Predictors of Attitudes toward Transgender Men and Women

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Introduction

Although there has been a good 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 effects of empathy and personality/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

This study examined whether induced empathy affected attitudes toward transgender individuals, as well as personality and demographic variables related to those attitudes. Across two samples, participants who were higher in empathy and contemporary consciousness and lower in right wing authoritarianism held more positive attitudes. Similar attitudes were reported for both transgender men and transgender women.

Results

- People who were higher in empathy toward transgender individuals, dispositional empathy, and contemporary consciousness, and lower in right wing authoritarianism held more positive attitudes toward transgender men and women (Table 1).
- There were no differences in empathy or attitudes by condition in either sample, suggesting that the vignettes did not influence attitudes (Table 2).
- The community sample was higher on dispositional empathy (M = 5.06, SD = 7.67 vs. M = 4.91, SD = 6.23), t(22) = 3.23, p < .01, and current consciousness (M = 6.50, SD = 3.50 vs. M = 4.28, SD = 3.88), t(30) = 3.09, p < .01, transgender woman comfort, transgender man comfort, and sex/gender beliefs (Table 2).
- The UNI sample was higher on right-wing authoritarianism (M = 3.62, SD = 7.7 vs. M = 2.95, SD = 1.35), t(67) = 67.02, p < .001, social dominance orientation (M = 2.89, SD = 1.92 vs. M = 2.41, SD = 1.35), t(41) = 4.10, p < .001, and Christian orthodoxy (M = 5.5, SD = 1.63 vs. M = 3.86, SD = 2.24), t(86) = 3.81, p < .001.
- There were no significant differences between the community and UNI samples for human value (Table 2).

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 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 were students in their first semester) may also have limited experience with transgender populations, which can 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.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Trans Woman</th>
<th>Trans Man</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Sex and Gender</th>
<th>Beliefs</th>
<th>Human Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empathy toward Transit Gender</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>0.42***</td>
<td>0.21***</td>
<td>0.34***</td>
<td>0.22***</td>
<td>0.33***</td>
<td>0.29***</td>
<td>0.33***</td>
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<td>Empathy Scale</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>0.15*</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.30**</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.01</td>
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<td>Transgender Identity</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christian Orthodoxy Scale</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
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<td>Political Orientation</td>
<td>Community</td>
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<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
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<td>RWA</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>-0.23**</td>
<td>-0.25**</td>
<td>-0.31**</td>
<td>-0.24*</td>
<td>-0.20**</td>
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<td>SD07</td>
<td>Community</td>
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<td>CCC</td>
<td>Community</td>
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<td>-0.12</td>
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<td>-0.18</td>
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<td>Community</td>
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<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
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<td>-0.01</td>
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<td>RP</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>0.08***</td>
<td>0.49, 65</td>
<td>0.84***</td>
<td>0.47, 64</td>
<td>0.77***</td>
<td>0.71, 80</td>
<td>0.86***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adjusted RP</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.35</td>
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<tr>
<td>ρ &lt; .05, * p &lt; .01, *** p &lt; .001; Higher Political Orientation = Liberal; Higher Biology = Due to biology</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

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