

Reimagining Gender: Striving Toward Inclusivity

Rebecca Jesso

Abstract

Humans often view other people in terms of their group memberships (e.g., gender, ethnicity), and this tendency toward social categorization can maintain stereotypes that imply rigid differences between people. It is increasingly clear that this is the case with gender. The complexity and subjectivity of gender is unfathomable, yet the prevailing normative understanding of gender involves a dichotomy in which persons are understood simply, as either male or female (cisgendered). Rigid views of gender can be problematic for people who do not identify as exclusively male or female, as they do not easily fit as belonging with either dominant gender. Such non-cisgendered persons are disproportionately likely to face discrimination, however, this is not inevitable. Research in psychology shows that discrimination can be reduced in a variety of ways, including by expanding the psychological boundaries around people's sense of ingroup or "we," a process known as recategorization. This paper explores how this psychological research could inform the development of an intervention to improve the experience of non-cisgendered persons in the workplace. By developing more flexible perspectives of gender identities and expressions, Canadian communities can lead the world in becoming more inclusive.

Reimagining Gender: Striving Toward Inclusivity

During the last decade, there has been increasing attention dedicated to gender: what constitutes gender, why gender is important, and interest in gender neutrality. One notable example is National Geographic's issue in January 2017, titled "Gender Revolution" (National Geographic, 2017a) that devotes recognition to shifting understandings of gender. This issue focused on normalizing gender variations and how gender impacts opportunities cross-culturally. One article asked non-cisgender children and their families to describe their child's transition, the barriers they overcame, and social reactions they experienced. Public responses to this issue ranged from ecstatic to furious (National Geographic, 2017b). The campaign by National Geographic is among many others that share a common goal of questioning the normalization of cisgender identities— a phrase that refers to an individual's gender identity as matching their biological sex (Fish & Karban, 2015, p.205). In this paper, gender will be understood as an internal perception and external expression of the self that is impacted by endogenous factors such as chromosomes and hormones, and exogenous factors such as culture and religion (Girshick, 2008, p.2). While every factor will not be thoroughly discussed, this definition attempts to recognize a multitude of reasons why expressions of and opinions about gender differ so vastly on a global scale. This paper will specifically investigate the formation and expression of attitudes towards non-cisgender people living in Canada, how prejudiced attitudes can manifest in harmful ways, and how prejudice could be reduced in the workplace.

Traditional understandings of gender often equate it to biological sex, such that people are assigned genders at birth that match their sex (Oger, 2015). Presently, gender is defined as the internal perception of one's self, which may not necessarily align with assigned gender at birth (Lamble, 2008). Cisgender continues to serve as a standard of normativity as gender usually

aligns with biological sex, but gender can also align with the opposite sex, a phenomenon that is coined transgender (Namaste, 2011, p.2; Girshick, 2008, p.2). Contrary to the common belief that people are either born with either male or female biological traits, some people are born intersex. Intersex describes many variations of genitalia, hormones, and chromosomes which are not exclusively either sex (Herman, 2013). People who are intersex demonstrate that there are not exclusively two sexes, yet only two genders to describe one's experience until recently. The phenomenon of intersex people is relevant and important because it complicates the idea of gender strictly reflecting biological sex.

Gender is one of many ways individuals understand themselves and an identity that they want others to recognize (National Geographic, 2017). From this perspective, gender has two facets: an internal understanding and an external expression. While the internal aspect is subjective, gender identification can be expressed to others by presenting oneself in a manner consistent with their internal gender identity (Jackson, 2011). External expression includes using combinations of clothing, makeup, and hairstyles to shape how a person will be perceived. These are not absolute markers of gender, but some physical appearances are more closely associated with one gender, which allows people to easily infer gender through use of specific markers. People are also capable of physically changing their body to match their internal self. Studies have found positive psychological outcomes of presenting oneself in a manner consistent with one's gender identity (Davis & Meier, 2014; Fish & Karban, 2015, p.224). For example, transgender men who have undergone chest reconstruction surgery and testosterone injections self report significantly less body dissatisfaction than transgender men who only undergo injections or have not undergone any procedures (Davis & Meier, 2014). Gender identity is

relevant in Canadian society because it is the component other people see and may therefore be a target for prejudice.

In Canada, 0.5 % of the population currently identifies as non-cisgender (Oger, 2016; Bauer, Scheim, Pyne, Travers, & Hammond, 2015). The population of Canada is estimated to be around 36,286,400, meaning that approximately 181,431 Canadians identify as non-cisgender (Statistics Canada, 2016). Non-cisgender Canadians are undoubtedly recipients of intentional and deliberate prejudice and discrimination (Lamble, 2008). Regardless of how a person chooses to look or verbally express their gender, their identity should not result in victimization. Victimization and macroaggressions toward transgender people are associated with lower self-esteem and greater stress and anxiety (Seelman, Woodford, & Nicolazzo, 2016). The fact that people are being disproportionally targeted demands action to reduce prejudice in Canadian societies.

Non-cisgender Canadians who live their authentic selves openly face interpersonal, institutional, and cultural discrimination resulting from prejudice attitudes (Bauer et al., 2015). Interpersonal discrimination can be shown through self-report surveys completed by Canadian transgender students; 74% of have reported being verbally harassed because of their gender, 49% sexually harassed, and 37% physically harassed (Goffin, 2013). An illustration of institutional discrimination is the plethora of complex and inconsistent policies that prevent non-cisgender Canadians from changing their gender on various forms of government identifications. Up until June 2017, only 3 provinces would allow gender changes on official documentation without requiring one to undergo surgery or hormone therapy (Fish & Karban, 2015, p.226; The Canadian Press, 2016; Wherry, 2015). Lastly, concerns over which bathroom non-cisgender people should use demonstrates cultural discrimination (Herman, 2013). Using public washroom

facilities is a basic right, yet many non-cisgender people face discrimination when in the facility that matches their gender (Bauer, Pyne, Francino, & Hammond, 2013). Among transgender Americans, 59% avoided public washrooms due to fear of confrontation, and of those who report using public bathrooms, 70% disclosed experiencing negative reactions from other patrons in the bathroom (Ford, 2013). Negative reactions include being told they were in the wrong facility, being asked to leave, and being questioned or threatened. Individuals living in Canada are legally protected for using the washroom of their choice, though this does not guarantee they will not encounter discrimination. The profound impact of discrimination can be demonstrated through suicide statistics; 35.1% of transgender Ontarians seriously considered suicide and 11.2% attempted, compared to 3.7% and 0.6% of all Canadians (Bauer et al., 2015).

One way discriminatory actions are addressed is through Canadian laws. In Canada, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects each person's entitlement to their own beliefs, even if they are classified as prejudiced. However, beliefs cannot be acted upon in a manner that spreads hate or does harm towards identifiable groups, such as non-cisgender people. In Canada, deliberate discriminatory acts, such as intentionally inflicting physical or emotional harm, are classified as hate crimes and are illegal under sections 318 and 319 of the Criminal Code (CBC News, 2011). Non-cisgender people are included as an 'identifiable group' protected by the hate speech provisions of the Criminal Code and Canadian Human Rights Code (Cossman & Katri, 2017). To further protect non-cisgender people, the Canadian Federal Government passed Bill C-16 in June 2017: legislation which prohibits discrimination toward people on the grounds of gender identity and gender expression (Wherry, 2015; Tasker, 2017; Parliament of Canada, 2016). While gender-based discrimination was already illegal in Canada, Bill C-16 offers further legal protection to non-cisgender Canadians through modern and specific notions of gender.

While legal interventions are a crucial component of preventing discrimination, social interventions are needed because of persisting discrimination in Canada.

Theory and research in social psychology can provide guidance when developing strategies which may effectively reduce discrimination while creating increasingly more inclusive environments for non-cisgender people. Humans use social categorization implicitly and explicitly to organize people into easily defined social groups (Gaertner, Mann, Murrell, and Dovidio, 1989). Social identity theory posits one way people evaluate themselves is through collective identity— memberships in groups, such as gender (Jackson, 2011, p.109). The self-esteem hypothesis posits that people want to favorably evaluate themselves and the groups they belong to. Preferring ingroup members can be harmless, but it can lead to prejudice attitudes about outgroup members (Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Brewer, 2017). One way that reduced discrimination against non-cisgender people can be achieved is by encouraging adults to broaden their views on gender and diminishing preferences for gendered ingroups. The process of recategorization involves attempts to change people's perceptions so see themselves as more similar to than different from outgroup members by creating more inclusive understandings of "we" (Gaertner et al., 1989). The implication is that through recategorization, the boundaries between in and out-group members can be diminished. Through recognition that we share many commonalities with an "other," those others can become part of a psychologically more inclusive ingroup.

Several decades of research following social identity theory have demonstrated that the simple categorization of people into groups can be sufficient to generate preferences for ingroups. In 1971, Tajfel and colleagues wanted to discover what the minimal conditions were to provoke intergroup conflict (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971). Using a method known as

the minimal group paradigm, they found that the simple categorization of people into separate groups was sufficient to generate intergroup conflict, even in the absence of competition or self-interest (Billig & Tajfel, 1973). Therefore, discrimination can result from categorization into dichotomous groups, and in contemporary Canadian culture, gender is a means of categorization. Non-cisgender people may have a hard time fitting in their desired gender ingroup or being accepted as a member of any identifiable gender (Ford, 2013). A person who is non-cisgender relies on other's acceptance to feel safe and welcomed in their community. Recategorization attempts at reducing prejudice so non-cisgender people can feel safe.

Research on recategorization suggests ways that it might be used effectively to achieve this goal. One study that examined the effect of recategorization on ingroup attitudes is that by Gaertner et al. (1989). In this study, participants were divided into 2 teams of 3 people, and members in both group had to work together to generate a unified answer to a task. Each group was unable to interact until being placed in a one-group condition or two-group condition. The one-group condition has both teams merged together, seated alternately so that each individual had members of the opposite team on either side. The two-group condition required each group to sit with their respective team, facing the other group. The last component of the study was a questionnaire where each participant was asked to reflect on the likeableness of the other 5 participants. Results found participants rated ingroup members as more favourable than outgroup members, and participants in the one-group condition displayed lower bias toward outgroup members than those in the two-group condition. These results show how interdependent cooperation creates a common identity, therefore positive evaluations of ingroup members are extended to outgroup members.

Humans socially categorize themselves based on many factors, of which gender is one. A study by Nier et al. (2001) assumes racial appearance as a means of categorization, and tests intergroup relations by interviewing students at a university football game. Black and white interviewers approached white students, where the dependent measure was the student's response to being interviewed. All interviewers wore a hat representing one of the football teams. The independent variables were whether the interviewer's race was the same as the student's and whether the student and interviewer were representing the same team. The results of this study demonstrated that white students were significantly more likely to agree to an interview with a black interviewer when he wore a hat supporting that same team as the student, comparing to the opposite team. Despite different racial categorizations, the hat was a symbol of likeness. White students were just as likely to agree to help a white interviewer regardless of the team on their hat. The implications are that even sharing a symbol can infer sameness.

One factor impacting people's willingness to partake in gender prejudice reduction is their strength of identification with their gender ingroup. A study by Iyer and Ryan (2009) measured participants' strength of gender group identification in moderating desire to reduce workplace gender discrimination toward women. All participants read an article on the "glass cliff". Next, participants completed a survey measuring their levels of anger and sympathy toward the article, whether they believed it to be a real issue, and if action should be taken. Results showed women reported feeling significantly more identified with their gender group, and they saw the glass cliff phenomenon less legitimate than men. Overall, people who felt less affiliated with their gender group were more likely to want to participate in collective action to address gender discrimination. The implication is that the social position of one's ingroup and the level of their identification with that group, can impact how people respond to gender

inequality. Therefore, the effectiveness of prejudice intervention could partially rely on how issues are being framed and the emphasized closeness of the outgroups.

Dovidio et al. (2004) conducted a study to examine interventions that could be successful in helping people improve their attitudes toward outgroup members. White participants were pretested on their racial attitudes before viewing a videotape which depicted two men partaking in the same activities. One man was white and did not experience racial discrimination, while the other man was black and faced racial discrimination. There were 3 conditions manipulated: before the video began, participants were either instructed to imagine how the black man felt, to be objective as possible, or were not given any instruction. After watching the video, all participants immediately completed questionnaires regarding their empathy and recognition of injustice. Results demonstrated that reduction of prejudice was significantly greater than in imagine condition than then other two conditions, and that between the pre-tests and post-tests, overall reduction in prejudice was only statistically significant in the imagine condition. The greater implications of this study are that attempts to be empathetic make people feel closer to outgroup members. Taking the potential perspective of another can open us up to negative emotions we could feel if we encountered the same position. While this paper focuses on developing a workplace intervention targeting gender prejudice, perhaps the findings could be implemented in a way that would help employees resonate with the struggles faced by the non-cisgender community.

Despite the amount of prejudice and discrimination non-cisgender Canadians face, these negative interactions are not inevitable. Interventions inspired by recategorization theory can be developed and implemented to reduce prejudice toward non-cisgender Canadians. To develop a relevant and effective program, how Canadians currently view gender should be considered. One

such program is a workplace training program based on recategorization that attempts at reducing prejudice and discrimination. This interactive training program will educate employees on modern views of gender, inform them of discrimination that occurs, and encourage them to emotionally resonate through perspective taking with non-cisgender Canadians. The purpose of the program is to lead employees to extend boundaries of their ingroup to incorporate non-cisgender people.

To address and reduce prejudice toward non-cisgender people, I am proposing a workplace training program. Current peer-reviewed psychological research suggests that a workplace programs could be successful in reducing prejudice toward non-cisgender people. A workplace training program only targets a subpopulation of Canada: adults who are employed and whose corporation has chosen to implement the program. Attempting to reach the entire population is not realistic, but many adults can be reached through their workplace. Employers also have the power to make training sessions mandatory and can implement policies to include protections for non-cisgender Canadians. Targeting adults rather than children is constructive in creating immediate change, because non-cisgender people living in Canada should not have to wait for changes to be made by progressive future generations. Educating children is necessary too, but adults are responsible for encouraging an inclusive society and implanting legal policies that promote equality immediately.

The training program will be structured, interactive, supervised, and will run for half a work-day (roughly 4 hours). The program will be delivered by a team of well-trained presenters, some of whom are non-cisgender, and the number of presenters will be dependent on the size of the audience. Attendees will be placed in groups of 5-8, each with a presenter for more interaction. The justification for this length is that it will cost less to deliver the program, which

will hopefully make the program more widely available for all workplaces in Canada. To ensure this program reaches Canadians in all fields of work across the country, the hope is that it will be funded by the federal government. To determine the success of the program before it is widely implemented, the first groups of attendees can complete confidential pre-tests before the program to test prejudice attitudes, and post-tests to determine the lasting success of the intervention.

The program will be organized into 4 connected phases, each which will run for approximately the same length. In each of the phases, the ingroup that will be focused on is the shared identity all employees have by working for the same company and living in the same community. The specific focus is ensuring non-cisgender coworkers are fully included in the workplace and in the community. However, not all workplaces have non-cisgender people, and even if they did, these people are not necessarily going to be okay with being centered out. To address this, some of the program presenters will be non-cisgender, and the program will also emphasize that all employers are also part of the community they live in.

To emphasize ingroup sameness while promoting collaborative action to for a more inclusive workplace and community, all attendees and presenters will wear clip on buttons on their shirts. The buttons will all have the company name, logo, and name of the city they live in. The idea of a button symbolizing ingroup membership and likeness is based on findings from Nier et al. (2001). Perhaps all attendees sharing a symbol with non-cisgender presenters would be an incentive for attendees to include others in their ingroup.

The first phase of the program is an introduction about valuing all members of the workplace and members of the community. This also allows the owner or supervisor of the company who oversee employees to remind them that their workplace has no tolerance for forms of discrimination, because a considerable body of research shows that when institutional norms

support diversity and respect, prejudice and discrimination can be reduced. The focus will be on viewing diversity in communities as a positive thing, and presenters will emphasize that members of the specific company help make the community a nice place to live in. In discussing the wellbeing of the community, it is important that one-group representations of the company are emphasized. Based on results from Gaertner et al. (1989) and Dovidio et al. (1997), one-group representations will help eliminate barriers that would normally lead individuals to avoid members of their outgroup. Rather, the goal is to promote individuals to work with all their diverse employees and presenters to better their community.

The second phase shifts to a greater focus on how essentialist views on gender can be harmful to everybody. Attendees will be placed in groups, each with a presenter to facilitate open dialogue and discussion within their respective group. Attendees will discuss how gender stereotypes harm everybody and are welcomed to give personal examples. The presenter will also ask attendees to ponder how people with unique genders are harmed by these stereotypes. The purpose of this phase is to reduce identification to one's gender ingroup through the recognition that stereotypes can be harmful to everyone. For example, this attempts to reframe views of one group being harmed by certain stereotypes, to stereotypes having the potential to harm people of all genders. Based on the findings by Iyer and Ryan (2009), the social position and strength of identification with one's ingroup can impact how people respond to gender inequality. Therefore, inclusive discussion may reduce attendees' affiliation with their ingroup, and may encourage them to address gender discrimination.

In the third phase, every presenter reads a scenario of a non-cisgender person facing a problem, and every group gets a different scenario. Employees will be given time to write down what problem is present, how they think this person might feel, and how their workplace can

change policies or employees can help resolve the issue. Findings by Dovidio et al. (2004) showed that being instructed to practice empathy and perspective taking can make people feel closer to outgroup members. Therefore, through imaging how non-cisgender people may feel when faced with prejudice, attendees may feel closer to gender outgroup members, and take intervention more seriously.

The fourth and last phase wraps up the intervention by allowing each group to take turns sharing what their scenario is, and their proposed interventions. Members of other groups can give feedback and groups exchange ideas, and everybody is exposed to numerous scenarios. It is important that free thought is promoted and not limited in each phase; opinions should be guided, but not in a restrictive manner. A study by Legault et al. (2011) measured participants' receptivity to anti-discriminatory brochure. They found that people who received brochures promoting autonomy had the lowest motivation to possess prejudiced attitudes, compared to people who received controlling brochures or no brochures at all. Based on these findings, the workplace- training program must promote autonomy and a sense that people are free to choose how to think and act in relation to gender, or else the program might have a counter effect.

In summary, non-cisgender people living in Canada face prejudice, but attitudes surrounding gender can be changed to more accepting understandings. Greater understandings of gender may promote social support, and support has been shown to correlate with lower levels of depression and anxiety in non-cisgender people (Wareham, Fowler, & Pike, 2007). One community intervention that could have widespread effects is a workplace- training program based on recategorization theory. Research on recategorization has found that belonging to a group can influence people to evaluate ingroup members more positively (Gaertner et al., 1989; Dovidio et al., 1997; Dovidio et al., 2004). Through a workplace training program, employees

can be taught to expand their ingroup's boundaries to include all community members. While there is no single ideal program, research findings clearly demonstrated that learning to view others as more like ourselves is a successful way of becoming more unified.

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