

Fall 12-9-2023

Transgender and Gender-Nonconforming Peoples' Views on Masculinity: A Literature Review & Meta Analysis

Alyx Loney
Portland State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/honorsthesis>



Part of the [Social Psychology Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Loney, Alyx, "Transgender and Gender-Nonconforming Peoples' Views on Masculinity: A Literature Review & Meta Analysis" (2023). *University Honors Theses*. Paper 1414.
<https://doi.org/10.15760/honors.1446>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in University Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: pdxscholar@pdx.edu.

Transgender and Gender-nonconforming peoples' views on masculinity:
A Literature Review & Meta Analysis

by
Alyx Loney

An undergraduate honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Science
in
University Honors
and
Psychology

Thesis Adviser
Marcus Sharpe

Portland State University

2023

Abstract

The perception and performance of masculinities in the United States has been a topic that, on its own, has garnered relatively little research attention in existing literature. Only in recent years have we seen an increase in attention given towards the study and understanding of masculinities and their role in American society. Even among the study of masculinities, the viewpoints of transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals on masculinity have received little to no attention. With this literature review and meta analysis, we seek to develop a greater understanding of transgender and gender-nonconforming peoples' views on masculinity as they are currently depicted in available literature. We find that, especially among transgender men, the experiences of masculinity are likely as diverse as the wide array of lived experiences in masculinity experienced by cisgender men and masculine individuals. Simultaneously, it is evident that the apparently beneficial effects of performing masculinity in a social context, also referred to as male privilege, are not felt equally among transgender men, similarly to the wide variance in experience felt among cisgender men. We finish with recommendations for future research on the topic to gather more information on the opinions of other transmasculine, transfeminine, and other gender-nonconforming individuals regarding their perception and experiences with masculinities.

Body

It is important to begin with the understanding that gender is largely fluid and dynamic, with the potential to shift in meaning and presentation not only among societies across place and time but also within an individual over the course of their life (Brady et al., 2022). When we discuss the perception and performance of masculinities, therefore, we are merely examining a fraction of the potentialities of experience that exist within the context of perceived masculinity. This does not necessarily mean that the dominant or even most common experience of masculinity is the prototypical toxic masculinity that has received a great deal of attention in recent years. We want to note that through the lens of intersectionality, there is no absolute experience of masculinity that exists or even can possibly exist

singularly within a society or even within an individual. All aspects of our lives coalesce and continue to form and reform the ways in which we experience our world and ourselves within it; therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that any individual person's experience and perception of masculinity will vary from one to the next. That being said, it is worth examining the overall perception of masculinities amongst groups such as transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals who may be said to have a unique relationship with and experience of gender in their lives. It is especially interesting to note that, when the experiences of transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals are taken into account, a diverse model of a spectrum of gender can be observed which defies a dominant notion of a binary system of gender classification based on sex characteristics (Strang, et al. 2023). It is also worth noting that through the duration of this analysis, we recognize the differences between sex and gender, with the latter being defined as an individuals' experience of their gender identity and its possible congruence or incongruence with sex assigned at birth. With this acknowledgement, we can be better situated to understand that a person's experience of gender will not necessarily correlate with the experiences of other peers whose gender identity coincides with their assigned sex at birth, thereby situating transgender and gender-nonconforming people to have a potentially unique perception of masculinities. We want to further note that while we are interested in transgender and gender-nonconforming peoples' opinions of femininity and nonbinary identity, we have focused on masculinity for the scope of this current paper and review of existing literature.

Transmasculine individuals - people who were assigned female at birth but later transitioned to male or male-presenting - have been indicated as having a potentially unique perception of masculinities as well as an ability to provide a greater understanding of the differential experiences of being perceived as masculine within society, as well as any perceived social benefits that could be gleaned from being perceived as masculine. These social benefits to performing masculinity, otherwise known as male privileges, are commonly understood as benefits to being male in a patriarchal society, including higher pay and greater opportunities in work and social life, as well as a greater degree of respect allocated to

one's position as a male. We understand that intersectional identities complicate this picture of a privileged man, and that race and socioeconomic status are only two factors that may significantly differentiate one person's experience of being a man from another. Existing literature supports the idea that the lived experiences of differential identities within an intersectional lens vary widely from one to another, and so it would be accurate to say that even among cisgender masculine individuals, their lived experiences of masculinities vary widely from person to person. These intersectional variables include the differential qualities of being transgender and transmasculine as opposed to experiencing masculinities through a cisgender lens of experience. Clements et al. (2021) conducted a study to survey the opinions of transmasculine individuals' experiences of masculinity within a framework of perceived male privilege, and their results found that such experiences are widely diverse and serve to further deconstruct the dominant narrative of a gender binary grounded in essentialism. Instead, the lived experiences of masculinities reported by transmasculine individuals varied widely and did not produce results consistent with a singular experience of masculinity or perceived male privilege.

Another study conducted by Goodfriend et al. (2022) sought to understand the role of masculinity in the identity development of transmasculine individuals from a variety of countries including the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, among others. They found that the development of a strong identity and self-esteem was mediated not only by the support of family and friends, but also by the degree to which individuals were perceived by society at large as masculine. Their findings indicate that while a singular masculine identity may not be shared as a commonality, the emotional wellbeing and strength of identity formation of transmasculine individuals is at least in part mediated by how their masculinity or lack thereof is perceived and gauged by the world around them. An individual's environment and whether or not their social circles are supportive of gender incongruence or nonbinary identities can therefore be said to be a predictor of the strength of an individual's formation and satisfaction with a presentation of masculinity. Goodfriend et al. also importantly noted that participants from Australia and New Zealand reported altogether a more positive experience with the process of

transitioning compared to places like the United States or Canada. This tells us that even though we are experiencing some forward momentum, albeit with more than moderate pushback, of transgender civil rights, the perceptions of trans and gender nonconforming people is still highly variable and subject to significant rebuttal, which can complicate an individual's relationship with their identity due to outside factors such as social pressure and lack of support at large.

Discussion

It is evident that there is a clear need for further research to expand on the literature available to more accurately quantify transgender and gender-nonconforming peoples' experiences with and perceptions of masculinities. The literature as it is supports a fluid model of gender that is nonbinary in nature and reflects a great deal of variance of the kind of masculinities experienced by the people who participate in them on an individual and societal scale. Both the geographical location and familial status, as well as factors of intersectional identity, all contribute to an individual's formation of their identity as well as their potential relationship to their masculinity and masculinities as a whole. There is no singular experience of masculinity among either cisgender or transgender men or otherwise gender-nonconforming individuals, but further research could benefit with more in depth surveys and interviews to better understand the differential modes of masculinities as they are experienced by the diverse and unique array of people who have lived experiences with masculinities overall.

References

Brady, B., Rosenberg, S., Newman, C. E., Kaladelfos, A., Kenning, G., Duck-Chong, E., & Bennett, J.

(2022). *Gender is dynamic for all people*. *Discover Psychology*, 2(1)

doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s44202-022-00054-2>

Clements, Z. A., Derr, B. N., & Rostosky, S. S. (2022). *Male privilege doesn't lift the social status of all*

men in the same way: Trans masculine individuals' lived experiences of male privilege in the

united states. *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*, 23(1), 123-132.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.1037/men0000371>

Goodfriend, W., Garcia, A. L., Hoover, A. E., Habashi, M. M., Hack, T., & Raymond, A. (2022). *Identity*

development and self-esteem in transgender men: The importance of masculinity. *Journal of*

Homosexuality, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2022.2060056>

Strang, J. F., Wallace, G. L., Michaelson, J. J., Fischbach, A. L., Thomas, T. R., Jack, A., . . . Yang, J. S.

(2023). *The gender self-report: A multidimensional gender characterization tool for gender-*

diverse and cisgender youth and adults. *American Psychologist*,

doi:<https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0001117>