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Gender nonconformity and desired social distance: Examining the stigmatization of gender nonconforming targets

Leah Chaney

Masters in Psychology of Intercultural Relations

Advisor: Doctor David Filipe Lourenço Rodrigues, Investigator in CIS-IUL

November, 2022

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Resumo

A não-conformidade de género ocorre quando uma pessoa decide não aderir às normas de género estabelecidas pela sua sociedade ou cultura. Tal como quaisquer outras minorias de género ou sexuais, pessoas não-conformistas às normas de género estão expostas a estigmatização e discriminação social. Num estudo experimental, um conjunto de participantes (N = 119) leu seis descrições de alvos num delineamento 2 (sexo biológico do alvo: feminino vs. masculino) x 3 (conformidade de género do alvo: conformista vs. ligeiramente não-conformista vs. altamente não-conformista) intra-participantes. Participantes indicaram qual a distância social que teriam com cada um dos alvos. Indicaram ainda o seu grau de familiaridade com pessoas não-conformistas às normas de género. Os resultados revelaram um efeito principal do sexo biológico do alvo, com maior distância social reportada para o alvo masculino (vs. feminino). Verificámos também um efeito principal da conformidade de género do alvo, com maior distância social para ambos os alvos não-conformistas (vs. conformista). A interação entre os fatores não foi significativa. Uma análise exploratória revelou ainda diferenças consoante a familiaridade. Especificamente, o efeito da conformidade de género do alvo na distância social foi observado apenas para participantes menos (vs. mais) familiarizados com pessoas não-conformistas às normas de género. Em geral, este estudo mostra que pessoas não-conformistas às normas de género tendem a ser discriminadas, independentemente do grau do conformismo a tais normas, particularmente quando as pessoas são menos educadas ou têm menos contacto com esta minoria de género.

Abstract

Gender nonconformity occurs when a person decides not to adhere to their gender norms within a given culture or society. Much like any other gender or sexual minority group, gender nonconforming people are at risk of stigmatization and social discrimination. In an experimental study, participants (N = 119) were asked to read the descriptions of six profiles in a 2 (target's biological sex: female vs. male) x 3 (target's gender conformity: conforming vs. slightly nonconforming vs. highly nonconforming) within-participants design. For each target, participants were asked to indicate how socially distant they be from each target. They also reported how familiar they were with gender nonconforming people. Results showed a main effect of target's biological sex, with participants indicating greater social distance from the male (vs. female) target. There was also a main effect of target's gender conformity, with participants indicating greater social distance towards both nonconforming (vs. conforming) targets. The interaction between both factors was non-significant. An exploratory analysis revealed differences according to familiarity. Specifically, the effect of the target's gender conformity was observed only for participants who were less (vs. more) familiar with gender nonconforming people. Overall, this study shows that gender nonconforming individuals tend to be discriminated against, independently of their level of adherence to gender nonconformity, particularly when people are less educated about or have less contact with this gender minority.

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CHAPTER 1 Introduction

The definition of gender has changed throughout history and today we can understand gender in many different facets (García Johnson & Otto, 2019). Over time, gender has been seen through a binary lens, which means individuals tend to be categorized either as female or male (Wylie et al., 2010). These gender categories are socially constructed by stereotypes and norms that spread over time and generations (Dietert & Dentice, 2009). The way individuals present themselves in a given society or culture is a cue for this (rather automatic) categorization. Likewise, gender roles can be explained as expectations of visual cues and behaviors that fit into a collective definition in a society of what a binary system deems is what makes a man and what makes a woman (Sawyer & Thoroughgood, 2017).

In recent times, society has come to agree that gender may not be as binary or straightforward as once defined to be in our societies (D'haese et al., 2015). Gender can be defined as an identity within a person, a gender identity, or a gender expression, that can be observed outwardly by how a person presents themselves regarding gender roles or gender stereotyped behaviors (Martin-Storey, 2016). Nonconformity occurs when these behaviors or expressions fail to adhere to society's definition of gender roles (Martin-Storey, 2016). People who present themselves as gender nonconforming are not necessarily transgender or transitioning from one gender to another, they simply do not fit into the conventional gender norms given to them by their society. There is also an important distinction to be made that not all people who are gender nonconforming identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or questioning. Gender nonconformity is how a person presents themselves and not about their sexual orientation, although these categories are usually mixed when judging an individual (Gordon & Meyer, 2007).

Even though the general definition of gender identity is progressing to lend individuals a more open expression, other gender conforming individuals may find nonconformity uncomfortable due to the fact that nonconforming individuals are in violation of societal gender norms (Collier et al., 2012). Individuals who are gender nonconforming could be faced with various forms of prejudice and discrimination including peer verbal enforcement of gender norms (i.e., correcting preferred pronouns; Xiao et al., 2019), homophobic insults and name-calling (Birkett & Espelage, 2015), or hostile physical assault (Tomsen & Mason, 2001). Along with being discriminated against for their gender identity, gender nonconforming individuals may also be faced with the discrimination that comes with being a part of a minority group (Skidmore et al., 2006). Minority group membership discrimination

can increase the risk for psychological distress through a number of processes such as direct experiences of victimization and social rejection which then can have significant cognitive and behavioral consequences (i.e., social anxiety and depression; Skidmore et al., 2006; Miller & Grollman, 2015).

According to the most recent National Survey on LGBTQ Youth on Mental Health conducted by Trevor Project (2022), which surveyed almost 34 thousand LGBTQ+ youths ranging in age from 13-24 years old from the United States, about 37% of the participants reported identifying as nonbinary, bigender, gender fluid, gender nonconforming, or genderqueer. More importantly, of those participants 87% of transgender boys/men, 77% of transgender girls/ women, and 67% of nonbinary/ genderqueer reported experiencing discrimination due to their gender identity. Even though in most settings, such as the workplace or school, there are measures taken to accept all individuals, and it might be illegal to discriminate against someone for their sex or gender, people who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community or who are gender nonconforming still experience discrimination and prejudice every day in a multitude of setting, including social settings (Miller & Grollman, 2015).

In another survey conducted by GLSEN (2021), in which more than 23 thousand students between the ages of 13 and 21 took part in the National School Climate Survey, 31% of participants reported as nonbinary. In the same survey, 92% of nonbinary identifying participants reported hearing negative remarks about gender expression, 29% had been prevented from using their chosen name or pronouns, and 21% had been prevented from wearing clothes deemed “inappropriate” based on gender norms. Furthermore, individuals who experienced higher levels of victimization because of their gender expression were 3 times more likely to miss school in the past month, felt lower levels of belonging to their community, and had lower self-esteem paired with higher levels of depression. Also, transgender students reported experiencing the most hostile intergroup climate compared to their peers. Hostile intergroup climate was operationalized as school safety—with 43% of transgender students reporting feeling unsafe at school because of their gender expression—,verbal remarks—with 83% of transgender students reported hearing negative remarks about transgender people—, harassment and assault at school—with 57% of transgender students experiencing verbal harassment based on their gender expression and 21% experiencing physical harassment—, and discriminatory school policies—with 29% of transgender students reporting not being able to use their preferred pronouns and 27% prevented from using the

bathroom that aligns with their gender identity. These findings included those who identified as nonbinary male or nonbinary female, and those who identified as only nonbinary or genderqueer.

Other research has found that transgender and gender nonconforming individuals report experiencing high levels of minority stress (Scandurra et al., 2021; Puckett et al., 2016). Minority stress (Meyer, 2003) is a framework that suggest that minority members experience a more hostile and stressful living environment which provides an explanation as to why minority members may show higher levels of mental and physical health problems. This research states that transgender and gender nonconforming individuals who experience stigmatizing social environments and higher levels of minority stress which includes distal stressors (discrimination, victimization, and social rejection), and proximal stressors (internalized transphobia, negative predictions for future events, or nondisclosure) contribute to the individual's quality of life mentally and physically. For example, Puckett et al. (2016) have shown that members of the LGBTQ+ community who also identify as gender nonconforming are more likely to experience specific minority stressors (prejudice) due to their gender expression. In their study, the authors found that gender nonconformity and the minority stressors that come as a product of nonconforming to gender expression were significantly correlated. Gender nonconformity was associated with participants experiencing more minority stress, psychological concern and social anxiety. In another study, Scandurra et. al. (2021) examined minority stressors of transgender and gender nonconforming individuals. The authors found that gender nonconforming participants reported higher levels of anxiety and depression, when compared to binary participants. According to the authors, these findings may be a result of gender nonconforming individuals receiving less overall support from family and friends, experiencing higher levels of social discrimination, and higher levels of mental health problems due to the invalidation of their preferred gender identity.

A number of the previous research that involves prejudice towards gender nonconformity tend to examine the targets of the victimization (i.e., gender nonconforming individuals themselves) and their personal experiences with mental health, discrimination, and the difficulties faced in everyday life (Chmielewski et al., 2016). Even though there is a lack of research on gender nonconforming individuals specifically, the research on the transgender community can give insights when trying to understand the social discrimination of gender non-conforming individuals.

It is important to mention that although sexual minority discrimination, homophobia, or transphobia is not the same as gender minority prejudice, it is likely linked to the individual's attitudes towards gender nonconformity and their treatment of their gender nonconforming peers. For example, individuals who are homophobic or transphobic will more likely also have negative attitudes towards gender nonconformity (Horn, 2007). Furthermore, sexuality and gender expression are separate constructs and therefore are required to be studied separately in order for researchers to fully understand the participant's beliefs and attitudes towards gender nonconformity without interference from effects of sexuality or other gender minority group adherence (Horn, 2007). Even though gender expression is separate from sexual orientation or gender identity, people who present as gender nonconforming continue to be discriminated against comparably to the way members of the LGBTQ+ community are discriminated against (Hollis & McCalla, 2013). Often, members of the LGBTQ+ community feel a sense of bullying and social nonacceptance by their peers, causing these individuals a loss of productivity at work and even a lack of feeling safe in social settings (Hollis & McCalla, 2013).

Researchers have been speculating on the best ways to reduce prejudice, including by introducing intergroup contact, which can also be described as a person's familiarity with an outgroup member (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Previous research states that more positive exposure to outgroup targets can therefore have a significant effect on whether or not a person will like an outgroup member (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). For example, Barbir et al. (2016) surveyed college-aged students and examined their relationships with transgender individuals, and their attitudes and behaviors toward transgender individuals. The authors found that participants who reported having no friendships with a transgender individual reported more negative attitudes and negative intentions toward transgender individuals. In contrast, participants who reported having at least one friendship with a transgender individual reported more positive attitudes and greater positive behavioral intentions towards transgender individuals. These findings suggest that having more familiarity with an individual from a gender minority, even just one friend, can positively impact attitudes and behavioral intentions. Likewise, using intergroup contact theory, it is possible to predict the positive effect that greater contact and familiarity with gender nonconforming individuals will have on the amount of prejudice a perpetrator will exhibit towards gender nonconforming targets. For example, Boccanfuso et al. (2020) found that participants who were exposed to transgender E-contact (i.e., computer-mediated intergroup contact) resulted in prejudice reduction when compared to participants who were only exposed to cisgender E-contact. Hence, being

educated about, having contact with, or being more aware of sexual minority group members can significantly reduce stigma.

The purpose of this research was to examine the social discrimination of gender nonconforming individuals by their gender conforming peers. We were interested in examining if social discrimination varies in function of the target's biological sex, gender conformity, or both. By introducing participants to imagined profiles of gender nonconforming individuals and evaluating participants desired social distance towards gender conforming targets compared to gender nonconforming targets, the research could reveal social discrimination happening to gender nonconforming individuals. This study will also examine if levels of gender nonconformity (slight vs. high) impact social discrimination and if a participant's level of familiarity towards gender nonconforming people (low vs. high) will intensify this interaction.

CHAPTER 2 Literature Review

2.1. Perception of Gender Nonconformity

There is an emphasis on making the distinction between gender and sex in most societies. A person's sex refers to the biology of the body, while gender, being a social construct, refers to behaviors, including interests and appearances (Butler, 1988). Individuals who agree that gender and sex are different identities would also argue that gender is a learned construct that can be observed within a specific culture (Butler, 1988). The way in which a person outwardly portrays their gender in appearance, behaviors, and emotional expression as either masculine, feminine, or androgynous can be defined as gender expression, and the way that these expressions are matched with a person's specific biological sex is called gender conformity(Puckett et al., 2016). In the case for an individual who might stray away from their social gender norm by either rejecting all norms or by acquiring their opposite gender norm (such as a man wearing make-up or a female wearing a suit and tie) is referred to as gender nonconforming (Gordon & Meyer, 2007).

Although gender identity and sexual orientation are separate topics of discussion, throughout history, gender nonconformity has been seen to be the basis of some individual forms of antigay discrimination and even violence (Foster-Hanson & Rhodes, 2019). In most cases, gender nonconformity is a visual stigma, and therefore more easily targeted by people and potentially used to discriminate (Foster-Hanson & Rhodes, 2019). A large portion of the current knowledge on what motivates a person to have negative emotions or reactions towards gender nonconforming individuals comes from most studies in cases of adolescents and adults who are not in favor of, verbally harass, or even physically assault individuals whom they assume to be either gay or lesbian (Pauletti et al., 2014). Furthermore, it can be speculated that perpetrators likely hold prejudiced attitudes or beliefs because of their cognitive understanding of gender which is then stimulated by the targets' nonconforming behaviors and will elicit negative judgments in the form of disgust, threat, anger, and even aggression (Pauletti et al., 2014).

We were particularly interested to examine if there was a difference when comparing biological sex and gender nonconformity. In previous research, both gender nonconforming biological females and gender nonconforming biological males have been seen to face prejudice and discrimination (Rudman & Phelan, 2008; Miller & Grollman, 2015; Atwood & Axt, 2021). Although, the process of this discrimination is different according to biological

sex. In the case of gender nonconforming females, there is a “backlash effect” for the characteristic of competency and these individuals are seen as breaking traditional gender norms (Rudman & Glick, 2001). Therefore, a competent biological female who is gender nonconforming would be judged as less likable than a gender conforming biological male who is at the same level of competence (Rudman & Phelan, 2008). This “backlash effect” could mean that biological female individuals who differ from their appropriate gender norm in terms of appearance are also evaluated less favorably in terms of sociability, and therefore socially discriminated against when compared to gender conforming males or females. Women who do not adhere to their respective gender role stereotypes in appearance are also more likely to be discriminated against by being evaluated more negatively compared to men (Oh et al., 2020).

This is not to say that gender nonconforming biological males do not also face discrimination that may be specific to their male sex and the departure from societal male gender norms. In their study, Moss-Racusin et al. (2010) examined the likeability of male targets who were presented as having more traditionally thought of as feminine personality traits (i.e., cooperative, supportive, friendly, warm, and sensitive to the needs of others). When male targets seemed to depart from traditionally masculine characteristics and adopt feminine traits, they were reported to be less likable by the participants and therefore would face social discrimination compared to their female counterparts.

2.2. Social Distance as Discrimination

One theoretical approach that helps explain why adults’ have prejudiced behaviors toward gender nonconforming individuals is that of the affordance framework (Schaller & Neuberg, 2012). This theoretical framework helps to predict the perpetrators' behavioral outcomes toward gender nonconforming individuals and has previously been used to predict prejudiced behaviors toward racial groups and other minority groups (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005). Throughout evolution, humans have learned processes that help them to detect cues from the environment, identify if the cue is a threat, and how to act towards the perceived threat, if necessary (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Schaller & Neuberg, 2012; Sng et al., 2016). Thus meaning that if a person encounters a threat in their environment (including in a social environment), that person will act in ways that remove the threat or remove themselves from the threat creating greater social distance. Additionally, because humans put a great deal of importance into their social groups for survival, the positive functioning of one’s social group

will need to be maintained in the face of a possible threat (Sng et al., 2016). When a person indicates that there is a social threat, they are likely to desire further social distance from the perceived threat, therefore ensuring their group's survival (Schaller & Neuberg, 2012). Not only do perceivers consider and evaluate for threats to their group, but they also work towards a more harmonious ingroup (Schaller & Neuberg, 2012). Usually, the perceivers will have a more positive attitude towards their own ingroup members when compared to an outgroup member which might be faced with skepticism (seen as a threat and desiring social distance)

One way to measure discrimination against a minority group is to examine the desired social distance of participants from the target groups. Social distance can have many forms such as nonverbal behaviors or explicit distancing actions. For this study, we will be observing social distance as a relational distancing of oneself from a certain social group (i.e., gender nonconforming targets). Often social distancing behaviors are seen as normative in social settings and usually can go unrecognized, making them socially acceptable within a group (Swim et al., 1999). In this study, social distance was defined as the willingness to engage in or accept the proposed social intimacy of interaction with a defined outgroup (Smith & Williams, 1964). Using a social distancing measure will give us insight into how outgroups are discriminated against by their peers when compared to ingroup participants. As the level of social distance gets higher, the members of minority outgroups will be pushed further away from their peers, leaving them to be segregated and ostracized within their society (Bogardus, 1926; Swim et al., 1999, Mather et al., 2017). One predictor of this interaction is the level of past interaction with someone from an outgroup; for example, the more a person has had interactions with another from an outgroup minority, the more they would be willing to share closer social distancing. This can be backed up by Allport's (1954) contact theory, which states that the more interpersonal contact a person receives with an outgroup, the less prejudice the person will internalize toward the outgroup. This theory has been empirically supported by studies showing a decrease in sexual prejudice among heterosexual participants who reported more interpersonal contact with a member from the LGBTQ+ community (Pettigrew, 1998; Barbir et al., 2016). In this same theory, it is thought that having positive experiences with outgroup participants will foster a more positive relationship and increase levels of empathy towards the outgroup members, therefore reducing the levels of between-group prejudice and discrimination (Allport, 1954). In the case of this study, the Intergroup Contact theory can be used to hypothesize about the effect that previous interactions with a gender nonconforming individual might have on social distance.

Social distancing can also translate from the discrimination of sexual minorities into the targets of gender nonconforming individuals. This can be seen evident in the linkage of social distancing behaviors to the interaction between negative attitudes towards biological female's gender nonconformity to feminine gender roles, and negative attitudes towards lesbians (Swim et al., 1999) Further, this interaction was more pronounced in participants who had less contact or familiarity with the minority group (Swim et al., 1999).

2.3. Present Study

Our study was guided by two fundamental questions: *Are gender nonconforming individuals socially discriminated against by their peers when compared to gender conforming individuals?* and *Are gender nonconforming biological male individuals subject to higher levels of social discrimination compared to gender nonconforming biological female individuals?* The purpose of this research was to gain insight into the process of social discrimination on gender nonconforming individuals and expand on previous research to compare the perception of individuals who were born male who are gender nonconforming in contrast to individuals who were born female who are also gender nonconforming. This study aimed to examine the way that gender nonconforming individuals are discriminated against compared to gender conforming individuals, specifically focusing on the way that peers desire to have more social distance towards the gender nonconforming outgroup compared to the gender conforming ingroup.

Gender nonconforming individuals are exposed to social discrimination in the form of social distance from their peers when compared to gender conforming individuals. To continue this further, biological male, gender nonconforming individuals are subject to higher levels of social discrimination compared to biological female, gender nonconforming individuals, due to the fact that biologically male gender nonconforming individuals depart from not only gender norms but also reject masculinity. Lastly, further social distancing will occur toward gender nonconforming individuals at higher levels from people who possess less familiarity towards gender nonconforming people, for example, less intergroup contact.

Hypothesis 1: We expect that gender nonconforming targets will receive higher social distance scores when compared to gender conforming targets.

Hypothesis 2: We expect that gender nonconforming biological male targets will receive higher social distance scores compared to gender nonconforming biological female targets.

Hypothesis 3: We also expect that participants who have had less contact or familiarity with gender nonconforming people will attribute higher social distance to the gender nonconforming targets.

CHAPTER 3 **Methods**

3.1. Participants and Design

A total of 251 participants accessed the online survey. Of these, 132 did not complete the survey. The final sample included 119 participants from the United States, with ages ranging from 18 to reporting 76 years old (M = 42.73, SD = 16.21). Most of the participants were biological females (78.15%), heterosexual (83.19%), White (88.24%), lived in suburban or rural areas (40.34%), had a bachelor's degree (40.34), were currently working (67.23%), and were more comfortable with their household income (52.10%). A detailed description of the demographic characteristics can be found in Table 1.

This study used a 2 (target's biological sex: female vs. male) × 3 (target's gender conformity: conforming vs. slightly nonconforming vs. highly nonconforming) within-participants factorial design.

Table 3.1

Demographic Characteristics

	M (SD)	*n (%)*
Age	42.73 (16.21)	
Gender		
Male		25 (21.0)
Female		93 (78.2)
Education		
≥ High School		16 (13.4)
Bachelor's Degree		48 (40.3)
≤ Master's Degree		43 (36.1)
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual		99 (83.2)
Lesbian/ Gay		4 (3.4)
Bisexual		13 (10.9)
Ethnicity		
Arab		2 (1.7)

Asian	4 (3.4)
Black	2 (1.7)
Latino	1 (0.8)
White	105 (88.2)
Other	5 (4.2)
Region	
Metropolitan	25 (21.0)
Suburb	45 (37.8)
Rural	48 (40.3)
Employment Status	
Student	6 (5.0)
Employed	95 (79.8)
Retired	17 (14.3)
Economic Income Status	
Less comfortable	46 (38.7)
More comfortable	73 (61.3)

3.2. Materials

3.2.1. Profiles

We created six written descriptions of the targets. Each target was given a gender-neutral name to avoid automatic inferences. In all profiles, participants were presented with the target's biological sex and their preferred pronouns according to gender conformity. Targets were then presented as a recent college graduate and interested in certain hobbies (also gender neutral, such as music, reading, and traveling). Lastly, participants were informed about the physical appearance of each target, containing information about hairstyle, make-up, and clothing style. A detailed description of each target is presented in Table 2.

Table 3.2

Target's Description According to the Experimental Condition

		Target's Biological Sex	
		Female	Male
Target's Level of Gender Conformity	Conforming	Sam is biologically female and uses the pronouns she/her. Sam is a recent college graduate who enjoys music, reading and traveling. Sam	Jorden is biologically male and uses the pronouns he/him. Jorden is a recent college graduate who enjoys music, reading and traveling.

		usually has very long hair, ears heavy make-up and colorful nail polish, and wears dresses and high heels to work.	Jorden usually has very short hair, does not wear make-up or nail polish, and wears a suit and tie to work.
	Slightly Gender Nonconforming	Taylor is biologically female and uses the pronouns she/they. Taylor is a recent college graduate who enjoys music, reading and traveling. Taylor usually has medium long hair, sometimes wears minimal make-up and neutral colored nail polish, and wears casual clothes to work.	Jamie is biologically male and uses the pronouns he/they. Jamie is a recent college graduate who enjoys music, reading and traveling. Jamie usually has medium short hair, sometimes wears minimal make-up and neutral colored nail polish, and wears casual clothes to work.
	Highly Gender Nonconforming	Alex is biologically female and uses the pronouns they/them. Alex is a recent college graduate who enjoys music, reading, and traveling. Alex changes their hair often from longer hair styles to shorter hair styles. Some days Alex wears heavy makeup and colorful nail polish but other days they wear minimal makeup and neutral colored nail polish or none at all. Depending on the day, Alex wears dresses and high heels or a suit and tie to work.	Cameron is biologically male and uses the pronouns they/them. Cameron is a recent college graduate who enjoys music, reading, and traveling. Cameron changes their hair often from longer hair styles to shorter hair styles. Some days Cameron wears heavy makeup and colorful nail polish but other days they wear minimal makeup and neutral colored nail polish or none at all. Depending on the day, Cameron wears dresses and high heels or a suit and tie to work.

3.3. Dependent Measures

3.3.1. Social Distance

We used an adapted version of the Bogardus Social Distance Scale (Mather et al., 2017). After reading each target's description, participants were given the statement "I would be willing to accept [target's name] as a…" and asked to select one option from the following: 1 = *A close friend by marriage*, 2 = *A close personal friend*, 3 = *A neighbor who lives on my street*, 4 = *A coworker*, 5 = *A citizen in my country*, 6 = *A noncitizen visitor in my country*, or 7 = *I would not allow this person in my country.*

3.3.2. Familiarity with Nonconforming People

Participants were asked to indicate if they personally know (1 = *I don't know anyone who is like this* to 7 = *I know many people who are like this*) or interacted (1 = *I never interacted* to 7 = *I interact often*) with someone who is either slightly or highly gender nonconforming. We computed an overall score (a = .85; M = 4.25, SD = 1.58) and used the median-split to categorize participants in the lower ($M < 4.25$) or higher ($M > 4.25$) familiarity group.

3.4. Procedure

Prospective participants were recruited in online social research group forums and online survey platforms (e.g., Survey Circle) and invited to take part in a study about gender nonconformity. To be eligible, individuals had to be over the age of 18, live in the United States, and understand English. Participants were informed about their rights and duties and asked for their consent before proceeding with the study. Before being presented with the profiles, participants provided their answers to standard demographic questions (e.g., age). Given the goals of our study, we also asked participants if they adhered to their gender norms. Participants who did not adhere to their gender norms were redirected to the end of the survey. Eligible participants were then randomly presented a description of the six targets (see Table 2). After each profile, participants were presented with the dependent measures. At the end of the survey, participants were debriefed and provided with detailed information about the goals of the study and provided with contact information if they had any questions or wanted information about the survey in the future.

3.5. Data Analysis Plan

We first computed a 2 (target's biological sex) × 3 (target's gender conformity) within-participants repeated-measures ANOVA on social distance scores. When group differences were found, post-hoc comparisons were computed with Bonferroni correction. We then replicated this analysis entering familiarity as a between-participants factor in the ANOVA.

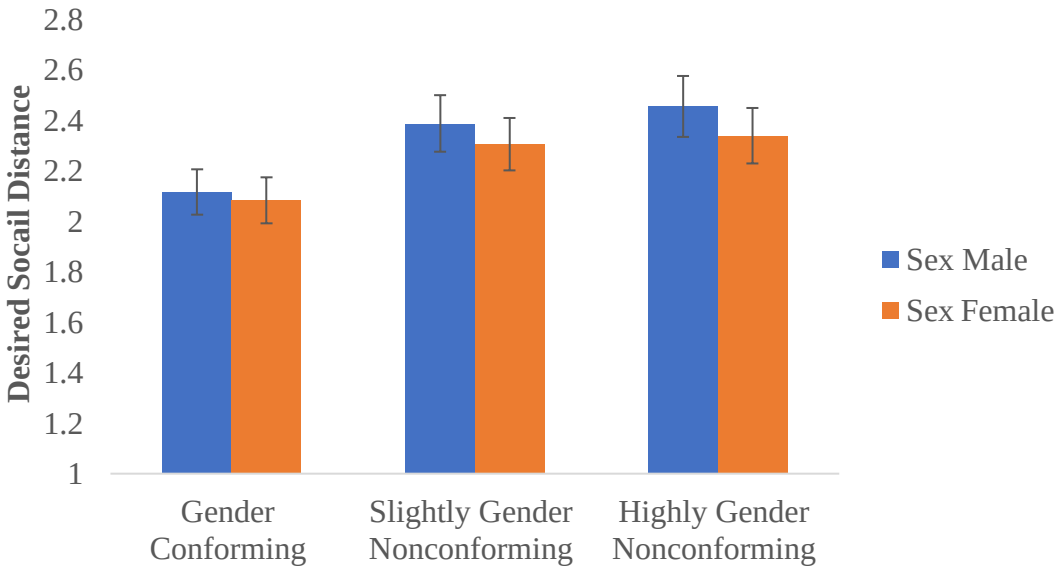
CHAPTER 4 Results

4.1. Social Distance

Results of the first analysis are depicted in Figure 1. We found a main effect of the target's biological sex, Wilk's $\Lambda = .95$, $F(1,120) = 6.85$, $p = .010$, $\eta_p^2 = .054$, such that participants indicated lower social distance to the female targets ($M = 2.24$, $SE = 0.09$) compared to the male targets ($M = 2.32$, $SE = 0.10$). There was also a main effect of the target's gender conformity, Wilk's $\Lambda = .88$, $F(2,119) = 8.12$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .120$. Post-hoc comparisons indicated lower social distance to the gender conforming target ($M = 2.10$, $SE = 0.08$) when compared to the slightly nonconforming target ($M = 2.35$, $SE = 0.11$), $p = .001$, or to the highly nonconforming target ($M = 2.40$, $SE = 0.11$), $p = .001$. No differences were found between both nonconforming targets, $p = 1.00$. The interaction between both factors was non-significant, Wilk's $\Lambda = .99$, $F(2,117) = 0.42$, $p = .659$, $\eta_p^2 = .007$.

Figure 4.1

Main Effect of Biological Sex and Level of Gender Conformity



4.2. Familiarity with Nonconforming People

Results of the second analysis are depicted in Figure 2. Both main effects of target's biological sex, Wilk's $\Lambda = .95$, $F(1,118) = 6.83$, $p = .010$, $\eta_p^2 = .055$, and target's gender conformity remained significant, Wilk's $\Lambda = .87$, $F(2,117) = 8.52$, $p = .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .127$. Again,

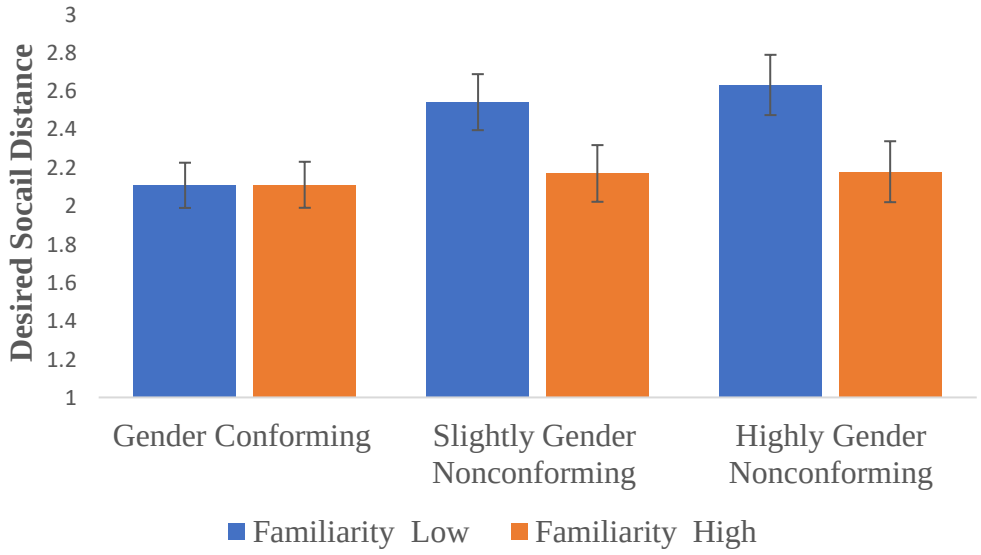
the interaction between both factors did not reach significance, Wilk's $\Lambda = .99$, $F(2,117) = 0.42$, $p = .659$, $\eta_p^2 = .007$.

Results also revealed an interaction between target's gender conformity and familiarity Wilk's $\Lambda = .92$, $F(2,117) = 4.99$, $p = .008$, $\eta_p^2 = .079$. Post-hoc comparisons indicated that participants in the lower familiarity group reported lower social distance to gender conforming targets ($M = 2.11$, $SE = 0.12$), when compared to either slightly gender nonconforming ($M = 2.54$, $SE = 0.15$), $p \leq .001$, or highly gender nonconforming targets ($M = 2.63$, $SE = 0.16$), $p < .001$. No difference emerged between the latter, $p = .678$. In contrast, participants in the higher familiarity group did not differ in their social distance scores between gender conforming targets ($M = 2.11$, $SE = 0.12$), slight gender nonconforming targets ($M = 2.17$, $SE = 0.15$), and highly gender nonconforming targets ($M = 2.18$, $SE = 0.16$), all $p = 1.000$.

Lastly, results showed no significant interaction between target's biological sex and familiarity, Wilk's $\Lambda = .97$, $F(1,118) = 3.40$, $p = .068$, $\eta_p^2 = .028$, and a non-significant 3-way interaction between all factors, Wilk's $\Lambda = .99$, $F(2,117) = 0.76$, $p = .471$, $\eta_p^2 = .013$, was not significant.

Figure 4. 2

Interaction Effect Between Familiarity and Conformity



CHAPTER 5 Discussion

5.1. Discussion

The main goal of this study was to examine the way that gender nonconforming individuals are discriminated against compared to gender conforming individuals, specifically focusing on the way that peers desire to have more social distance towards the gender nonconforming outgroup compared to the gender conforming ingroup and the effect that familiarity has on this process. We hypothesized that gender nonconforming targets should elicit higher social distance scores when compared to gender conforming targets. Overall, participants showed a significant social preference for gender conforming targets, which is congruent with past research examining prejudice and discrimination against gender nonconforming individuals (Gordon & Meyer, 2007; Miller & Grollman, 2015; Pauletti et al., 2014). As expected, both gender conforming biological males and females scored lower on the Social Distance Scale when compared to either slight gender nonconforming male/female and high gender nonconforming male/female, therefore, showing that participants would rather be socially closer to individuals who are gender conforming than to either slight or high gender nonconforming individuals. When an individual deviates from social norms, including gender norms such as hairstyle, makeup, or clothing choice, this causes others who adhere to the social norms to stigmatize the other person and, as shown in our study, desire a larger social distance from that person (Miller & Grollman, 2015).

Furthermore, it was hypothesized that when comparing biological male and female gender nonconforming individuals, the gender nonconforming biological males would receive a higher social distance score compared to the gender nonconforming female profiles. This hypothesis was not supported by the data collected. Overall, participants gave similar desired social distance scores to all the gender nonconforming profiles: slight gender nonconforming biological male, slight gender nonconforming biological female, highly gender nonconforming biological male and highly gender nonconforming biological female. Participants confirmed that when given the choice they would decide to have further social distance from anyone who is at any level of gender nonconformity and that they would choose to be socially closer to individuals who are gender conforming in society.

We also expected that participants who have had less contact or familiarity with gender nonconforming people will attribute higher social distance to the gender nonconforming targets. Aligned with our hypothesis, participants who were categorized as having higher levels of familiarity with gender nonconforming people (i.e., those who were

more likely to personally know or have interactions with gender nonconforming people) reported similar levels of social distance across gender non-conforming targets. In other words, these individuals were less likely to discriminate based on gender non-conformity. In contrast, participants who were categorized as having lower familiarity with gender nonconforming people reported less social distance towards gender conforming targets and higher social distance towards targets described as slightly or highly gender nonconforming. This finding is congruent with past research examining the contact hypothesis (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), extending its typical findings to different gender minority groups.

Although findings from this study are congruent with previous research examining the discrimination of gender nonconforming individuals (Levy et al., 1995), it is still important to note that the current data showed no difference for the level at which an individual deviates from gender conformity and that there was no significant difference between gender nonconforming biological males vs females. From our perspective, it was crucial to make a distinction between biological sex and an individual's gender identity to ensure that these two identifiers remained separate and therefore the variable of gender nonconformity could be examined independently. Based on our current results, the level at which someone moved away from gender conformity does not seem to be considered when perceiving and evaluating people from gender minority groups.

This research contributes to the ongoing investigation into ways to decrease and extinguish prejudiced attitudes towards individuals in gender minority groups, specifically gender nonconforming individuals. With the results discussed in our study, we showed how important intergroup contact is in the reduction of prejudiced attitudes and behaviors. Although this relationship is not something new to be studied, it's crucial to continue research in this area considering the fact that so many members of the LGBTQ+ community, especially gender minority members, face prejudice, discrimination, and victimization in their daily lives.

5.2. Limitations and Future Directions

This study was conducted to extend previous studies examining how gender nonconformity, and how biological sex interacts with gender nonconformity, in determining prejudice and discrimination. However, this study had one notable limitation. It is also important to mention that sexual orientation and gender identity often are judged simultaneously, which could also have influenced the data collected. In the study, there was no mention of sexual orientation in

the imagined profiles, but it's possible that participants assumed or created a sexual orientation based on the suggested gender identity or preferred pronouns. This could have influenced the scores for the desired social distance given by the participants to both slightly gender nonconforming and highly gender nonconforming. Although homophobic prejudice was not the aim of this study, it could have had a significant influence on the participant's level of social distance from gender nonconforming individuals (Wang et al., 2021).

The current study was based on gender nonconformity specifically and how familiarity would contribute toward less prejudiced behavior. Previous research has already shown that situations in which the perpetrator is able to see an individual from a sexual minority group through an empathetic lens, has the potential to decrease prejudice attitudes (Tompkins et al., 2015). We examined familiarity in the context of knowing or having interacted with someone who is gender nonconforming. Throughout previous research, studies have used other measures to define a closer or more positive interaction such as friendship or interventions with a positive framework (Barbir et al., 2016). These conditions may have a bigger role to play in the future of research on the reduction of prejudiced attitudes and behaviors toward gender nonconforming individuals. Adding this empathetic context and introducing participants to a perspective-taking environment might have a larger effect on the interaction between familiarity and desired social distance (Barbir et al., 2016). In addition, having a more specific measure of familiarity (such as friendship or positive intervention) could offer a more in-depth understanding of the perpetrator's ability to see gender noncofnorming individuals through an empathetic lens and therefore reduce prejudiced attitudes and behaviors, although it is suggested that minority members tend to select interactions and friendships with others who would already present positive attitudes towards a minority group member (Nuttbrock, et al., 2009).

While this current research showed an effect between familiarity and desired social distance of participants, for future research it might be beneficial to take a deeper examination of what this familiarity means further than knowing or having an interaction with a gender nonconforming person. With a deeper understanding and more precise focus on gender nonconformity, it will be possible for future researchers and professionals to create effective interventions in the reduction of prejudiced attitudes and behaviors that would also improve the mental health and social lives of gender nonconforming individuals.

5.3. Conclusion

Overall, the study found that attitudes tend to be more negative towards any level of gender nonconformity and that these individuals are most likely being socially excluded by their gender conforming peers. As previous research on gender nonconformity has shown, our results suggest that there are significant negative attitudes towards gender nonconformity, but that there is no difference as to at which level this nonconformity exists and that it makes no difference if the gender nonconforming individual is biologically male or female. This further suggests that one way to measure how a person who is gender nonconforming is socially discriminated against is by assessing desired social distance from someone who identifies as gender conforming and adheres to their biological sex's gender norm.

In conclusion, gender nonconforming individuals face discrimination from their peers through social distancing. When a person is seen as deviating from their respective gender norm, they are subject to social discrimination no matter at which level they may be deviating from norms (slightly gender nonconforming vs. highly gender nonconforming). This negative social discrimination is also intensified if a perpetrator possesses lower familiarity towards the minority group (gender nonconforming people).

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