
**Gender Identity as a Personality Process**

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**Abstract**

Within psychology and psychiatry, gender identity has developed at least two distinguishable meanings: awareness of anatomy (e.g., Stoller, 1974) and endorsing specific traits that are stereotypical of different gender groups (e.g., Bem, 1974; Wood & Eagly, 2010). However, neither existing approach has considered gender identity to be a self-categorization process that exists within personality science. In this chapter, I develop the argument that gender identity can be fruitfully explored as a personality process. I use both classic and modern personality process approaches to demonstrate that theorizing about gender identity from the personality perspective clarifies and complements—rather than eclipses—prior theorizing. Additionally, several unique insights are available to researchers when gender identity is approached as a personality process, and some of these insights are identified within this chapter.

**Gender Identity as a Personality Process**

Over the past 50 years in psychology and psychiatry, gender identity has developed at least two distinguishable meanings. One meaning is the sense of self that is little more than a person’s anatomical awareness. This meaning is seen in Stoller’s (1968/1974) original ideas about core gender identity. With modification through the years, Stoller’s view has remained part of both the psychiatric and clinical psychology understanding of gender identity to the present. The other meaning of gender identity is the sense of self as endorsing specific traits that are stereotypical of different gender groups. This meaning is seen in Bem’s (1974, 1981a) gender schema theory, Spence and colleagues (1975) personal attributes approach, and to the present in Eagly and Wood’s (2010) approach to gender identity—all of which are found under the purview of social psychology. Yet, none of the current understandings has considered gender identity to be a self-categorization process that exists within modern
personality psychology (also called personality science). The goal of this chapter is therefore to detail an argument for gender identity as a personality process that is inclusive of all gender identity experiences and developmental profiles. Using classic personality process approaches (e.g., Kluckhohn & Murray, 1948), this chapter starts from the premise that gender identity, like any other personality process, at the broadest level covers all people in some way, at a second level constitutes the traditional individual difference (i.e., applies to some people differently than others), and, at a third level, becomes idiosyncratic for a specific person. Using modern personality process approaches (e.g., Caspi, Roberts, & Shiner, 2005; Revelle, 1995), this chapter also starts from the premise that gender identity involves both self-perception and other-perception components as well as biological and social influences. The chapter then develops the case for measuring gender identity as self-categorization consistent with the personality trait approaches. Specifically, one part of the argumentation within this chapter is to show that the study of gender self-categorization would benefit from making explicit the supposition that one’s internal sense of self is likely a process different from genital anatomy awareness—substantially revising the Stollerian view. With this supposition in mind one can unite the descriptive experiences of cisgender individuals (i.e., those whose current gender identity labels are the same as their birth-assigned category labels) and transgender spectrum individuals (i.e., those whose current gender identity labels are different from their birth-assigned category labels) to argue that each is emanating from a common source that is not awareness of genitals as ultimate or core identity. Additionally, one can view transgender spectrum experiences as providing an extremely useful and necessary lens on this common source of gender identity experience because these experiences are not as easily confused with additional information sources—namely, other people’s perceptions of the self—as happens with cisgender experiences. I also argue that much of the social psychological view starts from a cisgender bias that focuses research attention primarily on the perception of the self by others, and only secondarily (if at all) on self-perception and self-categorization (see also Ansara & Hegarty, 2012). While also important, this social psychological view is not the whole of the story for gender identity. Another part of the specific argumentation in this chapter is to show that gender self-categorization can be measured at different levels—not just the broadest level of checking a box that corresponds to one’s current gender identity label. Self-categorization itself may imply a sense of strong overlap with, affinity to, or subsumption within any or none of the available gender categories in one’s culture. Importantly, the argument for gender identity as a personality process does not eclipse prior theorizing about gender identity as involving a person’s consideration of anatomy (at some level) and social schemas (at another level); instead, this new argument clarifies and complements the previous arguments. I argue that gender identity as a personality process exists within a bundle of gender-related constructs, and that specifying focus on this aspect allows researchers to more completely characterize the others. In order to develop the arguments as clearly as possible, this chapter first details the early and current approaches to gender identity within various disciplines of psychology and psychiatry and then makes the argument for gender identity as a personality process within the context of the historical and current theorizing. Finally, the new insights that accompany theorizing about gender identity as a personality process are enumerated.
THE EARLY PERSONALITY APPROACHES TO GENDER IDENTITY

Among the earliest personality and psychiatric approaches to gender identity was Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theory, which emphasized biological differences between sex-assigned categories (viz. men and women), and spelled out the implications of these differences for psychological development (Eagly, Beall, & Sternberg, 2004). Notably, Freud argued that gender is different from biological sex (i.e., the presence of vagina-vulva or penis-scrotum genital structures [viz. sex assignment]) (Eagly et al., 2004). In doing so, Freud was implicitly arguing that parts of gender—namely, psychological identity experiences—are crafted or develop, and are not fixed from birth. This thinking was not unique to Freud (cf., Ellis, 1905; Hirschfeld, 1919/2000); however, the whole perspective of starting with biological differences between men and women and using those as the scaffolding on which to build theories of individual differences was coming into vogue at that time and persists to the present (see, e.g., Penke, 2010).

In the 1920s and 1930s, Lewis Terman and Catherine Cox Miles approached gender theory via the measurement perspective to create the Terman and Miles Attitude-Interest Analysis Test (Terman & Miles, 1936). Terman and Miles believed that organizing their data by participants who self-categorized as female or male would allow researchers to empirically determine the important aspects of gender identity by examining differential response patterns to research questions. In brief, the Terman and Miles approach was that women and men differ from each other on certain psychological phenomena and not on others. Accordingly, to determine that gender influenced female and male psychologies, one simply needed to find the types of differences via response patterns. This approach might be construed as atheoretical, insofar as Terman and Miles used an ostensibly inductive approach to determining how women and men differed from each other. Yet, with the benefit of a historical perspective, Terman and Miles (1936) had one fundamental assumption that is worth noting because it limits the kinds of conclusions that may be drawn from this approach. The assumption is that the kinds of questions asked were a sampling from the universe of all possible similarities and differences that these gender groups could have one from the other. Nonetheless, many of the items used by Terman and Miles (1936) reflected intergroup dynamics that a scholar today might classify as sexism or gender bias—even if in its benevolent form (see Glick & Fiske, 2001, for a discussion of benevolent bias). For example, summarizing responses to some of their items concerning affinity for celebrities of the time and literary characters, Terman and Miles (1936) wrote “[f]emales show a distinctive preference for women, unfortunate people, and philanthropists; males for successful generals, sports heroes, and defiers of convention” (p. 446). Since at that time women and men were sociologically differentiated on a variety of dimensions, including women having fewer rights and privileges and less social mobility at the time, any psychological differences may have been a conflation of the realities of intergroup social conflict being measured at a psychological level (cf. Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 1999; Eagly, Wood, & Diekman, 2000). Thus, Terman and Miles (1936) may have revealed more about intergroup evaluations than other constructs related to gender, such as self-categorization or other identity processes.
Items from the Terman and Miles (1936) Attitude-Interest Analysis Test would later be adapted for use in the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) (Hathaway & McKinley, 1940) to measure sexual inversion in males, which was an early name for homosexuality (see summaries within Constantinople, 1973; Dahlstrom, Welsh, & Dahlstrom, 1972; Hoffman, 2001; Nichols, 2011). The same conceptual analysis can be seen in the Strong (1935) Vocational Interest Blank that was designed to measure vocational interests with the rationale that men and women will choose different careers (Strong, 1936). Thus, from the 1900s into the 1940s, gender identity was being theorized about and measured as the differences between self-identified women and men with the conceptual anchors of heterosexual socialization (Freud) and intergroup evaluations (Terman, Miles, Strong, Hathaway and McKinley).

Freud’s ideas about gender identity development (and the similar ideas on which his were based; see Ellis, 1905; Hirschfeld, 1919/2000) appear to have infiltrated both developmental psychology and psychiatry. It seems that the former focused on the acquisition of gender identity and its constancy, while the latter focused on the mechanisms by which one acquires a gender identity in normative and non-normative ways. Lawrence Kohlberg’s (1966) cognitive-developmental theory of gender identity development recapitulated part of the Freudian psychoanalytic theory with a focus on the internal factors of gender identity (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Additionally, cognitive-developmental theory is a stage model of gender identity that reveals different layers of gender experience over time. Unlike the Freudian model, Kohlberg’s (1966) theory did not emphasize heterosexual socialization or imply that such a sexual orientation was indicative of successful psychological adjustment to one’s gender category assignment. Instead, Kohlberg’s theory focused on the child’s self-labeling in reference to the labels provided at birth by others in the child’s life as the first stage of gender development. This stage occurs around three years of age and can be seen when the child begins to “correctly” self-label using the birth-assigned sex category (see Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Kohlberg, 1966). Kohlberg (1966) also argued that children begin to develop the next stage, gender constancy, between the ages of three to seven years. At this stage, children begin to realize that their sex—and thus gender identity in this theory—will remain permanent (Kohlberg, 1996; Stangor & Ruble, 1987). In this way, Kohlberg’s theory created a strong connection between birth-assigned category and self-experienced gender categorization as appropriately cisgender (viz., the same label for each). Thus, it is unclear how Kohlberg’s (1966) approach might account for children who have transgender spectrum experiences of identity development (viz., the self-categorization being different from the birth-assigned category label).

Kohlberg’s (1966) theory of gender constancy and the well-documented anatomical (and physiological) differences between men and women—as medically defined—led to discussions of any differences between these two groups being referred to as sex differences. However, the more modern term gender differences is an even better characterization of the psychological information discussed at this time in history. Nonetheless, using the notion of sex difference and that language, Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) reviewed the psychology of gender differences at that time and extracted two important insights. One, the theory of gender development grew to include two main socialization processes of gender identity development—namely, social learning theory and social exchange theory—creating some controversy among gender theorists who were mainly concerned with cognitive processes (see also Martin, Ruble, & Szkrybalo, 2002). Both socialization processes were derived from
the behaviorist approach to psychology and assume that people will repeat rewarded behaviors and abandon those behaviors that are followed by negative reinforcement or punishment (see Howard & Hollander, 1997). In particular, social learning theory focuses on individual behaviors, whereas social exchange theory is an application of social learning theory to social relationships (Howard & Hollander, 1997). In either case, little room was made for cognitive appraisals or more interesting psychological dynamics between the person and their reinforcement environment and reinforcement schedules at this time. In any event, the discussion of gender differences as sex differences reinforced a marginalization of transgender spectrum experiences and, as I develop below, masked some of the interesting insights about gender identity as a personality variable while over-emphasizing gender identity as a social psychological phenomenon.

For psychiatry in the same time period (i.e., the 1960s and 1970s), the conceptual issues centered on gender identity development in relation to one’s awareness of genital anatomy, the putative power of attendant physiological differences that create genital structures to influence psychological processes, and the presumed genetic underpinnings of those genital structures. The psychiatric line of thinking on gender identity might be most clearly expressed in the writing of Robert Stoller’s (1968/1974) Sex and Gender. Stoller’s influential view of gender identity can be succinctly stated by quoting his definition of core gender identity: “This aspect of one’s over-all sense of identity can be conceptualized as a core gender identity [italics in original], produced by the infant-parents relationship, by the child’s perception of its external genitalia, and by a biologic force that springs from the biologic variables of sex” (Stoller, 1974, pp. 29-30). Stoller’s original formulation of core gender identity was no more than a psychological representation of one’s genital anatomy, the social labeling of that anatomy as female or male, and the expectation that one should, based on these two pieces of information, label oneself according to the term that described the anatomy. Additionally, Stoller (1968/1974) believed that the social stereotypes associated with gender groups were somehow part and parcel of the experience of being assigned to a particular genital anatomy category. In effect, Stoller asserted that gender identity was only a specific outgrowth of the biology associated with the development of one’s genitals. This general assertion with slight, but important, modification would also be seen in the social psychological approach to gender of the 1970s—one which also extends to the present. Moreover, based on these beliefs, Stoller (1968/1974) explicitly characterized transgender spectrum experiences as forms of mental disorder—a conception that has, with some revision, continued to the present (Dresher, 2010).

**THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY APPROACH TO GENDER IDENTITY**

While the developmental and psychiatric perspectives provided their somewhat separate views of the development of gender identity, clinical, social, and personality psychology researchers started to deal with and respond to the Terman and Miles approach (see Hegarty & Coyle, 2005). In the 1970s, these disciplines grappled with the internalization of gender stereotypes for adults and how these stereotypes might affect healthy and normative functioning. Ann Constantinople (1973) questioned the usefulness of treating gender identity as a single continuum from masculinity on one end to femininity on the other end. This
conceptual practice appears to be a holdover from or further specification of the general Terman and Miles approach. Bem (1974) put Constantinople’s ideas about measuring femininity and masculinity as separate dimensions into practice with the Bem-Sex Role Inventory (BSRI). The name of the scale still reflected the supposition that one’s birth-assigned sex category was eventually the same as one’s gender self-label; yet, it also focused researchers on the idea that gender category stereotypes were not actually bipolar and opposing. Instead, to some extent, masculinity and femininity were accessible to all people. Gender socialization and internalization processes created psychological dynamics in which men, for example, might be encouraged to internalize more traits associated with masculinity and simultaneously fewer traits associated with femininity. Similarly, women might be encouraged to internalize more traits associated with femininity and simultaneously fewer traits associated with masculinity. However, for Bem (1974, 1981a, b), there was an appropriate proportion of internalizing these traits to increase psychological well-being: men and women separately should internalize both masculine and feminine traits—an experience referred to as psychological androgyny. If men were too masculine and not feminine enough in terms of gender stereotype endorsement, then they would be hypermasculine and not experience the best psychological well-being outcomes. Likewise, if women were too feminine and not masculine enough in terms of gender stereotype trait endorsement, then they would be hyperfeminine and thereby not experience the best psychological well-being outcomes. The arc of Bem’s (1974, 1981a,b) theorizing was that men and women should strive for moderation in terms of internalizing both masculine and feminine traits—and this activity toward the psychologically androgynous state became another meaning of gender identity. The BSRI was developed as a way to test this psychological androgyny hypothesis, as well as the implications of hypermasculinity and hyperfemininity.

In parallel to Bem’s work, Spence, Helmreich, and Stapp (1975) developed the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ) to also separately measure masculinity and femininity as gender stereotype endorsement within the same individual. Though importantly distinct in terms of the kinds of traits used, how these traits were derived, and the fact that Spence et al. used traits that were meant to be androgynous on their own (whereas Bem used separate masculine and feminine traits whose aggregation was considered androgyny), the Spence et al. and Bem approaches are united in the fact that they allowed researchers to create at least a two-dimensional understanding of gender identity as stereotype endorsement, rather than the single-dimensional understanding provided by the Terman and Miles approach. Considering the separability of the femininity and masculinity constructs theoretically and empirically, Bem (1974, 1981a) outlined four major ways by which data could be organized. Participants could be located into quadrants that represented (a) mostly masculine and not very feminine (masculine-typed), (b) mostly feminine and not very masculine (feminine-typed), (c) both masculine and feminine (psychologically androgynous), or (d) neither masculine nor feminine (undifferentiated). These four types were Bem’s gender identities. The early Spence et al. (1975) approach allowed for a similar data organization using different methods owing to the explicit androgyny items (see also Spence, 1991). In any case, the social psychological approach focused on a definition of gender identity that was overtly concerned with the extent to which people internalized the social meanings of gender categories via the endorsement of various traits or behaviors that were organized by researchers as stereotypically associated with gender groups. This meaning of gender identity as stereotype endorsement or gender role
adherence is the most common and influential in social psychology to the present (see Wood & Eagly, 2010).

While more theoretically sophisticated than the Terman and Miles approach, both the Bem and Spence approaches might be seen as a continuation of the Terman and Miles thinking. Instead of focusing on the differences between respondent groups, Bem and Spence made the “differences” the gender stereotypes themselves, with the explicit statement in the theorizing that people should strive to internalize what appeared to be expected social differences between men and women. Extending this theorizing, Spence (1991) and other scholars have since argued that masculinity approximates an agency or instrumentality dimension of personality—indicating self-reliance, assertiveness and related constructs—and that femininity approximates a communion or expressiveness dimension of personality—indicating other-orientedness, emotional focus and related constructs (see Laurent & Hodges, 2008; Spence & Helmreich, 1980; Witt & Wood, 2010); yet, both are still supposed to index something about socially expected gender differences. Even while Bakan (1966) had argued for agency and communality as fundamental aspects of human experience that were not tied to gender (see Helgeson, 1994), the approaches of Bem and Spence did not appear to take this into account in their early formulations, and many psychologists remain unaware of Bakan’s theorizing to the present. Thus, the method of asking about social stereotypes allowed for more than two possible outcomes, but importantly focused on personal adherence to social stereotypes associated with gender groups—not one’s sense of being categorizable as a man or a woman (see Tate, 2012).

The approach ushered in by Bem and Spence was completely amenable to a social psychological approach that was becoming increasingly cognitively oriented (e.g., Markus, 1977). Summarizing her approach to gender stereotype endorsement, Bem (1981a) coined gender schema theory. Schema theories were developed within cognitive psychology and generally posit that people organize social information into mental templates or knowledge structures (schemas). Schemas aid in information processing by filtering incoming information, directing future behavior, and making sense of past behavior. In the case of gender schemas, these knowledge structures focus attention on self-relevant information and allow people to categorize gender relevant information faster than gender irrelevant information, based on the individualized content of their own schemas (Bem, 1981a). Gender schema theory assumes that any individual can actively process and represent information from socialization (and other sources) and build and refine one’s self-schema in terms of gender stereotypes and other gender-related information. Importantly, men and women could vary along the quadrants of possible schema organizations from masculine-typed, feminine-typed, psychologically androgynous, and undifferentiated as defined above (Bem, 1981a).

Bem’s gender schema approach was picked up and built upon by many researchers in social psychology, and chief among them were Alice Eagly and Wendy Wood. Eagly and Wood’s theory of sex differences changed the names of Bem’s terms to the ones that Spence preferred and placed focus on agency (male-stereotypical traits) and communion (female-stereotypical traits) as the central trait clusters that differentiate men and women, on average (Eagly & Wood, 1999, 2011; Eagly et al. 2000; Wood & Eagly, 2000). It is no accident that Eagly and Wood named this approach sex differences. For Eagly and Wood, social psychology had to acknowledge the demonstrable anatomical differences between men and women (evident in the medical designations at birth) and the chromosomal differences that were assumed to produce these anatomical differences in a uniform manner. Yet, the
existence of gender stereotypes, gender socialization, and how these two connected at the
levels of self-schemas and social schemas became the dominant understanding of gender
difference in social psychology propounded by Eagly and Wood. Herein, the biology of sex is
a scaffold on which gender differences (and, conceptually, similarities) might develop.
However, the development of these differences might have more to do with socialization
processes, and less to do with genetic predilections toward behaviors than other theorists
might assume—though, admittedly, both are important (see Eagly & Wood, 1999, 2011 for
excellent discussions). Several theorists have followed this manner of thinking about gender
identity, which, given its focus on stereotypy, is also easily amenable to the study of gender
bias as gender prejudice, gender discrimination, and sexism in social psychology. Note,
however, that gender identity for Eagly and Wood and most of social psychology has little to
do with the definitions of Stoller or Kohlberg or the idea of developmentally acquiring self-
knowledge that translates into self-categorization as female, male, or some other gender
category.

THE NEWEST APPROACH TO GENDER: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL
SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING

In what can be construed as an integration of the perspectives above, in 2001, Susan Egan
and David Perry developed what they termed a multidimensional approach to studying gender
with children. Egan and Perry (2001) argued that five dimensions are important to
characterize how children experience gender: (a) membership knowledge (awareness that the
self is categorized into a specific gender group); (b) contentment with one’s gender
assignment; (c) gender typicality (a sense of being similar to other children with the same
gender label); (d) pressure to conform to gender stereotypes or expectations; and, (e)
Intergroup bias (feeling superior to gender outgroups). This multidimensional approach shows
a layered understanding of gender experience, and integrates many of the historical insights
into a decidedly social psychological approach. By identifying specific psychological
processes associated with interpersonal evaluations, Egan and Perry created a nuance not
seen in the Kohlberg, Bem, and Spence approaches, and a perspective that is more consistent
with Eagly and Wood. Yet, even Egan and Perry’s multidimensional understanding does not
showcase a personality approach to gender identity. Rather, each dimension of Egan and
Perry’s framework is either a judgment of self in relation to others or an attitude about
information provided by others. For instance, estimates of gender typicality and intergroup
bias are two different ways to consider interpersonal dynamics—that is, the self in relation to
others. The typicality dimension is self as compared to the ingroup while the intergroup bias
dimension is self as compared to an outgroup. The remaining dimensions can be construed as
intrapersonal attitudes. Membership knowledge is one’s recognition of the category to which
one was birth-assigned, and, though not explicitly valenced, it does fit into the cognitive
component of attitude structure (cf. Zanna & Reppel, 1988). Contentment with gender
assignment is prototypically an attitude insofar as it requires a perceiver to place valence on
the assignment to a gender category by someone else in the generic evaluative forms of
positive, negative, neutral, or ambivalent. Pressure to conform to stereotypes is both an
affective and cognitive statement regarding how other people treat the self. Thus, even while
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nuanced, Egan and Perry’s multidimensional understanding of gender experience does not approach any aspect of gender as a personality process.

THE MISSING LINK: GENDER IDENTITY AS A PERSONALITY PROCESS

Since the days of Terman and Miles, personality psychologists have routinely overlooked the idea that gender identity could be a personality process. Instead, to the present, personality theorizing has focused on factor models of personality (e.g., Caspi et al., 2005; Srivastava, John, Gosling, & Potter, 2003), dimensions of personality that might exist outside the basic factors (e.g., coping) (Bolger, 1990), on the distinction between attributes as traits and the expression of them as cognition (Cantor, 1990), and on the link between temperament and personality (Rothbart, Ahadi, & Evans, 1999; Caspi et al., 2005)—to name a fraction of the pursuits in personality science over the past 50 years. In the cases where gender does appear, it is often as a moderator of the stability of another trait (e.g., Srivastava et al., 2003) or as a way to test evolutionary and social role hypotheses about the putative origins of gender differences (e.g., Costa, Terracciano, & McCrae, 2001). While interesting and worthwhile, these approaches to gender individually and collectively only serve to recapitulate the Terman and Miles (1936) reasoning. Common practices notwithstanding, below I develop the case for treating gender identity as a personality process in its own right. I use classic and modern personality process insights to demonstrate that gender identity as self-categorization is completely amenable to being theorized about and modeled as a personality trait.

Classic Personality Process Thinking and Gender Identity

Kluckhohn and Murray (1948) introduced what has come to be known as the classic personality process approach (see Revelle, 1995). As a summary, Kluckhohn and Murray (1948) argued that any personality process, at the broadest level covers all people in some way, at a second level constitutes the traditional individual difference (i.e., applies to some people differently than others), and, at a third level, becomes idiosyncratic for a specific person. Revelle (1995) has shown that this construal of personality processes has remained a common thread through the personality theorizing of the 1920s to the 1990s with additional insights and perspectives growing up around it. I would argue that the theme continues to the present, and this statement is supported by a more recent review of personality processes focusing on stability and change (Caspi, Roberts, & Shiner, 2005). With this classic perspective in mind, let us consider whether gender identity could be characterized as a personality process. At the broadest level, there appears to be little disagreement among psychologists that every person has a self-categorization that considers gender in some way. While it is most common in the United States and other industrialized cultures to think of female and male as being the exhaustive categories (e.g., Wood & Eagly, 2010), empirical research has shown that there are additional categories. In particular, in the U.S. and Canada, at least, individuals identify as female, male, trans female, trans male, intersex, and nonbinary/ genderqueer (Factor & Rothblum, 2008; Kuper, Nussbaum, & Mustanski, 2012; Scheim & Bauer, 2014; Tate, Ledbetter, & Yousef, 2013). The nonbinary or genderqueer
category can be further specified into the broad concepts of *genderblended* (i.e., a combined sense of being self-categorizable as female and male) and *post-gender* (i.e., a sense of being self-categorizable as neither female nor male) (Tate et al., 2013). Importantly, having a gender identity for oneself outside of the traditional, binary understanding of gender can still be viewed as having gender apply to one’s self-concept, and the words *nonbinary* and *genderqueer* convey this through language. In this way, the first aspect of the classic personality process perspective appears to be met. While it is true that the examples given focus on the U.S. and Canada, most psychological researchers presume that gender identity (defined as self-categorization) applies to all humans irrespective of culture (cf. Wood & Eagly, 2010).

Considering the second aspect of the classic personality process perspective (i.e., individual differences), gender identity also meets this standard. While gender identity appears to characterize all people (as argued above), it is experienced as an individual difference such that some people experience their gender identity as *female*, others as *male*, still others as *genderblended*, and yet more as *post-gender* (Tate et al., 2013). It should be noted that these are scholarly summaries of the natural language terms that exist in English to describe these identities. Though it is likely familiar to readers that *female* has associated terms such as *woman* and *girl* and that *male* has associated terms such as *man* and *boy*, what might be less familiar are the other terms associated with *genderblended* (e.g., “pangender,” “bigender”) and *post-gender* (e.g., “agender,” “non-gendered”). Also, as developed in detail below and in other publications (e.g., Tate, 2012; Tate et al., 2013), these four labels appear to be the most parsimonious individual difference labels because they include profiles or trajectories of gender identity experience. Transgender women and cisgender women are two different developmental profiles of the same category: women. In this case, some researchers use the terms *trans women* and *cis women* to emphasize the self-categorization similarity (women) while acknowledging the developmental trajectory as the different modifiers (trans or cis) (Tate et al., 2013). In parallel, transgender men and cisgender men are two different developmental profiles of the same category: men. In this case, some researchers use the terms *trans men* and *cis men* to emphasize the self-categorization similarity (men) while acknowledging the developmental trajectory as the different modifiers (trans or cis) (Tate et al., 2013). In any event, the gender identity experience appears to apply differently to different groups of people—thereby qualifying as an individual difference in the second aspect of classic personality process theory (Kluckhohn & Murray, 1948; Revelle, 1995).

Considering the third and final aspect of classic personality process theory (i.e., idiosyncrasy at the level of each individual), it appears that even within the four broadest individual difference labels (i.e., *female, male, genderblended, post-gender*), individuals vary from each other. Though virtually no research has yet examined the nonbinary gender identities, a number of studies have examined how women are different from each other and how men are different from each other. It should be acknowledged that, at the broadest level of analysis, these idiosyncrasies can be identified whenever variability is shown within women as a grouping variable or within men as a grouping variable. Although the specific focus may not be on a life story approach to gender identity (see McAdams, 1990, 1993; Ruynan, 1990, for the life stories approaches), the fact that the variance is above zero for any set of women or men on any set of life outcomes (e.g., Newton & Stewart, 2013) or personality variables (e.g., Srivastava et al., 2003; Costa et al., 2001) shows that it is possible to explore how individual women differ from each other on their experiences of having a
female gender identity and how individual men differ from each other on their experiences of having a male gender identity. Additionally, it should be possible to discuss even how one’s self-categorization as female, male, genderblended or post-gender differs between individual people within those categories. Thus, it appears that gender is experienced idiosyncratically at the level of each person.

**Inclusivity of All Gender Experiences Is Necessary to Focus on Gender Identity as a Personality Process**

With the three levels of classic personality theory rhetorically demonstrated, I now specify the argument for including all gender experience as a necessary scholarly activity to maintain the focus on gender identity as a personality process. Although developmental and social psychology have largely ignored transgender spectrum experiences, they are actually integral to understanding gender identity as a personality process. Moreover, given that classic personality theory holds that any personality process applies to all people at some level, it seems necessary to include all experiences of gender identity in order to make this statement true. While it appears that the numerical majority of people experience their gender identity within a cisgender profile (see Tate et al., 2013), cisgender experience is not exhaustive across people (Ansara & Hegarty, 2012; Factor & Rothblum, 2008, Kuper et al., 2012; Scheim & Bauer, 2014; Tate et al., 2013). In fact, transgender spectrum experiences may actually provide the clearest illustration that gender identity is a personality process, while considering cisgender experience alone biases researchers to consider the aspects of gender identity that are largely interpersonal phenomena. For instance, Fleming, Jenkins, and Bugarin (1980) were among the first researchers to examine transgender participants using the BSRI. Fleming et al. (1980) recruited a group of adult trans women and trans men (at the time, the term transsexuals was used) who were all seeking counseling through a non-profit organization that specialized in assisting clients in their emotional and medical transitions. Fleming et al. found that 24% of the transgender participants were considered psychologically androgynous according to the BSRI scoring methods, which was a similar finding to Bem’s (1974) study (with cis women and cis men—even though those terms were not used at the time). Fleming et al. (1980) suggested that transgender people are not seeking genital surgery because their gender role endorsement differs from the expectations based on their birth-assigned sex category, and this could be seen in the fact that the psychologically androgynous transgender participants seemed comfortable with flexibility in their behavior concerning gender stereotypes. Fleming et al. (1980) instead proposed that internal gender identity (or what I call gender self-categorization) and stertotypic gender roles are independent of each other, which is one of the first appearances of this argument within literature relevant to social/personality psychology.

Additionally, the suggestions that gender identity as self-categorization derive from social learning, behaviorist, or cognitive accounts (see Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Howard & Hollander, 1997; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Martin et al., 2002) benefit from considering the perspectives of individuals with transgender spectrum identities. If it were truly the case that gender self-categorization was nothing more than an elaborated calculation of external inputs from society and one’s genital anatomy, then it would be extremely difficult to generate transgender spectrum experiences. While Stoller (1968/1974) attempted to explain the experiences via a notion of clinical disorder, this proposition is ultimately unconvincing.
because it does not detail a process by which transgender spectrum experience arises—aside from vague, untestable assumptions based on neo-Freudian psychodynamic postulates. Even if these untestable claims were true, it would mean that those with transgender spectrum experiences were virtually immune to the well-demonstrated social-cognitive processes of learning and development, but only for gender identity and not any other learning or developmental outcome. Using a principle of parsimony, it is more likely that transgender spectrum experiences are subject to the same kinds of well-documented social-cognitive processes as everyone else for the learning and development of gender identity. At the same time, transgender spectrum experiences should provide a useful lens on the underpinning process of gender identity as self-categorization for everyone—especially the unique part of this process that is not reducible to learning via external inputs. This unique underpinning process might be characterized as an internal sense of self or felt-sense of gender identity. At present, no one understands from where this felt-sense might originate or the specific biological mechanisms that convey or support gender self-categorization. Nonetheless, researchers might infer the existence of such an internal experience and the biology that supports it in order to posit a conceptual interplay between the social-cognitive processes and this felt-sense variable in the following manner. When the felt-sense of gender identity and the gender label used for the self by others are the same, then there is still psychological activity—namely, a person identifies with the label that matches the internal sense of self—but this activity might appear as though it is being generated by others since the perceptions of others are visible to observers, but internal self-dynamics are comparatively opaque to observers. To make this insight concrete, consider an individual whose internal sense of self is FEMALE and who is also assigned to the medical category female at birth based on the presence of a prototypical vaginal-vulval structure. Under the model being proposed, this individual will continue to have access to the felt-sense of self as FEMALE even while other people use the cultural terms “girl” (and later “woman”) and “female” through this person’s life course. In this case, it only appears as though other people are influencing this individual’s sense of self; instead, there is simply a convergence between self and other perception using very different sources of information. The self uses this internal sense of identity while others use the social meaning of and cues associated with being medically assigned to an anatomy category. This woman would be described as a cis woman because the gender identity profile is calculated across these two perspectives (self and medical) (Tate et al., 2013). Importantly (and developed more fully in the next example), the private, internal information to which the self has access is likely not accessible to others unless the self discloses it (e.g., “I am a woman”). Nonetheless, in this example, since others already assumed the self’s same category membership (e.g., “she is a woman”) based on the social cues that normatively indicate gender category membership in that culture, it appears as though the self might be using information from others. Yet, I argue that the separate sources of information remain separate and either converge or diverge almost incidentally in interpersonal interactions. Now, consider another case. Consider an individual whose internal sense of self is FEMALE and who is assigned to the medical category male at birth based on the presence of a prototypical penile-scrotal structure. Under the model being proposed, this individual will continue to have access to the felt-sense of self as FEMALE even while other people use the cultural terms “boy” (and possibly later “man”) and “male” through some part of this person’s life course. In this case, it appears as though other people are not influencing this individual’s sense of self, and this is likely true. In this situation, one’s self-assigned
gender identity diverges from other people’s perceptions of this individual’s gender category. And, as described in the previous example, each actor is using a very different source of information. Other people use the medical category designation based on anatomy and the normative social cues that signal gender category membership within that culture, while the self uses another, private source that is likely not accessible to other people unless the self discloses it (e.g., “I am a woman, despite what you might think”). This woman would be described as a trans woman because the gender identity profile is calculated across these two perspectives (self and medical) (Tate et al., 2013). With the balance of these examples, it appears that scholars have a conceptual space that features two information sources working in the same location. One source being the individual’s felt-sense of gender identity and the other source being the social perception of that individual depending on normative social cues. Consequently, any individual’s gender identity experience in the world appears to be the convergence or divergence of the intrapersonal and interpersonal perceptions.

In fact, there is support for this modeling from different scholarly sources. One source is the narrative reports of trans men and women who argue that they had access to an internal sense of self long before they disclosed this internal identity to other people (e.g., Bornstein, 1998; Devor, 1997; Green, 2004, 2005; Mock, 2014; Morris, 1974; Serano, 2007). Prejudice and fear of discrimination appear to be major reasons why trans men and women delay disclosing their authentic identities (Factor & Rothblum, 2008; Grant et al., 2011). Although memoirs of cis men and women rarely invoke the same narrative structure, it is likely that they too had access to an internal sense of self long before they disclosed this internal identity to other people. For cis women and men, however, the need to disclose their internal identities might not be perceived as strongly because this self-disclosure converged rather early with other-perception on the same label. In effect, cis men and women might not notice as easily that they are disclosing an internal sense of self because other people arrive at that categorization via another route. The other source of support is admittedly indirect and comes from brain anatomy research. Rametti and colleagues argue that trans men (before any hormone treatment) and cis men show similar white matter microstructures in the same area of the brain when both are compared to cis women (Rametti, Carrillo, Gómez-Gil, Junque, Segovia, Gomez, & Guillamon, 2011a). Likewise, these researchers argue that trans women (before any hormone treatment) and cis women have more similarity in the white matter structures at the same locus when both groups are compared to cis men (Rametti, Carrillo, Gómez-Gil, Junque, Zubiarre-Elorza, Segovia, Gomez, & Guillamon, 2011b). My discussion of the Rametti and colleagues is not meant to suggest that these brain fiber differences reflect a particular direction of causality relative to genetic, physiological, or experiential sources (see Tate, 2013a, for detailed discussions of the differences among these sources and particularities of causal inferences from them). Nonetheless, the organization of the Rametti and colleagues’ data and the findings presented by that group illustrate that exploring similarities between cis men and trans men and, separately, similarities between cis women and trans women can provide interesting results that point toward the commonalities within men and within women—irrespective of developmental profiles and the ultimate causal origins of these commonalities.

Treating Gender Identity as a Trait and Measuring It Like a Trait
Treating gender self-categorization as a personality process might provide a useful inroad to studying gender identity as the felt-sense of gender categorization because treating it in this way allows psychological researchers to keep social meanings of gender separable from the personal meaning of gender. There appears little dispute within the psychology literature that gender categorization by others (e.g., “you are a girl”) exists and is information to which the self has to respond on some intrapsychic level. Yet, the contours of this response at the intrapsychic level (e.g., “yes, I am a girl” or “no, I am not a girl”) are poorly understood within children and adults. Nevertheless, personality theory allows for such contours to be explored and examined via psychological research, especially using the methodology of joint self-report and informant-report to assess personality traits. As the dominant model of developmental psychology suggests, gender self-categorization happens at an early age (i.e., individual respondents can tell another person about their gender identity as self-disclosure). However, only in some cases does the self-categorization appear to coincide with others-categorization of that person. That is, informants (others categorizing the self) sometimes use the same label as the self and other times do not. As one can easily imagine, informants’ reports are largely tethered to the birth-assigned category, especially when the focal individual is a child, and then later uses normative social cues for gender groups when the focal individual is an adult. Thus, informants are one source of information about an individual’s self-categorization, but they might not be the most reliable source. Thus, the personality approach to gender identity as self-categorization may be more useful when researchers assign greater weight to self-report and less weight to informant-reports throughout the lifespan.

The personality approach to gender identity also invites researchers to explore the current unknowns for gender self-categorization by focusing on the research topic of stability and change for personality traits (see Caspi et al., 2005). One current unknown is the stability of gender self-categorization from childhood to (early and late) adulthood. Using the personality approach, the tools of trait change become available for studying gender self-categorization. As Roberts and DelVecchio (2000) note, questions of personality trait change can be approached from at least four perspectives on consistency over time: intraindividual (same individual across time), ipsative (salience of attributes within persons over time), mean-level (average increase or decrease across persons over time), and rank-order (ordinal positions across persons over time). Taking the intraindividual differences perspective (see also Nesselroade, 1991), as an example, it is unknown at present whether there is variability for gender self-categorization within the same individual from childhood to adulthood. Because historical perspectives (e.g., Kohlberg, 1966) have assumed that once a child consistently uses the same label as the one used by others that gender identity is solidified, researchers have routinely missed the precise measurement of self-assigned identity that comes from the felt-sense, internal source. Focusing on convergence between self-labeling and other-labeling largely ignores or marginalizes transgender spectrum experiences. As noted above, many trans men, trans women, and nonbinary individuals disclose their self-categorization as such between 18 to 24 years old in the U.S. (Factor & Rothblum, 2008), likely because of fear of prejudice and discrimination or to avoid interpersonal difficulties at younger ages (cf. Bornstein, 1998; Devor, 1997; Green, 2004, 2005; Mock, 2014; Morris, 1974; Serano, 2007). Thus, it is possible that there is an internal, felt-sense of self that is solidified early in development—possibly around 3 years old for everyone—and that the field’s current emphasis on convergence of self and social labels (and particularly others’ perceptions of the
self) creates imprecision for measuring this aspect of trait consistency at the intraindividual level. In fact, virtually no information is known about any of the four perspectives on trait consistency that could be usefully applied to gender self-categorization. Nonetheless, the measurement concepts already exist within personality science to provide this information.

**Measuring the Specific Dynamics of Gender Self-Categorization as the Lower-Order Personality Process of Gender Identity**

Caspi et al. (2005) summarize personality process thinking as involving taxonomies that include higher-order and lower-order traits. Caspi et al. (2005) describe extraversion, for instance, as being the highest-order trait descriptor, indicating that “successively lower levels are more specific traits (e.g., sociability, dominance) that, in turn, are composed of more specific responses (e.g., talkative, good at leading others)” (p. 456). If one applies this approach to gender identity, the self-categorization as *female*, *male*, or *nonbinary* might be viewed as the highest-order trait. The more specific traits and responses, as Caspi et al. (2005) described them, could begin with the idea that any gender self-categorization might be modeled by focusing on constructs such as overlap with, affinity toward, or subsumption within any available gender category within one’s culture. For example, part of the female experiences of identity (cis or trans) may be overlapping more with a female gender category than with a male gender category. In fact, the two categories may be experienced intrapsychically as linearly separable to achieve a female self-categorization. That is, to categorize oneself as female one’s felt-sense of self might overlap completely or almost completely with this category while simultaneously showing no overlap with the category male. Likewise, part of the male experiences of identity (cis or trans) may be having a sense of self that overlaps almost completely with a male gender category and simultaneously shows no overlap with the category female. Again, this felt-sense of self is independent of gender role endorsement or other social psychological approaches to gender; instead, it is a sense of belonging to an abstract category of persons in the world irrespective of social similarities to them that is likely difficult to articulate because most lay and scholarly language around gender focuses on interpersonal rather than intrapersonal dynamics.

The personality approach is useful for describing such intrapersonal dynamics. If one takes extraversion as an example, what is the intrapersonal sense of being extraverted? This might be very difficult to describe, other than to say, “I really like being around other people and socializing.” Notice two points. One, the foregoing quote is a description that is easy for another person to access. Two, the internal experience that generates the statement might have contours that could be usefully described as the self overlapping more with sociability and less with seclusion. Given this second point, researchers ask questions to assess extraversion such as “I am the kind of person who is reserved” (to index overlap with seclusion) and “I am the kind of person who is outgoing, sociable” (to index overlap with sociability) (Rammestadt & John, 2007, p. 210). The former item negatively correlates with the latter item and thus a respondent receives a high extraversion score if they report high overlap between self and sociability and simultaneously low overlap with self and seclusion. Likewise, a person receives a low extraversion score (and might be considered introverted) if they report high overlap between self and seclusion and simultaneously low overlap between self and sociability.
In parallel fashion, the reasoning about overlap with dichotomous gender categories can and should be tested empirically. Furthermore, this method of asking about overlap with two gender categories can be usefully applied to nonbinary experiences of gender identity as well. In particular, researchers could determine whether genderblended individuals report similarly high overlap with both female and male gender categories and whether post-gender individuals report similarly low overlap with both female and male gender categories. The two hypothetical patterns appear to be consistent with the definitions of these experiences provided above. This new method therefore has the possibility to showcase both measurement precision and parsimony for the felt-sense of gender identity that is inclusive of all experiences. Also, the approach of examining comparative self-gender category overlap with at least two gender categories would allow for the eventual investigation of the four kinds of personality trait stability (i.e., intraindividual, ipsative, mean-level, and rank-order) in the following ways. The intraindividual consistency would be either test-retest reliability (at the shortest time interval) or longitudinal collection (at the longest time interval) for overlap ratings with either gender category. If a respondent for instance, overlaps highly with the female category at time-1, this result should remain at time-2. Likewise, if that same participant overlaps at near zero with the male category at time-1, this result should be similar at time-2. Ipsative consistency can be examined by comparing the relative extremities of endorsing each of the self-gender overlap categories within the same people across time. For example, it is possible that before the age of 4 years, children are relatively low and undifferentiated in their felt-sense of overlap with both the female and male gender categories. Yet, soon after age 4 years, many children may start to experience more overlap with one gender category, while overlap with the other remains low. The foregoing example assumes a binary experience of gender self-categorization, but the same reasoning would be applicable to nonbinary experiences, as either experience of high overlap with both female and male categories concurrently (genderblended) or as continued low overlap with both female and male categories (post-gender). The main point for the ipsative consistency would be to show a saliency change in self-category overlap (or lack thereof) over time within the same person. Mean-level consistency might be indexed by comparing those who self-categorize as either female or male to show that female respondents’ overlap with the self and the female gender category is always higher (on average) than male respondents’ overlap with the self and the female category. Likewise, the inverse should also be true: male respondents’ overlap with the self and the male gender category may always be higher (on average) than the female respondents’ rated overlap for self and the male category. Finally, rank order consistency might be indexed by showing that over time, self-categorized women and men (cis and trans) should show a greater discrepancy (i.e., larger absolute difference) between their self and female overlap ratings and their self and male overlap ratings compared to self-categorized genderblended or post-gender individuals. To see the specific mechanisms of this comparison strategy, one needs to conceptualize self-category overlap as both an extent (e.g., high, low) and target (e.g., female, male) combination. In this conceptualization some respondents (nonbinary experiences) are high-high (genderblended) or low-low (post-gender), but the absolute difference between these ratings within each group should be small. On the other hand, some respondents (binary experiences) are high-low (female) and low-high (male) combinations, and the absolute difference between these ratings of self and category overlap within each group should be large. A researcher could then compare the sizes of the absolute differences across the groups to determine rank order consistency. In this comparison and
over time, binary experiences should show a larger absolute difference between their ratings of overlap as compared to nonbinary experiences. Thus, with a measurement tool of the kind describe here, personality approaches to gender identity are both possible and illuminating.

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

In this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate that there are compelling reasons to begin an investigation of gender identity as a personality process. While the dominant social psychological perspective has been useful and informative, it does not and cannot provide a complete picture of a life science understanding of gender. Instead, the social psychological perspective (like all perspectives) caters to its strengths as a discipline of psychological science—namely, focusing the field’s attention on attitudes toward self and others and the social expectations and pressures that largely affect the aspects of self that require social coordination between and among people. The personality process approach complements the social psychological one in that the intrapsychic dynamics that are relatively opaque to interpersonal language can be detailed and modeled using the techniques that have largely been the domain of individual difference thinking and modeling. The tension between the social psychology and personality perspectives is well known to those within either of these fields even though a small and tenuous nexus exists between them (see, e.g., Funder & Fast, 2010). Consequently, it is not my intention to create further controversy or acrimony. Rather, this chapter has tried to unite the two perspectives. Gender, in its totality, is a set of psychological constructs that people experience in a manner that requires both a personality approach and a social psychological approach to fully characterize. Social psychology excels at modeling what Egan and Perry have termed constructs such as: (a) membership knowledge, (b) contentment with one’s gender assignment, (c) gender typicality, (d) pressure to conform to gender stereotypes, and (e) intergroup bias. The social psychological perspective is also excellent at modeling large-scale societal gender roles, socially derived gender expectations, as well as individual-level variability around them, and the intrapsychic and interpersonal dynamics of *genderhoods* (e.g., manhood, womanhood) and their consequences for cognition, affect, and behavior. Each of the research topics listed above, however, requires an individual social perceiver’s self-categorization into a gender group before any of these processes are meaningfully described or modeled by researchers. In this manner, personality science on self-categorization appears to be requisite for the social psychological dynamics to commence and be meaningful. As a result, only when the perspectives work together and explicitly acknowledge this nexus point—at gender identity specifically—can psychological science on gender be comprehensive.

As noted above, the dynamics of self-categorization as gender identity can and should be modeled at all levels of the personality process framing: self-report, informant report, physiological, and genetic. Of course, the biological approach to gender self-categorization requires researchers to avoid conflating or confounding the existing discussions of *gender difference* in medicine, biology, psychiatry, or psychology. Self-categorization is not tantamount to the fact that genders differ; it is a requirement for researchers to have gender groupings in the first place (rather than simple genital anatomy groupings). Related to this point, researchers should endeavor to theorize about gender self-categorization at the most inclusive level possible. The history of psychiatry and clinical psychology, for instance,
shows the glaring misstep of categorizing homosexuality as a mental disorder from 1900 until 1973 (see Drescher, 2010), which led to a marginalization of theorizing on sexual orientation that could have been more inclusive and more informative earlier in the history of these fields. One consequence of that style of thinking was and continues to be subtle and overt prejudice and discrimination toward lesbians and gay men (e.g. Herek, 1988, 2000; Kite & Deaux, 1986), as well as bisexual individuals (e.g., Ben-Zeev, Dennehy, & Kaufman, 2012; Mohr & Rochlen, 1999), that may be perceived as justified by the “scientific” thinking at the turn of the last century. Another consequence is that evolutionary psychology approaches to the origins of sexual orientations have underestimated how inclusive theorizing about sexual orientation (that treats all experiences of sexual orientation as valid) would strengthen the field’s understanding of sexual orientation overall (Tate, 2013b). Instead, the current approaches lurch between uncovering conceptual insights and falling into so-called paradoxes because the collective thinking is heteronormative rather than inclusive (Tate, 2013b; Tate & Ledbetter, 2010). The missed opportunities for sexual orientation theorizing and the difficulty of current work to capture new insights in the face of lingering prejudices and other academic resistance should be a cautionary tale for a personality approach to gender identity. Personality researchers should approach gender identity by including all profiles of gender self-categorizations—cisgender and transgender spectrum—from the outset to avoid missed opportunities, marginalization, and the ultimate delaying of theoretical advancement. Tate et al. (2013) have already provided researchers with a demographic method that simultaneously captures cisgender and transgender spectrum experiences for U.S. populations, and this work should be expanded for both cross-cultural use and as the basis for pursuing basic personality science questions about gender identity as self-categorization.

In the final analysis, the scientific approaches to gender across the life and behavioral sciences find themselves at the precipice of a new age of discovery. As developed in this chapter, personality science can offer a crucial nexus between the popular and ever-expanding social psychological insights and the need to focus specific attention on self-categorization processes. Only then can researchers develop solid theories about the origin and intrapersonal function of gender identity and connect these to the interpersonal meanings of gender identity. It is my hope that the relevant fields of study use these insights to create a better, more inclusive science of gender identity sooner rather than later.

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