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Unpacking Anti-Transgender Bias: Leveraging Mechanisms From Person Perception

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ABSTRACT

Anti-transgender bias is an important area of research given the disproportionate negative outcomes transgender relative to cisgender individuals experience. Yet, the mechanisms underlying this disproportionate negative bias remain understudied. We posit that a person perception perspective could be particularly beneficial to characterize mechanisms for this negative bias experienced by transgender individuals. We hypothesize that slower or more effortful processing when processing the gender of transgender versus cisgender individuals contributes to discrimination against transgender individuals (e.g., misgendering and degendering). We introduce and discuss two forms of potentially disfluent gender processing, conceptual and perceptual, and explore their potential connections to these biases. We also suggest how the existing literature on person perception can guide future research on the mechanisms driving anti-transgender bias and, consequently, potentially inform interventions to reduce bias against the transgender community.

1 | Leveraging Mechanisms From Person Perception to Understand Anti-Transgender Bias

Transgender individuals, who are people identifying their gender as different from the one assigned at birth (Morgenroth and Ryan 2021) are an understudied group that experiences widespread discrimination (Wanta and Unger 2017). Demonstrating the reach of the discrimination against them, transgender, relative to cisgender, people face higher risks of suicide attempts (Fredriksen-Goldsen et al. (2014), as well as more generally elevated risks of poor physical health and disability (Cochran et al. 2002; Fredriksen-Goldsen et al. 2014; Kenagy and Bostwick 2005; Lombardi et al. 2002). Moreover, recent legislation that marginalizes transgender individuals (Horne et al. 2022; Ofosu et al. 2019) relates to increased violence against them (Horne et al. 2022). This amplified anti-transgender bias concurrent with their heightened media representation is inconsistent with higher acceptance of other minorities (e.g., the LGB community; Horne et al. 2022). This inconsistency makes transgender individuals a unique

minoritized group. The transgender community includes, but is not limited to, transgender men (men assigned female at birth), transgender women (women assigned male at birth), as well as nonbinary, gender non-conforming, genderfluid, and agender individuals. In the present work, we will primarily focus on transgender men and transgender women who present in conventionally masculine and feminine ways, respectively (Howansky et al. 2021), as well as nonbinary individuals when relevant.

Although transgender individuals are becoming better represented in mainstream media, they are still less familiar to most people compared to other minoritized populations (Gallagher et al. 2025; Queen et al. 2024). Indeed, the transgender population is estimated to be 12 times smaller than that of the LGB population (Gates 2011). Further, transgender individuals even incur negative bias from within the larger LGBTQ+ community (Ofosu et al. 2019). This refusal of acceptance and relative societal unfamiliarity likely contributes to the heightened negative perceptions transgender individuals face. Therefore,

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characterizing mechanisms for such anti-transgender bias is important to better understand their position as a gender minority.

Anti-transgender bias is commonly studied through negative attitudes and perceptions of transgender individuals (Billard 2018; Bockting et al. 2013; Lombardi et al. 2002). Yet, behavioral consequences of anti-transgender bias can manifest in multiple ways. Here, we focus on two such ways to provide a more in-depth and specific analysis of behavioral consequences that can best be understood from a person perception lens—misgendering and degendering (e.g., Howansky et al. 2021). People may *misgender* in that they purposefully refuse to or make an accidental error in acknowledging a transgender person's gender identity (e.g., declaring someone is a man when she identifies as a woman herself; Nadal 2013). People also *degender* when they do not attribute gender to transgender individuals (e.g., Howansky et al. 2022). Characterizing mechanisms for these forms of anti-transgender bias is critical to both understand them and to develop interventions aimed at reducing them. Indeed, people misgender or degender transgender individuals even when they support the transgender community (Morgenroth, Means, et al. 2024; Morgenroth, Van Der Toorn, et al. 2024). Here, we propose that mechanisms from person perception are well-suited to characterize the misgendering and degendering characteristic of anti-transgender bias. In fact, mechanisms from person perception can uniquely characterize negative bias (e.g., Petsko and Bodenhausen 2020) and are well-established lenses by which to study prejudice (e.g., Eagly and Wood 1991).

Person perception comprises the mental operations used to process information about others (Harper and Schoeman 2003; Macrae and Bodenhausen 2000). Processing gender is a core aspect of person perception (Eagly and Wood 1991) to the extent it has been proposed to be a fundamental way in which people view the world (Martin and Slepian 2020). One much-studied aspect of person perception focuses on people's expectations of others based on the categories to which they belong (Madon et al. 1998). Processing categories like gender, however, is not always fluent. *Disfluently* processing categories during person perception (e.g., Lick and Johnson 2013) relates to increased negative bias toward the targets of that processing (Stern and Rule 2018). We propose that the disfluent processing of gender toward transgender individuals may contribute to the negative bias they incur.

Here, we first discuss misgendering and degendering as behavioral forms of anti-transgender bias. We then draw on past research on gender expectations and negative bias (e.g., Moss-Racusin 2014; Moss-Racusin et al. 2010; Okimoto and Brescoll 2010; Rudman and Glick 2001) to motivate the hypothesis that misgendering and degendering may result from the disfluent processing of transgender individuals' gender during person perception. We then describe how such disfluent processing may potentially emerge in both the conceptual and perceptual processing of gender. Finally, we suggest directions for future research in these areas aimed to elucidate how anti-transgender bias manifests.

2 | Forms of Behavioral Anti-Transgender Bias

2.1 | Misgendering

Misgendering is a form of anti-transgender bias (e.g., Ansara and Hegarty 2014; Howansky et al. 2022; McLemore 2018) referring to the misidentification of a person's gender identity (e.g., calling a transgender man a woman; Albuja et al. 2019). Such identity denial relates to poorer psychological health among transgender people (Albuja et al. 2019), suggesting that misgendering is a function of the minority stress model (e.g., Brewster et al. 2012). Indeed, misgendering likely functions as a minority stressor for transgender people that parallels reports focusing on other marginalized groups (McLemore 2018). This work suggests that misgendering may contribute to health disparities between the transgender and cisgender communities. The negative consequences of misgendering beget an understanding of the mechanisms underlying it.

2.1.1 | Explanations for Misgendering

Prior work has established several explanations for misgendering. First, people can misgender due to a lack of knowledge relevant to the transgender community and transgender culture (Nadal 2013). For example, a person may not be familiar with alternative pronouns or have never met a transgender person, therefore having less experience interacting with transgender individuals and be more likely to make categorical errors. Second, people can misgender with explicit harmful intent (Morgenroth, Means, et al. 2024; Morgenroth, Van Der Toorn, et al. 2024). For example, a person may reject the concept of being transgender altogether and purposefully misgender transgender people as a way of expressing this opinion or to inflict harm. Third, people may misgender because their expectations of what men and women should be is inconsistent with what some transgender individuals' physical and behavioral characteristics are (Ansara and Hegarty 2014). Arising from this latter explanation is the below-discussed possibility that gendered expectations interact with gender processing during person perception in ways that elicit anti-transgender bias.

2.2 | Degendering

Degendering is a behavioral form of anti-transgender bias referring to a tendency to not refer to transgender individuals in gendered terms nor to attribute gender stereotypic traits to transgender individuals (e.g., using gendered pronouns to refer to a cisgender person, but not using any pronouns to refer to a transgender person in the same setting; Ansara and Hegarty 2014). It is related to misgendering in that it can be a consequence of trying to avoid misgendering (Howansky et al. 2020, 2022). Degendering can directly or indirectly manifest. Direct degendering results from people rejecting transgender people's identities due to the perceiver's individual characteristics and beliefs (e.g., via their gender essentialism; Dzubinski and Diehl 2018). Indirect degendering often results

from uncertainty about how to refer to transgender individuals (e.g., which pronouns to use; Howansky et al. 2022).

Degendering can emerge in descriptions of transgender people using non-gendered language in contexts where gendered language would otherwise be appropriate. Indeed, although people typically use “she” or “he” pronouns to describe cisgender women and men, they engage in degendering by the omission of gendered language for transgender men and women who reported clear gendered pronoun preferences (Ansara and Hegarty 2012). Such findings suggest that degendering occurs even when transgender individuals establish their gender identity.

2.3 | Understanding Anti-Transgender Biases via Gender Processing During Person Perception

Gender is a fundamental lens by which people engage with the world (Martin and Slepian 2020). Demonstrating how it is foundational to person perception, people process gender almost immediately upon meeting others (Carbon 2011). However, this almost immediate processing of gender categories does not mean that processing gender is impervious to disruption.

The level of ease to categorize and process another person influences judgments and emotions toward that person (Tversky and Kahneman 1973; Alter and Oppenheimer 2009). Fluently processing stimuli is easy and effortless (Reber et al. 1998). The extent of processing fluency is determined by a factors ranging from frequency of exposure (Seamon et al. 1995) to visual clarity (Alter and Oppenheimer 2009). People also use processing fluency as a heuristic to navigate the world in that it aids in determining stimuli posing little risk from stimuli that may be more hazardous (Kelley and Rhodes 2002). Indeed, people tend to have more positive attitudes about fluently processed stimuli (Lick and Johnson 2015). Processing fluency, for example, positively relates to art evaluations (Belke et al. 2010), ease when following instructions (Song and Schwarz 2008), valence judgments of moral violations (Laham 2009), and value judgments (Alter and Oppenheimer 2008). People also more negatively evaluate items and people when their categorization is more disfluent (Johnson et al. 2015). For example, highly feminine women tend to be more positively evaluated due to being more easily processed within the social category of women, compared to highly masculine women (Sutherland et al. 2015), who are disfluently processed within the social expectations of women. Important to note is that fluency can assist in positive evaluations, but does not always guarantee positive outcomes due to individual differences (e.g., hostile sexism toward women; Pearson 2011).

We posit that differences in processing fluency contribute to the misgendering and degendering characteristic of anti-transgender bias. Bias arising from disfluency during person perception may be unique. Indeed, processing fluency helps people to make quick sense of their surroundings relative to bias stemming from, for example, explicit prejudice (Lick et al. 2015). The deep-rooted and early emerging traditional binary conceptualization of gender and, relatedly, gender stereotypes (e.g., Bockting et al. 2013), may be *conceptually* defined by the notion of someone being

transgender. Indeed, there is evidence that having a narrow conception of gender (i.e., higher gender-essentialism) leads to more anti-transgender bias (Atwood, Gibson, et al. 2024; Ching and Xu 2018; Glazier et al. 2021; Morgenroth et al. 2021). Thus, people may disfluently process the gender of transgender individuals when categorizing them. Transgender individuals also may not possess the *perceptually* masculine or feminine facial characteristics that facilitate gender categorization (e.g., Stern and Rule 2018).

Although not mutually exclusive, these types of disfluencies have distinct aspects. *Conceptually* bringing to mind a mental framework for transgender individuals (Flores 2015; Glazier et al. 2021; Gülgöz et al. 2019) likely has some distinction from the *perception* of transgender individuals from nonverbal cues (Fisher et al. 2020; Stern and Rule 2018; Wittlin et al. 2018). Indeed, work on these topics often draws from very different methods and literature on which to derive hypotheses (e.g., Glazier et al. 2021 vs. Stern and Rule 2018). To date, no work has examined the relative weight of these potential pathways when thinking about transgender individuals. However, they both plausibly contribute to bias. Here, we explore this possibility and describe conceptual and perceptual disfluency as to potential pathways explaining variance in anti-transgender bias.

2.4 | Perceptual Disfluency in Processing Gender

People identify social categories via *visual input* (e.g., faces). For example, people quickly categorize race (Cassidy, Krendl, et al. 2017; Cassidy, Sprout, et al. 2017), age (Lick and Johnson 2018), and even sexual orientation (Lick et al. 2015; Rule et al. 2009) by looking at faces. People also differentiate relative visual fits between targets and templates of what people expect a person belonging to a certain social group to look like (Lee and Labroo 2004; Reber et al. 1998). For example, highly feminine-appearing women would be considered prototypical for the social group of “women” in general, while more masculine-appearing women would be perceived as counter-stereotypical (Sutherland et al. 2015). Because prototypical individuals match people’s expectations of the social group, people have more efficient perceptual processing of other people and stimuli more closely matching such prototypes (Diego-Mas et al. 2020; Lee and Labroo 2004; Reber et al. 1998).

Relevant here, people positively evaluate more fluently processed visual stimuli, such as evaluating familiar people as more likable, safer, and even more attractive (Freeman et al. 2016; Reber et al. 1998; Whittlesea 1993). This positive relation, however, also means that non-prototypical category members are usually more negatively evaluated, in part due to being more disfluently processed (e.g., Lick and Johnson 2015). Such relations are exacerbated in people who exhibit more negative bias (e.g., anti-transgender bias) toward category members. For example, people who exhibit more conflict when processing the race of less versus more prototypical Black faces exhibit more anti-Black bias (Cassidy, Krendl, et al. 2017; Cassidy, Sprout, et al. 2017).

Experience can increase fluency when processing atypical stimuli, which has implications for bias expressed toward targets who do not perceptually match a group prototype. For

example, the relation between increased exposure to interracial people and having more positive evaluations of interracial faces over time is, in part, explained by the increase in fluency when processing interracial faces (Freeman et al. 2016). Together, these findings illustrate perceptual fluency as a potentially critical factor relating to negative bias. We posit that the relative fluency with which people process transgender individuals' gender contributes to the discrimination (e.g., misgendering and degendering) they experience.

2.4.1 | Face Perception in Perceptual Fluency

Facial features convey a wealth of social information, including identity, gender, age, and emotional expression (Blais et al. 2008; Carbon 2011; Freeman et al. 2010; Hack 2014; Knutson 1996; Sofer et al. 2015). Such information is efficiently extracted from faces (Carbon 2011). Upon mere glimpses of faces, people quickly discern emotional expressions and extract details about a person's identity, including their gender and relative attractiveness (Cassidy, Krendl, et al. 2017; Cassidy, Sprout, et al. 2017; Hack 2014; Knutson 1996; Perrett et al. 1998). Beyond the extracted gender category, however, faces also differ in the extent to which they appear more masculine or feminine (Diego-Mas et al. 2020). Such gendered facial features affect how people evaluate targets (Liebenow et al. 2024b; Martin and Slepian 2020). For example, having more feminine (vs. masculine) facial features benefit cisgender women in being evaluated for leadership (Liebenow et al. 2024a). Moreover, more masculine (vs. feminine) facial features help men to be perceived more competent and suitable for high-ranking positions (Abele 2003; Szesny et al. 2006).

We posit that expectations of cisgender facial features versus transgender targets' facial features may contribute to the negative bias transgender individuals experience via the extent of disfluent perceptual processing of gender. Visually categorizing transgender individuals' faces may challenge expectations laid out by cisgender norms of traditional facial templates. For example, a transgender woman may not have the traditionally feminine facial features people typically use to categorize someone as a cisgender woman (vs. as a man) (Fisher et al. 2020), such as hormonal changes during puberty leading to facial features changes (e.g., the growth of facial hair; Rew et al. 2021). This nonverbal expectation-versus-reality incongruence may result in less fluent processing and greater instances of behavioral bias in the form of misgendering and degendering toward transgender individuals. Notably, transgender individuals who transition early (i.e., go on puberty blockers before they hit puberty and then on HRT in late adolescence) may not undergo these facial feature changes, despite being assigned a different gender at birth (Rew et al. 2021).

2.4.2 | "Passing" in the Transgender and Nonbinary Community

One way in which transgender individuals may subvert this perceptual disfluency and subsequent misgendering and degendering is by "passing." Here, the term "passing" refers to the ability of transgender individuals to be perceived as

cisgender, which underscores the challenge of conforming to traditional gendered appearance norms (Howansky et al. 2020). People find it easier to process faces that conform to stereotypical gender norms (e.g., feminine-presenting women or masculine-presenting men) compared to those who deviate from these norms (Sutherland et al. 2015). Transgender individuals may attempt to "pass" as a way of affirming their gender identity and a means of avoiding discrimination (e.g., hate crimes, misgendering, degendering, etc.) by not only looking more feminine or masculine, but also more cisgender (Anderson et al. 2020; Quinn and Hancock 2023).

Different from "passing" in racial contexts (i.e., "passing" as another race; Dias et al. 2021), transgender individuals primarily pass to validate their own gender identity (Anderson et al. 2020). For example, a transgender woman passing as a cisgender woman to both escape discrimination for her transgender identity and to affirm her gender identity as a woman. However, "passing" does not always protect transgender individuals from prejudice and harassment due to the anti-transgender trope that transgender individuals are intentionally deceiving others about their gender for malicious intent (Anderson et al. 2020; Kaur 2017). Therefore, although "passing" could enhance perceptual fluency of gender categorization for binary transgender individuals, it may not completely subvert explicit prejudice toward them.

The experience of "passing" is even more complex for nonbinary individuals, as nonbinary individuals may embrace a range of gender expressions or none. Here, the concept of "passing" as a specific gender may be irrelevant (Kaur 2017; Murawsky 2023). Indeed, nonbinary individuals may instead be more concerned with avoiding gender dysphoria (i.e., the distress that can occur when one's physical appearance does not coincide with their gender identity; Galupo et al. 2021) than conforming to binary ideals of gender. In this way, "passing" may increase perceptual fluency, but directly oppose nonbinary ideals of perceptual cues (e.g., possessing masculine, feminine and/or gender-neutral nonverbal cues in combination). Notably, nonbinary prejudice could indeed stem from perceptual disfluency given that possessing gender and being gendered is associated with "humanness" (Martin and Mason 2022).

2.4.3 | Nonverbal Cues of Cisgender and Transgender Individuals

Research, however, has yet to investigate the distinct "tells" of people being transgender versus cisgender. One possibility for what underlies these "tells" is the relative mismatch of nonverbal cues for different gender categories based on traditional gender stereotypical feminine and masculine facial characteristics. Supporting this general premise, some work suggests that people perceptually perceive the *same target* differently depending on cisgender or transgender labels (Howansky et al. 2022; Wittlin et al. 2018). In this work, transgender targets are mentally represented (i.e., being visually represented in the "mind's eye") as less gender-congruent versus cisgender targets. In one study (Howansky et al. 2022), participants created avatars based on images of transgender and cisgender individuals. Avatars of transgender men and women

were depicted as, respectively, less masculine and less feminine than their cisgender counterparts. These findings suggest that people persist in viewing transgender individuals as *less* aligned with their gender identity compared to cisgender individuals. This potentially *visual* identity denial during person perception suggests that a visual gender template for transgender individuals differs from one for cisgender individuals in that it is inherently degendered. No work, to date, has directly tested how relative differences in facial characteristics of transgender versus cisgender individuals may elicit perceptual disfluency during gender processing in a way that elicits negative bias. It will be important for future work to establish these connections.

2.5 | Conceptual Disfluency in Processing Gender

We define disfluency during gender processing in two unique, but not necessarily mutually exclusive, ways. *Conceptual disfluency* is when more difficult or effortful processing is engaged to process *the concept* of a group or an individual's "fit" within societal expectations (Lee and Labroo 2004). People have expectations of gender (Eagly and Crowley 1986; Harper and Schoeman 2003; Liebenow et al. 2024a, 2024b) that can manifest as prescriptive stereotypes dictating what men and women "should" be like (Martin and Slepian 2020; Rudman and Glick 2001). Many expectations about men and women's trait attributes align with, respectively, agency and communality (i.e., the "big two" trait dimensions of social perception; Bruckmüller and Abele 2013; Martin and Slepian 2020). Whereas people expect that men will be highly agentic and competent, they expect that women will be highly communal and warm (Abele 2003; Abele et al. 2016; Abele and Wojciszke 2007; Bruckmüller and Abele 2013; Carrier et al. 2014; Diehl et al. 2004; Rudman and Glick 2001).

For example, conceptual disfluency can occur when women do not meet societal expectations for the general social group of "women" (Abele 2003; Wiggins 1991). Highly agentic women (Rudman and Glick 2001) are more likely to be evaluated negatively due to violating societal expectations of how women "should" behave. Women behaving in ways that are incongruent with expectations of women (e.g., being highly masculine or agentic) are often penalized by being disliked (Rudman and Glick 2001), and by being rejected for jobs (Liebenow et al. 2024a, 2024b) and political offices (Conroy et al. 2020). Indeed, research on role incongruity asserts that people may dislike those who do not conform to expectations of their stereotypic gender role. Because these agentic women do not conceptually fit the category of "women," they may be more cognitively effortful to process.

Any resulting processing disfluency is often attributed to negative bias (Asma 2023). Instead of recognizing any discomfort or effort as a result of cognitive dissonance (i.e., the mental tension created by conflicting or unfamiliar information) in the preconceived notions about how women "should" behave (Prentice and Carranza 2002), it may be simpler for people to interpret and misattribute this discomfort as a personal negative judgment or bias (Asma 2023) against counter-stereotypical individuals. Much like the agentic women studied in past

work (e.g., Rudman and Glick 2001), transgender individuals may also inherently challenge people's expectations of gender. Any resulting processing disfluency could plausibly lead to such negative attributions.

2.5.1 | Gender Schemas of Cisgender Versus Transgender and Nonbinary Individuals

People who do not seem to "fit" gender *schemas* (i.e., gendered expectations based on how gender is socialized in society) often elicit negative bias (e.g., Rudman and Glick 2001). Schemas facilitate person perception by allowing for fluent processing of people in everyday life (Bem 1981), and when information contradicts gender schemas, processing becomes slower to attempt to enhance clarity (Duffy and Keir 2004). For example, people take longer to read gender stereotype-incongruent sentences where the gender of a pronoun did not align with the expected gender stereotype of a job title (e.g., "The electrician shocked herself"). This research illustrates that the categorical information provided by gender identity significantly affects our processing speed during person perception.

For transgender individuals, whose identities often challenge traditional gender norms, people may experience similar delays in processing upon person perception. Indeed, when people have limited experiences with a social group, they lack a developed schema or mental representation constructed based on past experiences to process them (Bransford and Johnson 1972; Carreiras et al. 1996). Although people have well-developed schemas that are automatically activated to process cisgender men and women (Bem 1981), this may not be the case for transgender men and women. Because schemas for transgender individuals may contradict and be underdeveloped compared to cisgender schemas, people may more effortfully process transgender individuals in ways that reflect a disfluent conceptual processing of gender.

Further, it could be that people lack developed gender schemas for transgender individuals *or* do not integrate transgender individuals into the gender schemas they have for cisgender individuals. Prior work shows that people automatically encode both gender identity and modality (i.e., whether someone is cisgender or transgender; Gallagher et al. 2025). This automatic encoding suggests that transgender men and women are processed using different schemas than those activated for cisgender men and women. Cisgender gender schemas are automatically activated (Bem 1981) and include a range of well-established stereotypes (Abele 2003; Liebenow et al. 2024b). This automatic activation allows for fluent conceptual processing of gender (Banaji and Hardin 1996; Devine 1989).

Yet, transgender men and women are stereotyped as being more similar and dissimilar to, respectively, transgender and cisgender men and women (Howansky et al. 2020). Arising from this work is the possibility that transgender people may incur disfluent conceptual processing of their gender because they may not fit *neatly* into the expectations of either cisgender men or women (i.e., not fit established gender schemas). Supporting this possibility, transgender individuals are less differentiated

along traditionally gendered stereotype dimensions compared to cisgender individuals (Gallagher and Bodenhausen 2021). Without fluently activated or well-developed gender schemas, misgendering via incorrect pronoun usage and degendering via gendered trait attributions may result from this lack of “fit.”

Conceptual disfluency as a pathway to negative bias may have implications affecting not only transgender individuals, but nonbinary individuals as well. Indeed, while binary transgender individuals can still be categorized within the existing gender schemas of “man” and “woman,” nonbinary individuals face a different challenge. Nonbinary individuals do not “fit” into these traditional binary gender schemas and require an entirely new gender schema. Future work should explore how the absence of these pre-existing frameworks might contribute to increased disfluency when processing nonbinary individuals (see Figure 1).

2.5.2 | Gendered Trait Attributions to Cisgender Versus Transgender Individuals

Concomitant with activating gender schemas is the activation of associated traits and stereotypes (Morgenroth, Means, et al. 2024). While there is conflicting evidence that behaving in a gender-stereotypic or nongender-stereotypic way relates to conceptual disfluency of transgender individuals (e.g., Morgenroth, Van Der Toorn, et al. 2024), research suggests that people commonly fail to attribute gender-stereotypic traits to transgender individuals. For example, people often do not recognize communal traits in transgender women (Ansara and Hegarty 2014; Howansky et al. 2020, 2022). More broadly, people rate transgender individuals as being less typical of their gender group and apply stereotypes to them that align more closely with their sex assigned at birth rather than with their true gender identity (Gallagher and Bodenhausen 2021). One possibility is that this misalignment could reflect a lack of gender schema fit when processing transgender individuals that

results in degendering. One consequence of conceptual disfluency potentially arising from the inefficient activation of gender schemas is that this inefficiency could manifest as degendering (e.g., hesitating or not using pronouns to refer to a transgender individual).

Degendering does not necessitate the absence of gender in trait attributions (Gallagher and Bodenhausen 2021)—degendering can also emerge when people apply *fewer* gendered traits and associations to people they are degendering (e.g., in comparison to cisgender individuals). This type of degendering suggests an underdeveloped schema versus a lack of one. It also suggests that people may not fully integrate transgender individuals’ genders into the schemas held for cisgender individuals’ genders (e.g., gendered trait expectations and characteristics). Due to disfluency in a core aspect of person perception posited to be relatively automatic (Devine 1989), people may fail to apply traditional gendered concepts to transgender individuals in a way that elicits negative bias.

Another possibility is that people might similarly apply traditional gendered concepts to transgender and cisgender individuals, but are relatively slower when doing so with transgender targets. Indeed, people are slower to gender categorize more physically androgynous transgender individuals than less androgynous transgender individuals (Stern and Rule 2018), which may manifest similarly with conceptual processing of transgender individuals, as well. Regardless of a potential mechanistic difference, both of these possibilities are likely to elicit frustration, confusion, and eventual negative evaluations of transgender individuals (Bockting et al. 2013; Lombardi et al. 2002) because people make negative attributions when faced with disfluency (Asma 2023). Clarifying how people conceptually process the gender of transgender targets will be important to better understand the negative outcomes facing the transgender community (e.g., poorer health; Bockting et al. 2013; Coleman et al. 2022; Horne et al. 2022).

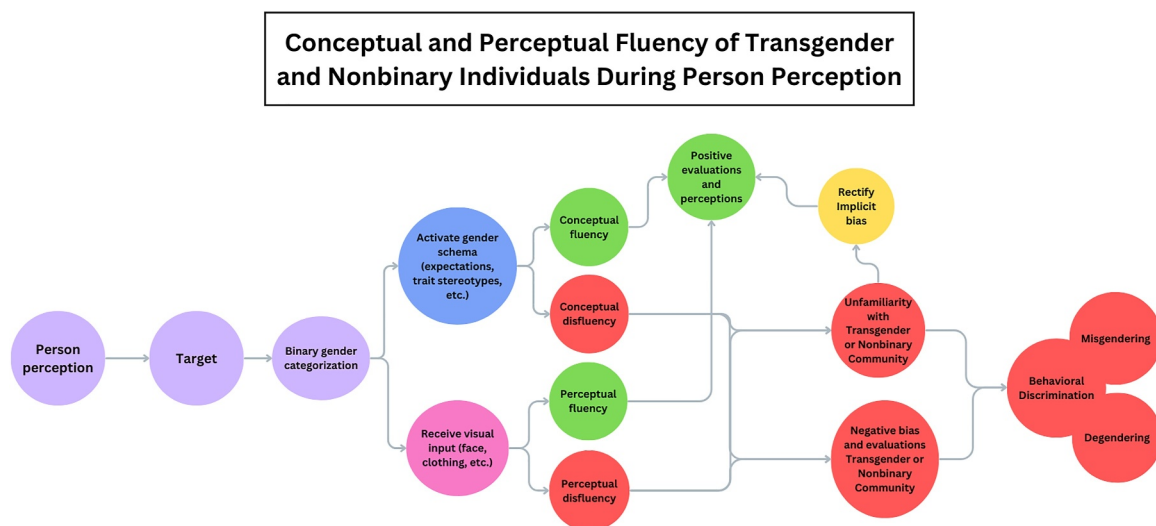


FIGURE 1 | Conceptual model demonstrating the potential mechanisms behind perceptual and conceptual disfluency upon person perception of transgender and nonbinary individuals that can lead to behavioral discrimination. Model demonstrating the processes behind the potential disfluency of transgender and nonbinary individuals that can lead to behavioral discrimination (misgendering and degendering).

2.6 | Considerations for Future Research

To better understand anti-transgender bias, we recommend using a person perception perspective to examine the fluency with which people process transgender individuals' gender (see Figure 1 for a model illustrating this perspective). Investigating how conceptual and perceptual disfluency contributes to bias in the perception of transgender individuals could yield insights into the specific impacts on this social group. One avenue for future work will be to determine the weight with which conceptual and perceptual disfluencies affect anti-transgender bias. It could be that bias is affected more by disfluency in processing nonverbal cues of transgender targets than the mental concept of being transgender (or vice versa). It could also be that they similarly contribute to bias. While the current literature acknowledges that both pathways influence outcomes for transgender individuals (e.g., Fisher et al. 2020; Gallagher and Bodenhausen 2021), it remains unclear which has a stronger impact on people's evaluations.

Beyond identifying the interplay of these pathways and their relation to anti-transgender bias, future work may focus on how these pathways can be harnessed in ways that reduce bias. Perceptual cues, for example, can be altered (e.g., through gender-affirming care or surgery; To et al. 2020). Yet, with the rise of anti-transgender legislation blocking access to gender affirming care (Horne et al. 2022; Puckett et al. 2018; Ronan 2021) this care can be difficult for transgender individuals to obtain. Moreover, emphasizing the altering of perceptual cues to reduce bias places an unfair onus on reducing bias on its target. Without fully understanding perceptual fluency's influence on assessments of transgender individuals (e.g., through research focused on faces or other nonverbal cues like clothing), interventions aimed at increasing transgender acceptance may be less effective.

Another avenue for future work is considering how conceptual and perceptual disfluency may similarly or differentially trigger bias toward transgender men and transgender women. There is asymmetry in how transgender men and women experience bias. For example, transgender women experience higher levels of reported street harassment than transgender men (Lombardi et al. 2002). Speculatively, this finding allows for the possibility that perceptual disfluency related to gender presentation may more strongly affect transgender women than men given appearance expectations for women (Liebenow et al. 2024a; Sutherland et al. 2015). Examining how conceptual and perceptual disfluency differently impacts transgender men and women can deepen our understanding of the distinct challenges each group faces and the underlying mechanisms driving different forms of anti-transgender discrimination. Further, such research could inform more targeted interventions aimed to reduce negative bias.

2.6.1 | Roles of Familiarity and Experience on Anti-Transgender Bias

Another area for future work is examining the role of familiarity (e.g., via media representation of transgender celebrities or personally knowing transgender individuals) in shaping bias

against transgender people. People are drawn to familiar and predictable stimuli because as it usually indicates safety; by contrast, unfamiliar stimuli can evoke a stress response (Sofer et al. 2015; Whittlesea 1993). Being relatively unfamiliar with transgender individuals, whether due to limited media representation, lack of personal connections, or inadequate education about transgender issues, can hinder the development of the schema likely needed for the fluent conceptual processing of transgender individuals' gender. Enhancing familiarity with the transgender community (e.g., through positive media representation), along with education about transgender issues, could positively influence conceptual processing of transgender individuals' gender (Lanska et al. 2014; Lee and Labroo 2004).

Supporting this idea, recent research demonstrates how gendered face perception is shaped by both immediate contextual information and personal experience (Atwood, Morgenroth, et al. 2024). This work finds that transgender and nonbinary participants, who have greater familiarity with gender diversity, make fewer errors when perceiving gender ambiguous faces, suggesting that familiarity with gender variance may enhance perceptual fluency. Notably, in Studies 4 and 5, even a brief experimental manipulation that introduced a third category for sorting gender resulted in less error for cisgender participants compared to when they were restricted to only two categories. This suggests that, with more exposure to alternative gender frameworks (i.e., more than two gender categories), cisgender individuals can adopt a more nuanced understanding of gender to better categorize gender ambiguous individuals. Together, these findings highlight the potential for both long-term familiarity and short-term interventions to reshape how people perceive gender, reinforcing the idea that increased exposure to transgender individuals and enhanced familiarity may facilitate more fluent and accurate conceptual processing of others' gender.

Informing this general premise, prior work on biracial individuals suggests that people develop positive evaluations for more frequently encountered biracial individuals, and that these individuals are more fluently processed even if they were initially perceived as neutral or were disliked (Freeman et al. 2016). It is possible that more frequent or meaningful encounters with transgender individuals will elicit more fluent processing of their gender in way that potentially reduce negative bias. Biracial individuals often face identity denial due to their ambiguous racial classification (Albuja et al. 2019); by contrast, transgender individuals may experience such invalidation due to anti-transgender beliefs and perceptions of gender transition as a choice (Flores 2015; Horne et al. 2022). These distinct forms of identity denial and their relation to processing disfluency warrant further investigation.

The impact of interactions and relationships with transgender individuals may also influence how people conceptually and perceptually process transgender individuals' gender (Flores 2015). Indeed, increasing meaningful exposure to marginalized groups can elicit more positive evaluations of group members (Bigler et al. 1997; Bigler and Liben 2007). Given that intergroup contact may elicit more fluent processing of targets (Lick and Johnson 2015), interventions aimed at forming bonds that provide an accurate representation of the transgender

community could increase the fluent processing of their gender. Future work may assess if such gains in processing fluency relate to reductions in negative bias.

Supporting this general idea, personal interactions with LGB individuals can foster more positive attitudes toward their rights (Bramlett 2012; Dyck and Pearson-Merkowitz 2014; Herek and Capitanio 1996) in ways that benefit transgender individuals. People who personally know someone who is lesbian or gay, for example, have more positive general attitudes toward transgender people (Norton and Herek 2013). Likewise, people who know at least one transgender person show stronger intentions to engage in collective action for transgender minority issues relative to those who do not (Reimer et al. 2017). One possibility is that these more positive attitudes are related to more conceptual or perceptual fluency in processing transgender individuals because of meaningful contact. Future research may examine how gains in processing fluency might translate to short-term or more long-lasting positive changes in attitudes, endorsements for transgender rights, and combatting anti-transgender legislation.

2.6.2 | Effects of Intersectionality

Another fruitful area of future research regards how target intersectionality affects perceptual and conceptual disfluency in ways that may influence anti-transgender bias. Discrimination is multifaceted, involving interactions between race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender identity. For instance, transgender individuals of color may face intensified discrimination due to the interplay of racial and gender biases, a complexity that cannot be fully understood when these factors are separately considered. Indeed, integrating information about multiple group memberships is a challenging cognitive task, which can lead to categorization fluency issues and the activation of conflicting stereotypes (Kang and Bodenhausen 2015; Petsko et al. 2021).

Conceptual disfluency may occur when individuals do not efficiently process the intersectional nature of a target's identity or do not efficiently and simultaneously process multiple intersecting social categories. Given research showing that race is gendered (Johnson et al. 2012), for example, combinations of race and gender identity may create competing or conflicting expectations that complicate conceptual processing fluency. Disfluency coming from the transgender identity and other intersecting identities could affect the degree to which negative bias is elicited toward transgender targets.

Intersectionality is especially important to acknowledge when considering perceptual disfluency. Perceptual disfluency during person perception can result in more severe biased judgments and harmful behaviors toward individuals with intersecting marginalized identities; for example, transgender Black women experience disproportionately high levels of violence compared to transgender individuals in other racial groups (Williams 2016). One result of targets possessing both a racial minority status and a gender minority status could be enhanced

perceptual disfluency. For example, because Black individuals with darker skin or more racially phenotypic features elicit enhanced negative bias (Blair et al. 2004). Black transgender women with these features may experience may incur more bias. Indeed, prior work demonstrates that prototypically Black features inhibit categorization of Black women within the category of "women" (Lewis et al. 2016; Newton 2023). Investigating perceptual disfluency from the lens of intersectionality may inform why some transgender individuals incur more negative bias and even violence than others.

Addressing this cognitive dissonance may involve prioritizing one category over others (Petsko et al. 2021) or evaluating based on the cumulative effects of perceived group identities (Blake-more and Boneham 1994). Thus, addressing both pathways of disfluency in the context of intersectionality may be crucial for developing a more accurate and holistic understanding of prejudice formation against transgender individuals.

2.7 | Conclusion

This paper reviews the literature on the mechanisms underlying anti-transgender bias and introduces a novel perspective through person perception. By focusing on the role of disfluency in processing transgender individuals, we highlight a gap in understanding how fluency and disfluency affect perceptions. We advocate for future research to explore these factors further. However, it is essential to recognize that reducing anti-transgender bias is an ongoing endeavor that requires sustained effort and commitment from both individuals and society. With this paper, we can hopefully shed light on how disfluency may be a crucial, yet understudied, factor in understanding the mechanisms of anti-transgender bias.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The authors have nothing to report.

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