

# Perceptions of Identity Transitions: Race and Gender not Equally Alterable

Christine M. Smith, Maria Sanchez Rodriguez, & Ashlyn Buckley



## Introduction

Growing acceptance of transgender identities in the absence of parallel shifts regarding race can be perceived as somewhat paradoxical, especially in light of how differently each construct is imagined to be rooted in biology. Perceptions of race and gender as alterable aspects of identity were explored using four identity transition scenarios. Participants' beliefs about identity transitions were dependent upon both the type of transition and political ideology. Results indicate that identity transitions involving gender (both male to female and female to male) and one race transition (white to black) were perceived similarly whereas the black to white transition was perceived as relatively less plausible.

## Method

Participants were randomly assigned to read one of four identity transition scenarios. The scenario's described J, an individual who has transitioned to a new identity following a lifetime of discomfort with an identity assigned at birth, for one of the categories.

- Participants were asked to indicate their belief that the individual within the scenario had genuinely become the identity they had transitioned to.
- Participants provided a rationale for this belief. Two independent individuals coded the rationales (discrepancies resolved by a third).
- Finally participants were classified as right and left leaning using Everett's (2013) social conservatism scale.

**Overall, participants were accepting of all transitions. However, one's gender identity was perceived as a matter of personal choice whereas one's race was perceived as determined by biology and physical characteristics.**

**The boundaries around whiteness were the most heavily policed. Female, Male, and White composed a homogenous set.**

## Results

