landscape forged above when considering the developmental trajectories of one's experience as cis or trans was purposefully crafted to only deal with *female* and *male* current identities even while we used the trans* indicator. This purposeful crafting was meant to illustrate the other tacit assumption: that gender self-categorization experience is believed to feature only two experience tracks across persons, and is thereby presumed binary and exhaustive. More important, in the modern scholarly discourse around the identities of trans men and women there is little disagreement on the fact that these individuals are ultimately men and women, respectively—not both categories or neither category. In this way, trans men and trans women are descriptively, at least, part of a binary understanding of gender—even if they make clear the active process of gender self-categorization (that, as we have argued above, also characterizes cis men and women). However, three recent demographic analyses have challenged this binary assumption for gender self-categorization experience by demonstrating that a large number of trans* individuals do not identify as exclusively female or male.

Factor and Rothblum's (2008) demographic analysis of trans* individuals indicated a sizable portion of respondents who did not moved "across" traditional female or male gender categories (from a cisgender perspective). Instead, these individuals moved "beyond" traditional gender categories, either by (a) blending gender categories and having a combined sense of self-categorization as being simultaneously female and male (e.g., "two-spirit," "genderblender," and "bigender") or (b) having a felt-experience of gender self-categorization that is outside female or male (e.g., "postgender," "agender," and "nongendered"). Using the language of the participants themselves, Factor and Rothblum (2008) referred collectively to these identities as *genderqueer*. More important, in Factor and Rothblum's (2008) sample, the genderqueer respondents were slightly more numerous than the trans men and trans women. Factor and Rothblum (2008) recruited participants for in-person interviews from trans* activist communities, so these designations and experience might have been specific to that population. Nonetheless, Kuper et al. (2012) found similar results using open-ended questions about gender identity in an online snowball sample of trans* young adults recruited through social networks and medical networks—with genderqueer participants being just over 50% of all listed trans* identities. Finally, Tate et al. (2013) conducted a general survey using close-ended response options in the San Francisco Bay Area that was not specifically targeting trans* respondents. Tate et al. found almost identical proportions of respondents who identified as either binary trans (i.e., trans men or trans women) and nonbinary trans (i.e., genderqueer). Thus, three separate sources converge on the idea that genderqueer individuals may be close to half of the trans* population. These estimates can be seen as an upper-range of the nonbinary constituents of the trans* population because other investigators have only found approximately one-third of the trans* individuals in their sample reporting a self-categorization other than trans female or trans male (e.g., Grant et al., 2011; Iantaffi & Bockting, 2011).

We use *genderqueer* and *nonbinary* to refer collectively to both the combined sense of being *female and male* or the neutral self-categorization as being neither *female or male*. The justification for this broad usage is that, specific experiences notwithstanding, combined self-categorization (what Tate et al., 2013, called *genderblended* as a summary term) and neutral self-categorization (what Tate et al., 2013, called *postgender* as a summary term) experiences are united—at least descriptively—in the fact that each describes a nonbinary track for gender identity experience. In effect, two discrete categories are not enough to include these genderqueer experiences. Instead, genderblended experience requires thinking of female and male self-categorization as a unity, not as dichotomized. Similarly, postgender experience necessitates an understanding of a categorization system that is at least trinary so that a third option—none of the above—is available. To be clear, as an initial supposition, we believe that genderqueer/nonbinary developmental profiles should show the same active gender identification processes as the binary female and male individuals (cis or trans). Additionally, the process of disclosure to others might take as long as it does for trans men and trans women given fear of prejudice and social anxiety in a cisnormative social world. In fact, researchers have shown that genderqueer self-categorization disclosure to others appears to show similar timing to that of trans men and trans women (see Factor & Rothblum, 2008). These data are consistent with our initial supposition.

At present, little more than demographic empirical studies exist on nonbinary gender experience of self-categorization. Qualitative research has focused on genderqueer experience in a variety of ways (see Roen, 2002)—some of which conflate current identity dynamics with the social presentation of gender in terms of attire and mannerisms (see Califia, 1997; Nestle et al., 2002)—which would be our Facet d (rather than our Facet b), see Figure 1. However, below, we highlight additional conceptual insights that emerge by focusing on nonbinary gender as self-categorization

(Facet b). In particular, one hidden conceptual possibility is that gender self-categorization may be most usefully modeled as the *degree* to which one's sense of self overlaps with any or all gender category labels in a given cultural context.

It is worth noting that existing measures of gender experience do not provide information about one's sense of identity or categorization overlap with a single or multiple gender categories. In terms of the facets of the gender bundle (see Figure 1), current measures that could assess the degree of endorsement of gender experience only focus on either Facet c or Facet e. For Facet c (gender roles and expectations), the Bem-Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974, 1981) and the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1974) assess one's endorsement of traits associated with gender stereotypes. In those cases, endorsing purportedly *masculine* and *feminine* traits to the same degree (also called *psychological androgyny*; Bem, 1974) is not the same as having a gender self-categorization as both female and male. In fact, Tate (2012) argues that for Bem's (1974) labels such as *sex-typed* (e.g., a woman who endorses so-called feminine traits) or *reverse-typed* (e.g., a man who endorses so-called feminine traits) to be meaningful one's gender self-categorization and gender role stereotype endorsement must be conceptually and empirically separate. In terms of Facet e (gender evaluations), Tropp and Wright (2001) developed an ingroup gender identification measure for adults and Egan and Perry (2001) developed a gender typicality measure for children. Both, however, only assess ingroup evaluation (i.e., self in comparison with others with the same label). Thus, one's categorization into the group must exist logically before completing either measure. The best existing candidate for measuring something to our meaning would be Egan and Perry's (2001) contentment with gender assignment measure for children, but that measure only focuses on the birth-assigned category facet (Facet a), not explicitly on the current identity facet (Facet b; see Figure 1).

What genderqueer/nonbinary experiences invite theorists and researchers to consider is the possibility that gender self-categorization is a process of identifying to some degree with all available gender categories within one's culture. In cultures whose understanding of gender is binary, a parsimonious manner by which to recover genderqueer experience is to ask respondents to consider how much they overlap with both *female* and *male* identity categories. In this way, a combined sense of self-categorization as simultaneously female and male (genderblended) could be described as overlapping to a high degree with both *female* and *male* gender categories. Likewise, a neutral sense of self-categorization as neither female nor male (postgender) could be described as overlapping to a low degree with both *female* and *male* gender categories.

This new insight is also germane to describing the binary identities of female or male (cis and trans inclusive). Arguably, one's felt sense of gender categorization conveys *not only* one's sense of self-category overlap with one's current identity, *but also* one's *lack of overlap with other categories* and the self. For example, both cis women and trans women may, on average, feel a strong sense of overlap with the gender category *female*, and very small, if any overlap, with the gender category *male*. Likewise, both cis men and trans men may feel, on average, a strong sense of overlap with the gender category male, and simultaneously, little, if any, overlap with the gender category *female*. Of interest to the authors, the efficacy of this insight has not been formally tested in any psychological or sociological literature of which we are aware. However, such insights are not only useful for the inclusive theoretical modeling of gender self-categorization experience for all identities in the United States (and other cultures), these insights can and should translate into operationalizations that are usable within both qualitative and quantitative analyses.

Personality Research Methods Can Empirically Examine These Propositions

The tasks for U.S. personality or individual differences researchers are clear from the above descriptions and arguments. In this section, we briefly enumerate how each major supposition (i.e., similarity of self-categorization activity and binary and nonbinary structure) can be examined using extant personality methods.

Similarity of Self-Categorization Activity

To determine whether the above supposition about the similarity of self-categorization is supported, at least two types of studies can be conducted. The most sophisticated would be a longitudinal study, similar to the ones that already exist to probe the onset and stability of certain personality traits (e.g., Roberts, Walton, & Viechtbauer, 2006; Srivastava et al., 2003). Of course, these studies are expensive in terms of resources and participant time, so another type of study would be retrospective. Although retrospective studies of autobiographical experiences have their interpretive difficulties (see Schwarz, 2007, for a review), researchers could no doubt find ways to lessen the major difficulties. One of the major difficulties outlined by Schwarz is that most retrospective report measures do not take advantage of what he terms the hierarchical structure of autobiographical memory. Fortunately, Schwarz (2007) argues that methods already exist that can exploit the structure of autobiographical memory, such as the Event History Calendar (Belli, 1998). Accordingly, using an event history calendar (or similar) method might be a good way to obtain higher quality data about autobiographical information. The crucial variables in a retrospective or autobiographical study of cis and trans* identity profiles would be private self-categorization versus public self-categorization. There are good existing demographic methods to simultaneously determine cis and trans* respondents, such as Tate et al. (2013)'s two-question assessment of gender identity (2QAGI). The main question for this type of study is clear: Do cis and trans* individuals recall having a stable, *private identity* at approximately the same time? Any meaningful effect size difference between the two profiles would be evidence against the suppositions here and, more importantly, an empirical clarification (with methodological caveats for it being retrospective) that cis and trans* self-categorizations do in fact have different developmental onsets. One expects the public identities to be different, and this may be what extant research is finding. In any case, a study of this type clarifies the relevant conceptual issues irrespective of the empirical answer.

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Binary and Nonbinary Structures to Self-Categorization

To determine whether the above supposition about the binary and nonbinary structure of self-categorization is supported, the first task would be to develop a self-report measure of one's self-categorization overlap or strength with both *female* and *male* gender categories in the United States. This measure could be a Likert-type scale, a visual scale similar to the Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992), or some other rank-order representation. A measure with both female and male category items would then be administered to any set of cis and trans* respondents (who can be determined using the 2QAGI [Tate et al., 2013] or similar demographic methods), and the response patterns would be examined to determine whether cis men and women and trans men and women truly show stronger self-categorization with one category versus the other. Similarly, the two classes of nonbinary identities (genderblended and postgender) should show distinct patterns on these measures from each other and from the female and male respondents (cis and trans*). For example, genderblended participants might show equal strengths for self-categorization with both female and male categories at *an above zero rate*. However, postgender respondents might show equal strengths for self-categorization with both female and male categories *at a near zero rate*. These patterns would be definitional of their identities: genderblended respondents have a felt-sense of self-categorization that is simultaneously female and male, whereas postgender respondents have a felt-sense of self-categorization that is neither female nor male. However, like the arguments in the foregoing section, a lack of distinct patterns between nonbinary and binary profiles would suggest that any difference between these profiles may not be located at the level of self-categorization.

Additional Personality Questions

If these preliminary sets of findings as outlined above can be empirically supported, then researchers can pursue more complex questions concerning the four types of consistency when measuring traits (i.e., intraindividual, interindividual, mean-level, and rank-order; see Roberts & DelVecchio, 2000), but now relevant to gender self-categorization. Based on the specific patterns that would be found, researchers might create complex arguments about both continuity and change (e.g., Caspi & Roberts, 2001), or they might even create separate research tracks for cis and trans* experiences rather than integrating them because these two classes of experience would be demonstrably distinct (rather than just presumptively so). Accordingly, researchers are encouraged to take the appropriate steps to build a better science of gender self-categorization experiences from the contours of empirical information in addition to theoretical suppositions and hypotheses.

General Discussion

The function of a scholarly enterprise is to identify, collect, and integrate as much information regarding a specific topic of inquiry as possible. This is the basic meaning of an analytic or scientific approach. Since the early 1980s and to the present, however, psychological science, in particular, has consistently failed to create this integration by relegating transgender spectrum (trans*) experiences of identity to the marginal theoretical corners of disorder and dysphoria. The specialized area of transgender studies has helped promote the status of trans* experiences within many fields, yet more can be done to truly integrate these experiences with the majority of gender identity research. With this article, we hope to erode the practice of marginalization by offering a theoretical framework into which trans* fit with equal weight to cisgender (cis) experiences as not only valid experiences of gender but also as the lenses through which scholars can glimpse the whole of gender self-categorization phenomena. As we have tried to show, until now gender identity scholars and researchers have, instead, glimpsed large but incomplete pieces of gender identity experience by working without the realization of integration—and sometimes used (tacitly or explicitly) dubious or erroneous assumptions as a consequence.

In this article, we demonstrated that psychological theorizing already has a place for the integration of trans* and cis experiences of gender self-categorization within the dominant developmental psychology model of gender identity formation. Additionally, the theoretical power integration can be leverage by focusing on the structure of the relatively stable experience of self-categorization from the personality science perspective. We believe that it is now time to fill that place for integration of cis and trans* experiences of gender self-categorization using the lever of personality theory; and, this article serves as the clarion call. Of course, researchers should continue to use the important insights of social, clinical, and developmental psychology to further leverage insights from the experiences of cis and trans* individuals. It is our hope that the vantage points provided in this article can usher in new insights, new theories, new methods, and a deeper appreciation from the variegation of human social experience, especially as it relates to gender self-categorization from all relevant theoretical perspectives.

Finally, we hope that the insights provided in this article underscore the need to disambiguate the separate constructs within our so-called gender bundle (see Figure 1) and in Egan and Perry's (2001) multidimensional understanding of gender. Although this article only focused on two of the facets of the bundle to provide the insights detailed above, the conceptual framework of treating gender as a bundle of facets allows any scholar (qualitative or quantitative) to create focused and circumscribed analyses of each facet (and the subtopics within each facet). Focusing on separate facets of gender experience will undoubtedly led to a strong scholarly tradition once these facets are examined in various connections.

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