Correlation Between Attitudes Towards LGBTQ+ and Gender-Neutral Bathrooms

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Abstract
This study was designed to examine the relationship between the attitudes towards LGBTQ+ and attitudes toward gender-neutral bathrooms. Participants (N=95) took an online questionnaire made up of two parts—a survey to measure attitudes towards LGBTQ+ and a survey to measure attitudes towards gender-neutral bathrooms. The correlation between the mean ratings for each questionnaire was found to be significant at r (85) = 0.640, p < 0.01. These results show that, as expected, a correlation exists between people’s attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals and gender-neutral bathrooms. This data can be used to improve the lives of people from various sexual and gender identities on college campuses, work spaces, etc.

Introduction
In trying to abolish oppression and discrimination of certain groups and minorities, we must study the way in which people tend to discriminate against them. We must also continuously study the attitudes and behaviors of those who discriminate, and try to understand why they do what they do. One of the groups that are still largely isolated within many societies around the world today is the group of LGBTQ+ members. LGBTQ+ is an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning, and others. It refers to a population of people united by having gender identities or sexual orientations that differ from the heterosexual and cisgender majority.

Different terminology has been used to describe the negative attitudes or prejudice against LGBTQ+. The term “homophobia” has often been used to talk about negative attitudes towards homosexuals specifically. According to Dinesh (2010) on page 456 of his literature review, there has been some debate on how this term has been used, as stated: "Luthe (1976), ... suggests that homophobia is a socially determined prejudice rather than a medically recognized phobia." Dinesh (2010) also states: "Luthe (1976) differentiates between homophobia and homosocietalism—the former being a characteristic of individuals, who are rigid and sexist whereas the latter can exist in homosexuals and those who are personally not afraid of homosexuality." homophobia can be differentiated from homosocietalism in the sense that homophobia is an individual’s trait that is rigid and sexist, while homosocietalism is a trait of a population or group that are not necessarily afraid of homosexuals.

Dinesh, (2010). Negative attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals have been studied and investigated by many researchers, who have created different scales to measure attitudes that indicate the existence of such prejudices, and the extents of their impact. These scales have developed and changed a lot in time, where the older ones (Hansen, 1982) ask the questions in a manner that seemed more direct and less filtered, compared to newer measures (Curtis, 2004). This could show that prejudice against homosexuals has become less explicit, and more subtle over time.

According to an article by Messinger (2009), there have been improvements around the USA, especially within college and university campuses, regarding the issues of discrimination against LGBTQ individuals. These improvements include more gender-neutral facilities, and access to a variety of supportive resources. However, as the article states, “the institutions listed by the Human Rights Campaign (those actively improving the conditions for LGBTQ+ individuals that were investigated in this research) make up less than 8 percent of the more than four thousand accredited institutions of higher education in the United States. Placing these data in a wider universe, then, complicates first glance optimism” (Messinger, 2009, p. 27).

According to research on transgender issues on college campuses, “some of the most dangerous places on many campuses for transgender students are locker rooms and locker rooms designated for “women” and “men” (Beemyn, Curtis, Davis &Tabb, 2005, p. 55). The dangers include physical and verbal assaults, as well as confrontation and being questioned. In an attempt to improve the lives of members of the LGBTQ+ community, gender-neutral bathrooms are becoming more and more common, and many colleges are initiating the necessary change on their campuses.

According to a meta-analysis conducted on the effects of contact on sexual prejudice, under certain circumstances, the level of intercultural contact could have an impact on sexual prejudice, specifically: the more contact heterosexuals have with homosexuals, the lower amounts of sexual prejudices they exhibited towards them (Smith, Axwell, & Saucier, 2009). This would suggest that through having gender-neutral bathrooms, the authorities would be signaling their approval and support of the members of the LGBTQ+ community, and hence promoting their interaction and contact with the rest of the society.

I hypothesized that there would exist a positive correlation between negative attitudes towards gender-neutral bathrooms, and prejudice against LGBTQ+ individuals. To test this hypothesis, I have created two scales. The first one measures the degree of negative attitudes towards LGBTQ+ members. The other was created to measure negative attitudes towards the gender-neutral restrooms.

Each participant will answer both questionnaires, in an online form.

Method
Participants
A convenience sample of 85 participants took part in my research by taking my survey, which was posted on social media (Facebook,) and they volunteered to take it. 76.0% of the sample indicated females, 23.5% males, 1.2% agender, 1.2% non binary and 1.2% queer. The ages of my sample ranged from 18 to 50 years old, and the average age of the sample was 21.8 years. Data of participants under 18 years old was excluded from the research. 56.5% of the sample were Caucasian, 24.7% were Middle Eastern, 5.5% were African American, 5.6% were Asian, 2.4% were Male, 1.2% were African, 1.2% were Armenian, 1.2% were Asian American, 1.2% were Brazilian, 1.2% were Native American and 1.2% were Non Hispanic/ Latino White.

Materials
The questionnaire had 22 questions, some of which were meant to estimate prejudice against homosexuality (and/or LGBTQ+ individuals), for example “If I find out that my friend is LGBTQ+, I would still be their friend, ”, and others were meant to measure attitudes towards gender-neutral bathrooms, for example “I do not feel comfortable using a gender-neutral bathroom.” The questionnaire items had a 1 to 5 Likert response scale (1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree).

Procedure
Participants who volunteered to take it clicked the link and were presented with an informed consent page. Once they have accepted and moved on to the next page, a page explaining the term LGBTQ+ appeared. The participants should have read it, moved on to the next page, and been presented with the questionnaire questions. The survey took approximately 10 minutes. Once they had answered all the questions, they answered some questions on demographics, including gender, age, ethnicity and sexual orientation identity. Once they were completely finished, they were presented with a debriefing form. They did not experience any stress or dangers taking this survey.

Results
Participants completed the questionnaires online, answering a total of 22 questions and four demographic questions. The questionnaire items were all on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (meaning strongly disagree) to 5 (meaning strongly agree). When running a reliability analysis of the questionnaires, I found that some items needed to be reverse scored, and those were the questions that were stated in a negative tone, or showed a negative attitude, towards both LGBTQ+ and gender-neutral bathrooms. A mean attitude score was computed for each scale by averaging participants’ responses on the 12 and 10-item measures after reverse-scoring the appropriate items. I ran reliability analysis for each questionnaire, which resulted in a Cronbach Alpha r =0.880 for the attitudes towards LGBTQ+ questionnaire, and a Cronbach Alpha r =0.870 for the attitudes towards gender-neutral bathrooms questionnaire. Deleting some questionnaire items from each scale helped increase the Cronbach Alpha and further enhanced these results. Furthermore, the results indicated a significant correlation of r(85)=0.640,p<0.01. As Figure (1) below shows, this correlation can be seen in the scatter plot by the concentration of dots around the line. The graph also indicates that overall, participants showed more positive regards and attitudes towards both questionnaires, which is a reassuring and optimistic thing.

Discussion
The hypothesis of this research was to find a correlation between the attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals and communities, and the attitudes towards gender-neutral bathrooms. The results clearly indicated that a pattern does exist between the two, and that they are correlated. This finding supports my hypothesis, and can have many implications. One way this knowledge can be used to enhance the lives of LGBTQ+ individuals in the broader communities is through encouraging communities to provide these gender-neutral bathrooms explaining that the positive correlation can be expected to go both ways. Hopefully, having these gender-neutral bathrooms, and becoming accustomed and normalized to their presence, can help communities also become accustomed to LGBTQ+ members existing amongst them. This gender-neutral bathrooms can become a symbol of inclusiveness of LGBTQ+ in the larger society, which can encourage real interactions between the LGBTQ+ community members and the “gender-normal” majority.

Further investigation can be made to understand the individuals who are not comfortable with gender-neutral bathrooms, and what their refusal of them can lead to. It seems highly likely that these individuals come from more conservative backgrounds, and feel that the acceptance or gender-neutral bathrooms threatens their conservative communities.

The limitations of this study can include the sample. Even though it was fairly large, it is not sufficiently representative of the general population. In addition to that, the sample was collected through social media, which allowed for a variety of participants from different ethnicities to take the survey. Nonetheless, the vast majority of the participants were Caucasian. In addition to that, some questionnaire items could have been better phrased and more focused, especially in the gender-neutral bathrooms questionnaire. If I were to research this again, I would include more questionnaire items as well, in order to get a clearer picture of people’s attitudes towards these two topics.

Finally, I have concluded that a correlation exists between attitudes towards LGBTQ+ and gender-neutral bathrooms. Hopefully this finding can be useful to enhance the lives of members of this community, which are still a minority in our society, with their specific struggles and needs.

References

Figure (1) – correlation between attitudes towards LGBTQ+ and gender-neutral bathrooms.