

Discriminatory Tendency Toward the LGBTQ+ Community in the Context of Interpersonal Experience in the Population of Czech Adults

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Abstract The study aims to map the experience of interpersonal contact with the LGBTQ+ community in the population of Czech adults and to explore the discriminatory tendency influenced by this contact. Nine hundred and seventy-one respondents from all regions of the Czech Republic participated in the study. Their mean age was 27.99 years (SD = 8.319). Respondents completed socio-demographic data and an Attitudes Towards the LGBTQ+ Community Scale via the Google Forms platform. Through a question focusing on the experience of interpersonal contact with an LGBTQ+ person, we identified 814 respondents with a positive experience of interpersonal contact, 72 respondents with a negative experience of interpersonal contact, and 85 respondents with no experience. The research results showed that those who had a positive experience of interpersonal contact reported lower levels of discrimination against LGBTQ+ people compared to those who had a negative experience or no experience with an LGBTQ+ person.

Keywords: interpersonal contact, LGBTQ+ community, discrimination, adulthood, prejudice, experience

1. INTRODUCTION

The role of interpersonal contact has been a topic of interest in psychology, particularly in social psychology and sociology since the early 20th century. It began with the thoughts of Sumner (1906), who argued that interpersonal contact automatically leads to conflict because it is a reciprocal function of the in-group, resulting from a sense of potential superiority. Other related thoughts on interpersonal contact began to shape in the period after the Second World War. These focused primarily on interracial contact and isolation. In interracial contact, it was assumed that when two races fight for a common goal, respect and mutual understanding develop (Lett, 1945).

On the other hand, when two races are separated and isolated, interpersonal contact cannot occur, resulting in an increasing level of prejudice that spreads against a particular minority (Brameld, 1946). Other research over the next decade showed that interpersonal contact plays a significant role in reducing prejudice and its increase (Brophy, 1946; Kephart, 1957). However, a significant breakthrough in studying interpersonal contact occurred

around the early 1950s with the arrival of sociologist Williams. Williams (1947) laid the first basics for intergroup contact theory on the foundations other researchers built later. According to Williams' intergroup contact theory (1947), in order for intergroup prejudice to be minimized, groups must: (1) share common interests or status in society; (2) believe that a given situation can foster a trusting intergroup relationship; (3) see that the participants in a particular group do not fall into the classical stereotypes of that group; and, (4) feel that the activities cut across group lines.

The foundations of the intergroup theory were built upon by Allport himself, who, based on this theory and a body of research, formulated his contact theory, which was first presented in the book *The Nature of Prejudice* (Allport, 1954). According to this theory, positive contact with people from stigmatized groups contradicts negative stereotypes and reduces stigma (Amir, 1969; Desforjes et al., 1991). The quantity and quality of contacts and relationships between members of conflict groups can significantly impact the intergroup attitudes of members. On the one hand, if contact is only between hostile and violent members of these groups, this can lead to extreme and negative attitudes towards outgroups. On the other hand, intergroup contact theory proposes that positive intergroup contact may lead to reduced prejudices and stereotypes about outgroups and positive social development (Allport, 1954). To avoid increasing prejudice and increase positive development, four primary conditions must be met: (1) equal group status; (2) common group goals; (3) intergroup cooperation; and (4) support from authority figures.

Most research has indicated that contact with homosexual people significantly reduces prejudice against this marginalized group (e.g., Herek & Capitano, 1996; Herek & Glunt, 1993; Smith et al., 2009). Research conducted by Heinze and Horn (2009) found that people who have close contact with a homosexual person show lower rates of prejudice and positive attitudes when compared to those who do not have or did not have contact with a homosexual person. An interesting finding also came from Crisp and Turner (2009), who found that imagined intergroup contact can reduce prejudice as effectively as face-to-face contact. This finding that supports the above claim was also concluded by the team of Turner et al. back in 2007. The authors found that imagined intergroup contact significantly reduced prejudice against people of sexual orientations other than heterosexual. Another research conducted by Greenburg and Gaia (2019) showed similar results in attitudes toward

transgender people. Results showed that those who had interpersonal contact with a transgender person reported less transphobia than those who had never met a transgender person. These findings are also corroborated by research conducted by Detenber et al. (2013). The authors found that people who have had interpersonal contact with a homosexual individual showed less prejudice and more positive attitudes toward homosexual people. They also found that people who watched LGBTQ-themed films or series showed higher positive attitudes. Christ et al. (2013) found that people with a positive type of contact with a member of a minority group showed a more positive attitude and less prejudiced behavior.

1.1 Current Study

This study focused on mapping discriminatory and prosocial tendencies towards the LGBTQ+ community and selected sexual and gender identities in the context of interpersonal contact experience in a sample of Czech adults. Based on the analysis of literature and research sources in the introduction, we set out hypotheses in the context of interpersonal contact experience:

H 1 We assume that adults with positive interpersonal contact experience will report lower discrimination towards the LGBTQ+ community and selected identities than those with negative and no interpersonal contact experience.

H 1.1 We assume that adults with a positive interpersonal contact experience will report lower discrimination towards homosexual people (gays and lesbians) compared to those with a negative or no interpersonal contact experience.

H 1.2 We assume that adults with a positive interpersonal contact experience will report lower discrimination toward bisexual people (bisexual males and bisexual females) compared to those with a negative and no interpersonal contact experience.

H 1.3 We assume that adults with a positive interpersonal contact experience will report lower discrimination towards transgender people (transgender males and transgender females) compared to those with a negative and no interpersonal contact experience.

H 2 We assume that adults with negative interpersonal contact experience will report higher discrimination towards the LGBTQ+ community and selected identities than those with positive and no interpersonal contact experience.

H 2.1 We assume that adults with negative interpersonal contact experience will report higher discrimination towards homosexual people (gays and lesbians) than those with positive and no interpersonal contact experience.

H 2.2 We assume that adults with negative interpersonal contact experience will report higher discrimination towards bisexual people (bisexual males and bisexual females) than those with positive and no interpersonal contact experience.

H 2.3 We assume that adults with negative interpersonal contact experience will report higher discrimination towards transgender people (transgender males and transgender females) than those with positive and no interpersonal contact experience.

H 3 We assume that adults with no interpersonal contact experience will report lower discrimination towards the LGBTQ+ community and selected identities than those with positive but higher

discrimination than those with negative interpersonal contact experience.

H 3.1 We assume that adults with negative interpersonal contact experience will report lower discrimination towards homosexual people (gays and lesbians) than those with positive but higher discrimination than those with negative interpersonal contact experience.

H 3.2 We assume that adults with negative interpersonal contact experience will report lower discrimination towards bisexual people (bisexual males and bisexual females) than those with positive but higher discrimination than those with negative interpersonal contact experience.

H 3.3 We assume that adults with negative interpersonal contact experience will report lower discrimination towards transgender people (transgender males and transgender females) than those with positive but higher discrimination than those with negative interpersonal contact experience.

2. METHODS

2.1 Participants and Procedure

Nine hundred and seventy-one (971) respondents participated in this study. Volunteer sampling was used via online platforms (e.g., Discord, Reddit, Facebook groups, etc.). The mean age of respondents was 27.99 (SD = 8.319). Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study at the beginning of the questionnaire battery. They were also assured that their participation was voluntary and anonymous and that the data would only be used for scientific purposes. Respondents were also informed about the processing of personal data and participation in the research study according to the European Parliament and Council E.U. 2016/696 of 27 April 2016, on the protection of natural persons about the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data and repealing of the Directive 95/46/E.C. (General Data Protection Regulation). Respondents expressed their agreement with consent to the processing by clicking "yes" or disagreed by clicking "no." No respondent was excluded from the study based on expressing disagreement with the study condition.

The study participants were 407 individuals who identified as cisgender men; 416 individuals who identified as cisgender women; 60 individuals who identified as transgender women; and 92 individuals who identified as transgender men. In the experience with LGBTQ+ person, we identified 814 individuals who have had positive interpersonal contact experience with LGBTQ+ person; 72 individuals who have had negative interpersonal contact experience with LGBTQ+ person, and 85 individuals who did not have any interpersonal contact experience with LGBTQ+ person at all. Respondents from all regions of the Czech Republic participated in the study.

2.2 Research Methods

Socio-demographic questionnaire

Respondents completed basic socio-demographic data related to the variables of the study. Respondents answered questions related to their *age* (18 to 64 years); *gender identification* (cisgender male, cisgender female, transgender male, transgender female); *the region in which they live*; *which area they are from* (urban-rural); and their *interpersonal contact experience with an LGBTQ+ person* (positive, negative, no interpersonal contact at all).

Attitudes Toward LGBTQ+ Community Scale

The discriminatory behavior toward selected sexual and gender identities was measured by the Attitudes Toward LGBTQ+ Community Scale (Lenghart & Čerešňák). It is a sum of four foreign

measurements that are described below. Participants filled out an 18-item AT-LGBTQ that measures overall prejudice and discriminatory tendency toward the LGBTQ+ community, but also toward specific sexual and gender identities. Attitudes toward gays and lesbians (Morrison & Morrison, 2002 Modern Homonegativity Scale – gay and lesbian version) were represented by six items (3 for gays and 3 for lesbians), e.g.: "Gay men should stop shoving their lifestyle down other people's throats," and "Sex between two women is just wrong." Attitudes toward transgender males and transgender females (Hill & Willoughby, 2005) were represented by six items (3 for transgender males and 3 for transgender females), e.g.: "I would avoid talking to a woman if I knew she had a surgically created penis and testicles," and "If I encountered a male who wore high-heeled shoes, stockings, and makeup, I would consider beating him up." Attitudes toward bisexual males and bisexual females (Hoffarth et al., 2016) were represented by six items (3 for bisexual males and 3 for bisexual females), e.g.: "Many bisexual men are, in fact, homosexual. They just do not want to admit it.", and "Women who identify as bisexual just want to feel special and different." The scale was constructed in a 5-point Likert scale where respondents answered the extent to which they agreed (5) or disagreed (1) with the statements. The total score ranges from 18 (low discrimination) to 90 points (high discrimination).

2.3 Statistical Procedure

Statistical procedures were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25.0 statistical software. Respondents were divided into three main groups based on descriptive statistics: (1) respondents with positive interpersonal contact experience, (2) respondents with negative interpersonal contact experience, and (3) respondents who did not have any interpersonal contact experience at all. Based on the normality test, it was confirmed that the data was not evenly distributed across the research sample. Subsequently, we decided to use non-parametric statistical procedures, specifically the Kruskal-Wallis test.

3. RESULTS

Analysis using the Kruskal-Wallis test revealed significant differences between groups in all variables at the $\alpha \leq .001$ level.

In the area of attitudes toward gay people, respondents who had a positive interpersonal contact experience with an LGBTQ+ person showed the lowest level of discrimination in both attitudes toward gays ($H(2.971) = 264.580, p < .001$) and toward lesbians ($H(2.971) = 192.444, p < .001$; Table 1 Figure 1). In attitudes toward gays, respondents with a positive interpersonal contact experience showed the lowest discriminatory tendencies ($M = 4.44$). Respondents with no interpersonal contact experience with an LGBTQ+ person showed higher rates of discrimination ($M = 8.21$) compared to those with positive interpersonal contact experience but lower rates of discrimination compared to respondents with negative interpersonal contact experience ($M = 10.83$). The same trend was observed in attitudes toward lesbians. Respondents with positive interpersonal contact experience showed lower levels of discrimination ($M = 3.48$). Respondents with no interpersonal contact experience with an LGBTQ+ person showed higher rates of discrimination ($M = 4.62$) compared to people with positive interpersonal contact experience

but lower rates of discrimination compared to people with negative interpersonal contact experience ($M = 6.82$) (Table 1, Figure 1).

In the area of attitudes toward bisexual people, respondents who had a positive interpersonal contact experience with an LGBTQ+ person showed the lowest level of discrimination in both attitudes toward bisexual males ($H(2.971) = 201.300, < .001$) and toward bisexual females ($H(2.971) = 197.208, p < .001$; Table 1, Figure 1). In attitudes toward bisexual males, respondents with a positive interpersonal contact experience showed the lowest discriminatory tendencies ($M = 4.25$). Respondents with no interpersonal contact experience with an LGBTQ+ person showed higher rates of discrimination ($M = 7.18$) compared to those with positive interpersonal contact experience but lower rates of discrimination compared to respondents with negative interpersonal contact experience ($M = 8.78$). The same trend was observed in attitudes towards bisexual females. Respondents with positive interpersonal contact experience showed lower levels of discrimination ($M = 3.73$). Respondents with no interpersonal contact experience with an LGBTQ+ person showed higher rates of discrimination ($M = 5.00$) compared to people with positive interpersonal contact experience but lower rates of discrimination compared to people with negative interpersonal contact experience ($M = 7.68$) (Table 1, Figure 1).

The penultimate area of the investigation were attitudes toward transgender people. Respondents who had a positive interpersonal contact experience with an LGBTQ+ person showed the lowest level of discrimination in both attitudes toward transgender males ($H(2.971) = 281.892, p < .001$) and toward transgender females ($H(2.971) = 167.818, p < .001$; Table 1, Figure 1). In attitudes toward transgender males, respondents with a positive interpersonal contact experience showed the lowest discriminatory tendencies ($M = 3.84$). Respondents with no interpersonal contact experience with an LGBTQ+ person showed higher rates of discrimination ($M = 7.14$) compared to those with positive interpersonal contact experience but lower rates of discrimination compared to respondents with negative interpersonal contact experience ($M = 9.03$). The same trend was observed in attitudes toward transgender females. Respondents with positive interpersonal contact experience showed lower levels of discrimination ($M = 4.19$). Respondents with no interpersonal contact experience with an LGBTQ+ person showed higher rates of discrimination ($M = 6.84$) compared to people with positive interpersonal contact experience but lower rates of discrimination compared to people with negative interpersonal contact (experience $M = 7.14$) (Table 1, Figure 1).

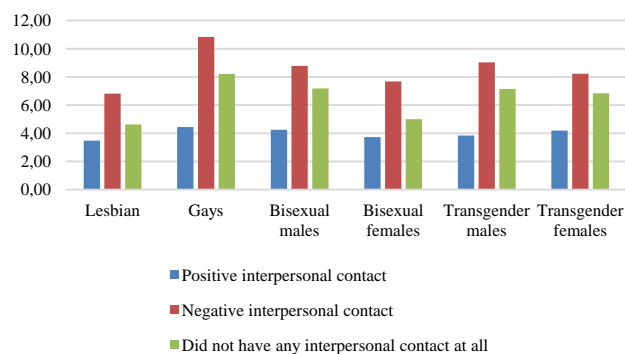


Figure 1: Discrimination toward selected sexual and gender identities in the context of personal experience.

The final area of investigation was the difference between the groups in the overall discriminatory tendency against the LGBTQ+

community. A Kruskal-Wallis test revealed a significant difference between groups ($H(2.971) = 261.994, p < .001$; Table 1, Figure 2). Respondents with a positive interpersonal contact experience showed lower levels of discrimination toward the LGBTQ+ community ($M = 23.93$) compared to those with no interpersonal

contact experience ($M = 38.99$) or a negative interpersonal contact experience ($M = 51.36$). At the same time, respondents who had no interpersonal contact experience with an LGBTQ+ person exhibited lower levels of discrimination compared to those who had a negative interpersonal contact experience (Table 1, Figure 2).

Table 1: Prejudice toward the LGBTQ+ community and selected identities in the context of interpersonal contact

Variable	Positive interpersonal contact ($n = 814$)		Negative interpersonal contact ($n = 72$)		Did not have interpersonal contact at all ($n = 85$)		H	p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Gays	4.44	2.491	10.83	3.026	8.21	3.257	264.480	< .001
Lesbians	3.48	1.581	6.82	3.324	4.62	2.031	192.444	< .001
Bisexual males	4.25	2.117	8.78	3.064	7.18	2.720	201.300	< .001
Bisexual females	3.73	1.743	7.68	3.135	5.00	2.198	197.208	< .001
Transgender males	3.84	1.884	9.03	3.431	7.14	2.727	281.892	< .001
Transgender females	4.19	1.905	7.14	3.238	6.84	2.511	167.818	< .001
LGBTQ+ Community	23.93	9.786	51.36	14.967	38.99	13.313	261.994	< .001

Note. M = Mean; S.D. = Standard Deviation; H = Kruskal-Wallis test results; p = significance

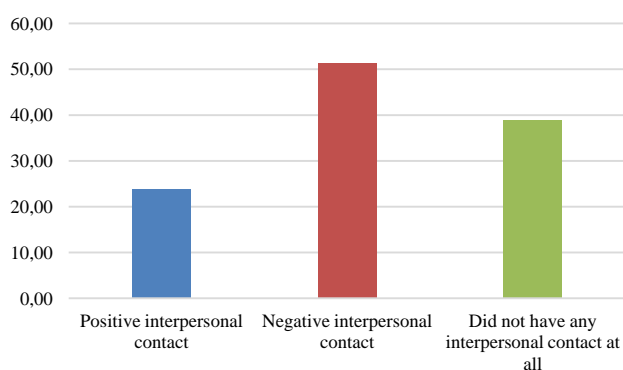


Figure 2: Overall discrimination toward the LGBTQ+ community in the context of personal experience.

4. DISCUSSION

Based on the results of our research, we can accept all our twelve hypotheses. We found that people with positive interpersonal contact experience show lower prejudice and discriminatory tendency levels than the other study groups (Hypotheses 1 - 1.3). Other studies support these results (e.g., Heinze & Horn, 2009; Herek & Capitano, 1996; Herek & Glunt, 1993; Christ et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2009) that positive contact or general contact significantly reduces prejudice and discrimination against minority groups in society. In this context, we can confirm that, based on our research, positive contact acts as a strong protective factor against discrimination and highly decreases levels of prejudice.

We also found that people with negative interpersonal contact experiences show the highest prejudice and a discriminatory tendency among all study groups (Hypotheses 2 - 2.3). Another research finding can also support this (Paolini et al., 2010). Barlow et al. (2012) research showed that negative contact with a minority group has a much more significant impact on prejudice and discriminatory tendency than positive contact. People who had a past negative or poor-quality experience with a member of an outgroup have a higher tendency to act discriminatorily or to

reinforce prejudices against a minority group based on this experience (Paolini et al., 2014).

The final area we explored was the experience and discrimination of people with no interpersonal contact experience with an LGBTQ+ person (Hypotheses 3 - 3.3). This group showed higher rates of discrimination compared to people with positive interpersonal contact experience but lower rates of discrimination compared to people with negative interpersonal contact experience. This supports the claims of various research (e.g., Greenburg and Gaia, 2010; Heinze & Horn, 2009) that people without contact with a minority group will show higher rates of discrimination than those with positive interpersonal contact. We can look at parasocial contact to explain why people with no experience show lower prejudice and discrimination rates than those with a negative experience. These people may not have had direct interpersonal contact with an LGBTQ+ person, but parasocial contact (contact via LGBTQ+ media portrayals) can significantly reduce levels of prejudice and discriminatory tendencies (Detenber et al., 2013; Miller et al., 2020) as they come into contact through television and possibly the representation of a specific situation with an LGBTQ+ person (Turner et al., 2009).

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