Reactions to Online Dating Profiles

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ABSTRACT

To date, the implicit and explicit biases about transgender individuals have not been effectively studied. To address the lack of literature, two studies were conducted. Experiment 1 utilized participants (*N* = 14) to determine the perceived masculinity and femininity of dating profile photos and dating profile autobiographies. Photos that were rated neutral and low in masculinity and femininity and autobiographies that were rated high, neutral, and low in masculinity and femininity were extracted to construct dating profiles for Experiment 2. Experiment 2 examined the effects of picture stereotypicality (low and neutral) and profile stereotypicality (low, neutral, high) to determine participants' (*N* = 599) explicit bias of transgender individuals using the social distance scale. Participants completed the Go/No-Go Association Task to determine their implicit biases on transgender individuals. Significant effects were found between profile stereotypicality and type of transition (FTM and MTF) on social distance and perceived attractiveness. No significant correlation was found between implicit bias and explicit bias.

INTRODUCTION

- The present study is focused on determining if the level of stereotypicality (pictures and profiles) affects self-reported social distance and implicit bias of transgender individuals.
  - Those who violate societal gender norms are more likely to be judged by society based on their physical attributes (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990), especially if the individuals in question are transgender (Gehardstein & Anderson, 2010; Madson, 2002; Rogers & Ritter, 2002).
  - Transgender is defined as people who have gender identities, expressions, or behaviors that differ from their birth sex (Combs, 2014; Flores et al., 2018; Gender Education and Advocacy, 2001; King, Winter, & Webster, 2009).
  - Transgender individuals are regular victims of discrimination (Gazzola & Morrison, 2014; Lombardi, 2009; Hill & Willoughby, 2010) and prejudice (King et al., 2009), which negatively impact them in terms healthcare (Grant, Mottet, & Tanis, 2010) and housing (Budge, Tebbe, & Howard, 2010).
  - In general, the transgender community is describe as being confused, abnormal, gay/lesbian, mentally ill, freak, outcast, and they stand out like a sore thumb (Gazzola, 2012; Gazzola & Morrison, 2014). However, there are different stereotypes associated with transwomen and transmen.
    - All stereotypes for transwomen and transmen in the present study are framed in relation to cisgender individuals.
  - Explicit bias refers to the conscious beliefs and attitudes individuals possess about specific people or groups (McConnel & Leibold, 2001). In the present study, I measured participants' explicit bias using an adapted social distance scale (Mannarini & Boffo, 2015).
  - Implicit bias is based upon the assumption that subconscious associations exist towards the characteristics of individuals (Greenwald, McGhee, & Shwartz, 1998).
  - Due to the inconsistency presented by the IAT, the Go/No-Go Association Task(GNAT) was used to determine implicit bias.

HYPOTHESES

- Participants would display a negative implicit bias towards transgender individuals.
- Male participants would have a stronger negative bias toward transgender individuals than would female participants.
- Male participants were expected to report greater social distance than female participants, however in the present study, participant gender and the gender of the target are confounded due to the fact the majority of participants were heterosexual, so it is unclear how much of this difference would be attributable to the gender of the participant or the type of transition (MTF or FTM).
- There would be greatest social distance in the low stereotypical profiles followed by neutral and then high stereotypical profile. There will be greater social distance in the neutral stereotypical picture condition than in the high stereotypical picture condition. Social distance was greatest between low stereotypical profile autobiographies and high stereotypical profile autobiographies in low stereotypical transgender picture condition than in the neutral stereotypical transgender picture condition.

METHOD

Participants

- Undergraduate students – 37 participants
  - 30 women and 7 men
  - Between the ages of 18 - 22 (*M* = 20.32, *SD* = 1.06)
  - Predominantly Caucasian (89.2%)
- Amazon Mechanical Turk – 562 participants
  - 235 women and 327 men
  - Between the ages of 19 and 67 (*M* = 25.52, *SD* = 9.89)
  - 60.3% Caucasian, 27.4% African American, 7.7% Hispanic, 6.6% Asian, and 1.8% other

Materials & Design

- Picture stereotypicality and profile stereotypicality were derived from the findings of Gazzola (2012), Gazzola and Morrison (2014), and the results of Experiment 1.
- The profiles were constructed based on an adaptation from Alhabash, Hales, Beck, and Oh (2014) using the traits derived from Experiment 1.
- Participants were randomly assigned to the order in which they viewed six different dating profiles in a 2(picture stereotypicality: low and neutral) x 3(profile stereotypicality: low, neutral, high) x 2(target transition: FTM or MTF) mixed subjects design wherein target transition was the between subjects factor.
- Participants were asked to rate the target's attractiveness and complete a social distance scale adapted from Mannarini and Boffo (2015). Participants reported their willingness or reluctance to talk with, go on a date, and pursue a romantic relationship with the target on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *Extremely Unwilling* to 7 = *Extremely Willing*).
- To determine the participant's implicit biases, they completed the Go/No-Go Association Task. Nosek and Benaji (2001) developed the Go/No-Go Association Task (GNAT) to measure the implicit attitudes or beliefs by assessing the strength of association between a target category and two poles of an attribute dimension (e.g. good-bad).

Procedure

- Student participants accessed the link to the project during scheduled sessions. Participants recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk accessed the link to the project at their own convenience.
- Participants granted their informed consent and read instructions regarding the tasks they would be performing.
- Participants completed demographic information (age, gender, ethnic background, and sexual orientation).
- Participants were randomly assigned to six different potential dating profiles appropriate for their self-reported gender and sexual orientation.
- Participants then completed the social distance questions as if they were not in a committed, monogamous relationship.
- Finally, participants completed the GNAT before being debriefed and compensated. Undergraduate participants received extra credit from their professor, if it was offered. Participants from Amazon Mechanical Turk were compensated $1.

RESULTS

- A 2x3x2 between subjects MANOVA was used to calculate the effects of picture stereotypicalty (neutral, high), profile stereotypicality (low, neutral high)and transition type (FTM, MTF) on social distance and perceived attractiveness.
- Social distance was calculated using the average score of the social distance scale and perceived attractiveness was calculated using the score of the attractiveness question.
- Social Distance
  - Social distance was greater for MTF transgender individuals (*M* = 14.10, *SD* = 8.03) than FTM transgender individuals (*M* = 11.24, *SD* = 9.94); $F(1, 599) = 101.22$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.30$.
  - Differences in social distance were not found between low (*M* = 12.90, *SD* = 5.73), neutral (*M* = 12.84, *SD* = 5.54), and high (*M* = 12.53, *SD* = 5.62) profiles; $F(1, 599) = 1.41$, $p = .25$.
  - As shown in Figure 1, the difference in social distance between FTM and MTF transitions was smaller in the neutral stereotyped profiles than in the low and high stereotyped profiles; $F(1, 599) = 4.44$, $p = 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$.
  - There was no significant interaction between profile stereotypicality and picture stereotypicality on social distance; $F(1, 599) = 0.61$, $p = .54$, $\eta_p^2 < 0.001$.
- Perceived Attractiveness
  - Perceived attractiveness was greater for high stereotypical picture profiles (*M* = 5.16, *SD* = 1.66) than neutral stereotypical picture profiles (*M* = 4.19, *SD* = 2.35); $F(1, 599) = 7.46$, $p = < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$.
  - Differences in perceived attractiveness were not found between low (*M* = 4.69, *SD* = 1.62), neutral (*M* = 4.68, *SD* = 1.61), and high (*M* = 4.72, *SD* = 1.59) profile stereotypicality conditions; $F(1, 599) = 0.19$, $p = .83$, $\eta_p^2 < 0.001$.
  - As shown in Figure 2, the difference in perceived attractiveness between FTM and MTF transitions was greater in the low stereotyped profiles than in the neutral and high stereotyped profiles; $F(1, 599) = 116.96$, $p = < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.34$.
  - There was no significant interaction between profile stereotypicality and picture stereotypicality on perceived attractiveness; $F(1, 599) = 0.72$, $p = .49$, $\eta_p^2 < 0.001$.
- A Pearson correlation was used to evaluate the relationship between implicit bias and explicit bias. No significant correlation between implicit bias and social distance was found; $r(599) = -0.01$, $p = .87$.

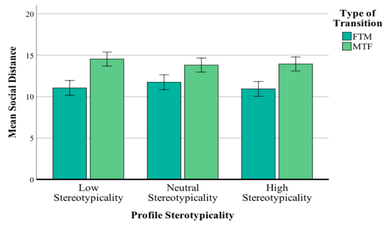


Figure 1. Mean Social Distance for Low, Neutral, and High Profile Stereotypicality by Type of Transition. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals of the means.

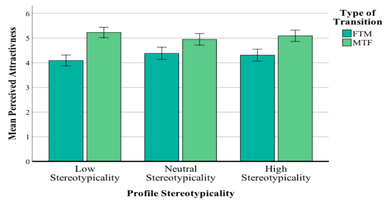
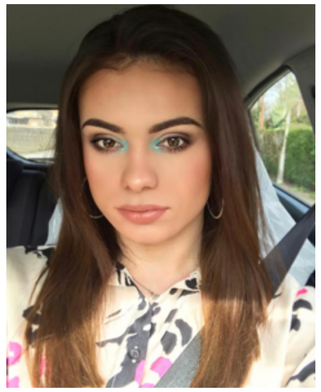


Figure 2. Mean Perceived Attractiveness for Low, Neutral, and High Profile Stereotypicality by Type of Transition. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals of the means.

Examples of Dating Profile

Picture: Neutral Stereotype
Profile: High Stereotype

Name: Alex
Age: 20
Occupation: Student
About Me:
I am currently looking for a seriously relationship. I am extremely strong. I am usually listening to AC/DC. My favorite hobby is restoring cars. When I am not restoring cars, I like to watch Breaking Bad.



Picture: Low Stereotype
Profile: Neutral Stereotype

Name: Riley
Age: 20
Occupation: Student
About Me:
I love to run. My favorite TV show would have to be The Office. I enjoy listening Coldplay. My friends would describe me as dependable. Overall, I'm looking for someone who is interested in a committed relationship.

DISCUSSION

Findings

- Greater social distance was found in MTF transgender profiles than in FTM transgender profiles
  - In line with previous research (Gazzola, 2012; Gazzola & Morrison, 2014)
  - MTF individuals are less socially accepted than FTM individuals (Gazzola, 2012; Miller & Grollman, 2015), which explains why participants were less willing to interact with MTF transgender individuals
  - However, participant gender was a confounding variable

Limitations of Present Study

- Pilot study did not receive an adequate number of participants
- Majority of participants were heterosexual
- The pictures, characteristics, and hobbies were found online through an internet search

Future Research

- Conduct a more extensive pilot test
- Using more strongly gendered pictures, characteristics, and hobbies to create a variation in perceived femininity and masculinity

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