Perceptions of Psychological Adjustment in Males

Introduction

Previous Research
Few studies have looked at the effect of gender nonconformity alone as it relates to perception of others. Gender nonconformity is the label given when individuals violate societal norms for their gender, for example a male acting in a typically “feminine” way. This area is important to study as gender nonconformity has rarely been studied as a separate construct from sexual orientation. While the two constructs do interact, they are separate and should be studied individually.

Negative ideals have been shown to be present for both males and female who do not prescribe to typical gender norms, however these ideals tend to be harsher toward males who violate this norm (Blashill and Powellshna, 2012; Lobel, 1994; Thomas and Blakemore, 2013). This effect has been found in both hypothetical males, as described in vignettes, and real males, as seen on videotape.

Hypotheses
1. Feminine males will be perceived as less well adjusted than masculine males
2. Feminine males will be perceived as less well adjusted than androgynous males
3. Each vignette will measure the level of gender conformity it is set to (masculine will be rated more masculine, feminine will be rated more feminine, androgynous will fall in the middle)

Method

Participants
Participants were 96 undergraduate students from Eastern Kentucky University who received course credit for their participation in this study.

Vignettes
Participants were shown one of three vignettes, describing a male with either stereotypically feminine characteristics, stereotypically masculine characteristics, or androgynous characteristics. These traits were pulled from Liben and Bigler’s Occupations, Activities, and Traits scale (Liben and Bigler, 2002).

As a measure of validity, participants completed the Personality Attributes Questionnaire, which measured their perceived levels of femininity, masculinity, and androgyny in the described male. Each sub-scale included 8 questions and was scored on a scale of 8 to 40.

Adjustment
To measure perceived adjustment, participants completed an adjustment inventory which included 28 questions. These questionnaires were scored on a scale of 28 to 56, with 28 being least well adjusted, and 56 being most well adjusted.

Main scores were replaced with more feminine traits, the male is perceived as having some kind of deficiency. This study’s results suggest that this deficiency could be in adjustment, that is, feminine males are seen to be maladjusted by outside individuals due to their violation of the typical masculine ideal.

Discussion

Consistent with the hypotheses, feminine males were perceived to be the least well adjusted among the three groups. The data suggest that femininity in males causes individuals to perceive that a male as unstably adjusted. This is also consistent with previous research, which has found gender nonconforming (feminine) males to be perceived much more negatively than conforming (masculine) males across multiple measures.

Masculine males were rated highest in adjustment, suggesting that high masculinity is an indicator of how well or poorly an individual’s psychological adjustment is viewed. This result could be attributed to society’s view of typical masculinity. More masculine traits are typical and expected out of males, so when those traits are absent or replaced with more feminine traits, the male is perceived as having some kind of deficiency. This study’s results suggest that this deficiency could be in adjustment, that perhaps feminine and less masculine androgynous males are seen to be maladjusted by outside individuals due to their violation of the typical masculine ideal.

If this study were to be repeated, a larger and more representative sample would be needed to measure for age and other outside effects. It would also be good to measure other dimensions beyond adjustment, to see if the maladaptive perception extends to other areas.

Results

Adjustment x Group
Masculine group rated higher than both feminine and androgynous groups
Androgynous group rated higher than feminine group

Masculinity x Group
Masculine group rated higher than feminine and androgynous groups
No significant difference between feminine and androgynous groups

Femininity x Group
Feminine group rated higher than masculine and androgynous groups
Androgynous group rated higher than masculine group

Example Survey Questions

Personality Attributes Questionnaire
Participants were given scales with two opposite characteristics on each end, and were asked to rate where “Michael” fell on the scale. For example:
Not at all aggressive A.......B.......C.......D.......E Very aggressive

Adjustment Questionnaire
Participants were given a list of yes or no questions, and were asked to choose whether or not the question accurately described “Michael.” For example:
Does Michael get angry easily? yes no

References