

# Transgender and attitudes essay sample



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## Abstract

Because of the dominant societal standard of gender as a binary construct, the emerging visibility of the transgender population (including transsexuals and cross-dressers) remains a politically and emotionally charged social issue. Unchecked negative attitudes toward transgender persons may result in transphobia as well as discriminatory treatment of transgender individuals. Few studies have examined the predictors of attitudes toward transgender persons. The purpose of the present study was to better understand attitudes toward transgender individuals through an identification of some of the variables that predict these attitudes, namely religiosity, gender role beliefs, homophobia, contact experiences, and causal attribution.

Measures of religiosity, attitudes toward transgender individuals, attitudes toward women, attitudes toward gays and lesbians, contact experience, causal attribution, and social desirability were administered to 45 undergraduate students at Far Eastern University.

A qualitative survey analysis revealed that high levels of religiosity, traditional beliefs about the roles of women, homophobic attitudes toward lesbians and gay men, and a lack of exposure to transgender individuals appeared to predict negative attitudes toward transgender people. Furthermore, contact with transgender people and attribution of the cause of transgender identities to biological rather than social factors were both related to more positive attitudes.

Perceptions and Attitudes of  
Far Eastern University Students  
towards Transgender People

An increasingly visible community of self-identified transgender individuals has helped to heighten the awareness of the societal marginalization and hostility that this population faces. The transgender population is comprised of a multitude of identities and forms of self-expression that transgress the established gender categories of “ male” and “ female.” The term “ transgender” includes transsexual (individuals who identify with a gender different from that which is biologically assigned). Transsexual individuals may or may not opt to pursue surgical or hormonal interventions to change their physical appearance. Also included in the “ transgender” category are cross dressers (individuals who prefer to dress in clothing traditionally worn by the opposite gender; this term is preferred to “ transvestites”).

Additionally, drag kings and drag queens, and individuals who identify as “ genderqueer” fall within the category of “ transgender” (Beemyn, 2003). Although these specific conceptualizations of gender variance and their corresponding nomenclature are modern, the challenge of gender norms has existed across many different cultures and time periods. However, current political activism and awareness have resulted in an emergent consciousness surrounding transgender issues. Consequently, an increasing visibility of individuals who transgress traditional notions of gender now exists. This growing awareness of transgender issues is evident in a number of aspects of Philippine culture, most visibly so in popular culture, the media and the political realm.

Examples of mainstream attention to transgender concerns include television programs such as *Gandang Gabi Vice* and *The Bottomline* that have portrayed transgender, transsexual and cross-dressing characters and subjects, oftentimes in sensitive and realistic ways. Political parties that represent LGBTQ rights such as *Ang Ladad* are increasing visibility in the media. Furthermore, mainstream media sources have covered transgender issues in an increasingly positive manner. Moreover, a growing number of individuals are choosing to vocally proclaim their identities as transgender.

The recent coming out of Rustom Padilla as BB Gandanghari for instance was a landmark moment to individuals in the gender minority. These examples indeed illustrate an evolution in the modern conceptualization of gender. However, because of the dominant societal paradigm of gender as a binary construct, the transgression of the male-female dichotomy has historically, and continues to engender considerable social controversy. The emerging visibility of the transgender community is a politically and emotionally charged issue, the polemics of which have often resulted in transphobia as well as unchecked discriminatory treatment of transgender individuals (Norton, 1997).

The sparse literature that addresses transgender concerns provides rather mixed data on the nature of the attitudes toward the transgender community, and the discrimination that transgender persons face. While many studies seem to be consistent with the notion that the transgender community is a target of much prejudice and discrimination (Gagné, P. & Tewksbury, R., 1998), other research has suggested a surprising acceptance of transgender individuals within non-transgender society (Rye & Elmslie, <https://assignbuster.com/transgender-and-attitudes-essay-sample/>

2001). Such inconsistent results may be due to a number of issues, including diverse range of identities under the umbrella of “transgender,” or the existence of a small, albeit vocal force of people extremely negative toward transgender persons. In better understanding the nature of the attitudes that fuel the societal marginalization that transgender individuals face, it may be useful to determine the variables that predict such attitudes.

Because there has been so little research in this area, determining appropriate predictor variables requires an examination of the literature on predictors of attitudes toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals. Based on this research, it appears that authoritarianism, religiosity, exposure to gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons, genetic causation attribution, as well as gender role attitudes and gender role orientation are useful variables to examine in predicting attitudes towards gay, lesbian, and bisexual people (Schwartz & Lindley, 2005; Tygart, 2000). Review of Literature

While copious literature exists on gay, lesbian, and bisexual concerns, very little research has been devoted specifically to transgender issues, particularly in the area of attitudes and discrimination. This section will review the extant literature on transgender issues, specifically on the topic of transgender identity. Because very little empirical research exists that specifically addresses attitudes toward transgender individuals, studies examining the predictors of attitudes toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals will be reviewed, thereby elucidating the conceptual and methodological underpinnings of the current study. Finally, the purposes and the hypotheses of the present study will be presented.

## Transgender Identity and Identity Formation

In order to best understand the nature of attitudes toward transgender individuals it is first important to define and describe the components of the transgender identity, and to understand some of the complexities of identity formation. For the purposes of this study, “transgender” is defined as an umbrella term for individuals whose selfidentification transgresses established gender categories of male and female. This term includes transsexuals, cross-dressers, drag kings and queens, and gender queers. First, transsexuals are individuals whose internal sense of gender differs from their biological sex.

Transsexuals may or may not pursue medical or hormonal treatment in order to change their outward appearance to match their internal identity. Second, cross-dressers are individuals who, for a wide variety of reasons, dress in clothing typically worn by the opposite gender. Third, drag queens and drag kings are individuals who, for the purpose of entertainment dress as the other gender.

Fourth, gender queers, are individuals who may not identify as male or female, as they feel their gender transcends the gender binary (Beemyn, 2003; Lev, 2004). Given the diversity of identities encompassed by “transgender,” it is impossible to develop a monolithic model of identity formation that would be appropriate for all transgender individuals. However, some attempts have been made to better understand some of the factors influencing transgender identity. For instance, Gagné, Tewksbury, and McGaughey (1997) examined the social pressures that influence transgender

identity formation through exploration of the coming-out experiences of transgender individuals.

Findings indicated that among the participants, social pressures to conform to the gender binary were experienced as desires for relationship maintenance and selfpreservation. This study identified the paradox that, in coming out as the opposite gender, transgender individuals reinforce and reify the very binary system of gender they hope to change. This conceptualization of the struggle experienced by transgender individuals is helpful in understanding the power dynamics of gender, and challenging the traditional notions of sex and gender (Gagné, Tewksbury, & McGaughey, 1997; Gagné & Tewksbury, 1998).

Much of the research on the identities and experiences of transgender individuals has been done through case studies of individuals. In a chapter entitled Gender Variance and Formation of the Self, Ettner (1999) explored the similarities between experiences of identity formation among transgender individuals. Using a case study of a male-to-female transsexual (an individual born male, but who identifies as female) as an example, she identified common struggles that most transgender individuals face in their development, finding three themes of hiding, guilt and shame.

Hiding describes transgender individuals' rejection of their true feelings of gender difference because of the need for acceptance and the desire to appear " normal." Because of these forces, many transgender individuals may deny their feelings of difference, and often assume traditional gender roles to hide these feelings. Guilt arises from the perceived notion of hurting

others by being different, and shame is the affective manifestation of that guilt (Ettner, 1999). The shame and guilt that many transgender individuals experience is often at the core of their psychological distress.

### Purposes of the Present Study

The above studies provide confirmatory support that religiosity, gender belief systems, genetic causal attribution, and exposure to gay and lesbian individuals are significant predictors of attitudes toward gay men and lesbians. Because of the similarities between sexual orientation and gender identities, it can be hypothesized that factors contributing to social attitudes toward gays and lesbians may apply to attitudes toward transgender individuals. Using this rationale, the present study examined whether religiosity, gender role beliefs, attitudes toward gays and lesbians, causal attribution and exposure to transgender individuals predicted attitudes toward transgender people.

The primary goal of this study was to gather information that will be used to better understand attitudes towards transgender individuals, both in the “straight” and “gay” communities in Far Eastern University through an identification of some of the variables that predict these attitudes, namely religiosity, gender role beliefs, homophobia, and contact experiences. Specifically, the goal of this study was to examine and understand potential differences that exist in attitudes towards transgender people held by Far Eastern University students.

### Participants and Procedure



We selected students from different institutes in Far Eastern University and asked them to take a survey on their perceptions and attitudes towards transgender people. We used a qualitative survey questionnaire to analyze the views of the students who took the survey. We selected at least (10) respondents with varied gender identities per institute to participate in the study. Measures of religiosity, attitudes toward transgender individuals, attitudes toward women, attitudes toward gays, lesbians, bisexuals and queer people, contact experience, and social desirability were administered to 45 undergraduate students at Far Eastern University. 36 out of the 45 students that we have surveyed are Catholics. When asked about how they feel towards transgender people, the results showed:

Majority of those who answered negative in the questionnaire are Catholic students. The survey analysis revealed that high levels of religiosity appeared to predict negative attitudes towards transgender people. In this case, it is because the Catholic Church teaches that our gender identity is stamped onto our being both physically and spiritually. Few university students are personally acquainted with transgender people. In fact, when we did the survey, we found out that only 6. 6% (n= 45) reported having knowingly met a transgender person while 86. 6% reported knowing a gay or lesbian person.

Students thus report having had relatively fewer experiences with transgender people. The questions “ Have you ever teased a man because of his feminine appearance or behavior?” and “ Have you ever teased a woman because of her masculine appearance and behavior?” tested the attitude

that they have when meeting a transgender or transsexual person. The results are as follows:

Prejudice against transgender people are unfortunately all too common in our society and transgender individuals are often met with discrimination and prejudice when they express their gender identity. The graph above shows that most of the people who belong to the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer community suffer from a great deal of discrimination perpetuated by friends, schoolmates, classmates, strangers and even by their own families.

A surprising finding from the survey showed that 13.3% of respondents even reported beating up a person simply because he or she belongs to gender minorities such as gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender, queers and intersex. Transwomen or male-to-female persons and gay men struggle the most when it comes to bullying and hate attacks. Transmen and lesbians suffer from the latter but in a slightly lesser degree.

Lesbians in particular suffer high levels of discrimination, due to the dominance of conservative values and expectations which exert pressure on women to get married and have children. But Gay men suffer more from abhorrence and homophobic violence. That is because Filipino men are bound by the macho standard of Philippine society. In the survey, we asked if the respondents could ever accept an offspring who identifies as being transgender, the results show:

However, when asked about their view on the statement about having a classmate or a close friend being a transgender, they came up with more positive responses as shown on the graph below:

The implication of this is that even though the society in status quo is more open to people who are transgendered, it is still hard to accept people who undergo such transitions when it comes to sex especially if it is a member of our family. The survey shows that 75% of the respondents believe that sex change is morally wrong. Living in a conservative country and the church being a major sub factor in developing our views and perceptions on these issues makes it even more difficult to accept or acknowledge gender minorities. Maddison Park in a CNN interview said “ When children insist that their gender doesn’t match their body, it can trigger a confusing, painful odyssey for the family.

And most of the time, these families face isolating experiences trying to decide what is best for their kids, especially because transgender issues are viewed as mysterious, and loaded with stigma and judgment.” That could explain why most people would still prefer not having a transgender child. In final data analysis, the lack of understanding and contact with sexual minorities may contribute to the formation of negative attitudes and assumptions towards transgender people. The societal gender binary says that a man is masculine and a woman is feminine, and ultimately creates a stigma against anything that deviates from that standard.

Conclusion

Transgender people are generally tolerated, if not accepted, here in the Philippines, but widespread discrimination still exists. An enormous amount of transgender people are discriminated, ridiculed and assaulted simply because of who they are. Because of patriarchy, the Philippine society allows greater space for women regarding gender expression which explains the data obtained on the subject of lesbians and female-to-male persons being more accepted than gay men and male-to-female persons. Nevertheless, since being a female-to-male person is strongly linked with being a lesbian/homosexual the risk is still very high, for our society is strongly influenced by Christian doctrine. As mentioned earlier, the contemporary view about transgender people in the Philippines is that they are just homosexuals who cross-dress, and/or change their sex.

Because of this, the prejudice, discrimination, and marginalization that they encounter stems from their assumed homosexuality and violation of gender norms not to mention the aggravation of this as contributed by their class status. The survey analysis revealed that high levels of religiosity, traditional beliefs about the roles of women, homophobic attitudes toward gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and queer people, and a lack of exposure to transgender individuals appeared to predict negative attitudes toward transgender people.

Furthermore, contact with transgender people and attribution of the cause of transgender identities to biological rather than social factors were both related to more positive attitudes. Using survey data, the present study describes the correlates of men's and women's attitudes toward transgender people. General feelings toward transgender people were strongly correlated

with attitudes toward gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and queer people, but were significantly less favorable. Attitudes toward transgender individuals were more negative among heterosexual men than women. Negative attitudes were associated with endorsement of a binary conception of gender; political conservatism, and religiosity; and lack of personal contact with gender and sexual minorities.

In final data analysis, sexual prejudice accounted for much of the variance in transgender attitudes, but respondent gender, educational level, and religiosity remained significant predictors with sexual prejudice statistically controlled. While there is much more work to be done in fully understanding social attitudes toward transgender issues, especially in a predominantly Christian and partly Muslim country such as the Philippines, the present study has identified some significant predictors of these attitudes. As the transgender population continues to gain visibility in society, it will become increasingly important to understand these attitudes in order to address transphobia in an informed and effective manner.

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