Abstract

CISGENDERISM IN GENDER ATTRIBUTIONS: THE WAYS IN WHICH SOCIAL, COGNITIVE, AND INDIVIDUAL FACTORS PREDICT MISGENDERING

by

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The current program of research investigated the ways in which social representations of gender, cognitive processes, and individual factors can be integrated to predict "misgendering," an example of cisgenderism in which people are categorized as a gender with which they do not identify. I proposed an (In)consistency Processing Model of Gender Attribution in which perceivers make a gender attribution by interpreting the stereotype-(in)consistencies of a target's gender characteristics through either a biology- or identity-based schema. Five studies were conducted to test different aspects of this model, the first of which was a secondary data analysis on a sample of students from Hunter College who participated in the lab. Participants from the remaining studies participated online and were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk.

Participants were more likely to reject a target's gender identity when the target's genitals and chromosomes were stereotype-inconsistent with the target's gender identity. Gender judgments were made quickly overall, but slower when target characteristics were stereotype-inconsistent. In other words, people processed gender consciously, rather than automatically, when characteristics were unexpected. Participants who knew transgender people were less likely to misgender and faster at making gender judgments, but only when targets had stereotype-inconsistent chromosomes suggesting limitations to the knowledge they gained from their contact with transgender people. Allies to transgender people and people with less gender essentialist beliefs were less likely to misgender people and did so
with similar response times to the rest of participants, suggesting they spent time consciously attempting to affirm targets gender identity. People who were initially found to be less likely to misgender ("adjusters") were more likely to misgender when their efforts to affirm target identity were constrained by a distraction or by added stereotype-inconsistent information about the target.

Study findings imply that cisgenderism operates implicitly on the gender attribution process. While some people may be able to temporarily focus their efforts on affirming people's genders, these efforts are conditional and easily destabilized. These findings have important practical implications for researchers, activists, service organizations, and governments invested in the ethical recognition of people's own gender self-designations.