Predictors of Attitudes toward Transgender Men and Women

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Introduction

Although there has been a great deal of research on attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women (Evans & Chapman, 2014; Jewell & Morrison, 2012), researchers have only recently started examining attitudes toward transgender people. Many transgender individuals report feeling rejection, discrimination, victimization, and violence. As a result of such occurrences, transgender individuals have a much higher suicide rate (41%) than the national average of less than 2% (Haas, Rodgers, & Herman, 2014). Transgender women are at a higher risk of violence in public places and have few places where they feel secure (Perry & Dyck, 2014).

Empathy can improve feelings toward stigmatized groups (Batson et al., 1997). The goal of this study was to examine the empathy of participants and demographic variables on attitudes toward transgender individuals. We were further interested in whether a difference existed between attitudes toward transgender men vs. transgender women.

Method

Participants

241 community participants (60% females, M age = 35, SD = 9.26)
215 UNI college participants (61% females, M age = 19, SD = 1.02)

Methods

Participants read one of four vignettes (i.e., a definition of "transgender," a personal story of a transgender female or male, or a control story)

Demographic information

Empathy Toward Transgender Individuals (Batson et al., 1995; 5 items; α = .97, .97)

Vignette

At birth, I was assigned to the male gender, and was named Samuel. When I was young, I didn’t feel комфортable in my own skin. When my parents were dressing me in shirts and shorts, I wanted to wear dresses. I was given toy cars to play with, but found myself wanting to play with Barbie dolls. Before I turned 1, I realized that I was transgender; even though I had the body of a boy, I felt like a girl. In seventh grade, I was told that I was a member of a stigmatized group. I tried to identify as a girl, but I don’t think she would answer if I called.

Results

People who were higher in empathy toward transgender individuals, dispositional empathy, and contemporary critical consciousness had more positive attitudes. Similar attitudes were reported for both transgender men and transgender women.

Discussion

Similar to previous findings on attitudes toward lesbian women and gay men, right wing authoritarianism predicted negative attitudes toward transgender people. In contrast, dispositional and specific empathy predicted positive attitudes toward transgender people. This finding supports previous findings that empathy improves attitudes toward stigmatized groups. A belief in a biological influence on being transgender also predicted positive attitudes toward the population.

UNI college students held slightly more negative attitudes toward transgender people than the community participants. This result could be because the community participants were generally more politically liberal. UNI students (most of whom in this study were first year students in their first semester) may also have limited experience with transgender individuals, which could result in more negative attitudes.

Educational programs implemented at the high school level promoting awareness and an understanding that being transgender is biologically influenced may help to reduce prejudice.

References


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