



# Too Close for Comfort: The Moderating Role of Essentialism in Transprejudice

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## Introduction

### Vocabulary Lesson

- **Transgender** is defined as encompassing those whose gender identity does not match the gender assigned to them at birth, commonly referred to as someone's sex.
- **Transwoman** is an individual who was identified at birth as a man but now identifies as a woman.
- **Transman** is an individual who was identified at birth as a woman but now identifies as a man.
- **Cis-** is a prefix applied when discussing an individual whose birth sex and gender identity are congruous.

### Transprejudice

- Transgender prejudice, or transprejudice, is the negative valuing or biased treatment of transgender or other gender-variant individuals (King, Winter, & Webster, 2009).
- Transgender individuals report higher than average rates of discrimination in the workplace, healthcare institutions, and at home (Grant et al., 2011).

### Essentialism

- Essentialism has been linked to stereotype endorsement (Bastian & Haslam, 2006), as well as denial of rights to transgender individuals (Tee & Hegarty, 2006).
- Essentialism, based upon entity theory, states that individuals ascribe observable traits to biological causes, and overall see these observable traits as discrete, biological, immutable, and informative of other characteristics (Bastian & Haslam, 2006).

## Hypothesis

We predict that those participants who endorse essentialist beliefs more strongly will express less comfort toward a transgender individual than those participants who endorse essentialist beliefs less strongly.

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## Method

- 305 participants recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (158 women, 147 men; 76% White) participated in exchange for .30 cents credited to their Amazon account.
- Participants read one of four vignettes about a fictitious Cisgender or Transgender student.
- In the *Transgender* conditions, vignettes described a male or female student who began transitioning to the other gender earlier in the year (e.g., a student identifying as a woman who was born a male).
- In the *Cisgender* conditions, vignettes described a male or female student with no apparent gender identity / birth sex inconsistency.
- All vignettes discussed John/Joan's engagement to Theresa/Thomas, respectively, to separate transgender from homosexuality in the minds of the participants.

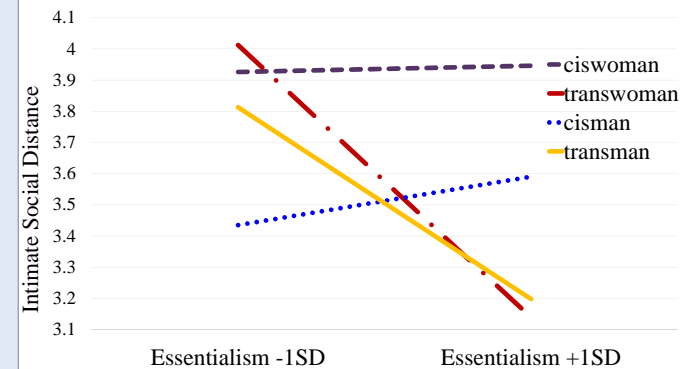
### Measures

- Essentialism Scale ( $\alpha = .65$ ): 9-item, 6-point Likert scale adapted from Bastian & Haslam's (2006) Essentialism Index.
  - Higher scores indicate stronger essentialist beliefs.
  - "It is possible to know about many aspects of a person once you become familiar with a few of their basic traits."
  - "The kind of person someone is can be largely attributed to their genetic inheritance."
- Intimate Social Distance ( $\alpha = .83$ ): 2-item 6-point Likert scale.
  - Higher scores indicate greater comfort.
  - "I would feel comfortable with this person using the same bathroom as me."
  - "I would feel comfortable with this person using the same locker room as me."

## Results

- The interaction between category (transgender or cisgender) and essentialism was a statistically significant predictor,  $\beta = .279, p < .001$
- The effect of essentialism on comfort with transgender individuals was statistically significant,  $\beta = -.356, p < .001$
- The effect of essentialism on comfort with cisgender individuals was not statistically significant,  $\beta = .057, p = .486$ .

Figure 1. The effect of essentialism on comfort with target by condition.



## Summary & Discussion

- Essentialism moderated the comfort level an individual has with transgender individuals. Those who endorse essentialist beliefs are more likely to feel uncomfortable around transgender individuals than those who do not.
- This pattern did not differ by participant gender.
- Future research can investigate the links between essentialism and transprejudice further:
  - Would modifying endorsement of essentialism change their comfort level with transgender individuals?
  - Should essentialist belief items be included in measures of transgender prejudice?

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