A Study of Predictors of Relationship Commitment for Cisgender Female Partners of Transgender/Gender Nonconforming Individuals

Lisa F. Platt, Ph.D.

Abstract

The current study investigates which variables predict commitment among cisgender women currently in a relationship with a transgender-identified partner.

This study includes variables specific to gender diverse couples such as years in the relationship, amount of prior knowledge about transgender identity, and gender role beliefs. Also included are the general relationship factors of satisfaction, quality of alternatives, investment size and the outcome variable of commitment, as described in the Investment Model of Commitment (Rusbult, 1980).

Using convenience sampling from online support groups, the sample was n=137 cisgender female partners.

The findings indicate one’s personal resilience and the number of years in the relationship prior to transition are significantly related to partner commitment, with satisfaction mediating both components do not predict commitment, as described in the Investment Model of Commitment Scale (Rusbult, 1998).

The longer a participant was in the relationship at the time of a gender transition of a partner, the less satisfaction they report, thus reducing commitment to the relationship. Additionally the more personal resilience a partner endorses, the higher the relationship satisfaction, and in turn, more commitment is reported.

The results offer information about factors related to staying in relationships during and after a gender transition.

Method

Participants

- Total participants: n=137
- Cisgender women with a TGNC partner
- Recruited from online social media groups

Measures

- Outcome variables:
  - Investment Model Scale (Rusbult et al., 1998) Commitment
- Predictor variables:
  - Investment Model Scale (Rusbult et al., 1998)
  - Satisfaction, Quality of Alternatives, Investment Size
  - Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al., 2008)
  - Gender Role Belief Scale (Brown et al., 2012)
  - Attitudes Toward Divorce Scale (Whitton, 2013)
  - Knowledge of partner gender identity
  - Years in the relationship
  - Demographic variables as controls in the analyses

Results

- Relationship satisfaction mediates the relationship between years in the relationship and commitment.

- Relationship satisfaction mediates the relationship between personal resilience and commitment.

Conclusions

- Years in the relationship prior to gender transition is negatively associated with satisfaction and commitment.
- One’s personal resilience in times of stress is positively associated with satisfaction and commitment.
- Many other factors including gender role beliefs, attitudes toward divorce, and the other IMS components do not predict commitment.
- Amount of knowledge of a partner’s gender identity at the start of the relationship is also not predictive of commitment.
- Many partners remain committed.

Limitations and Future Directions

- Sample was not diverse; not representative of cisgender, often sexual minority women -Still partnered
- Only one member of the dyad surveyed
- Fluid nature of gender identity/transitions
- Findings point to the need for more in-depth research
- Other dyad types
- Partners who do not remain in the dyad

Key References

