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Women's Race-and Sex-Based Social Attitudes: An Individual Differences Perspective

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Abstract

How do individual differences in personality and sexuality relate to social attitudes? We contend that personality traits and sexual orientation are descriptions of underlying biases (e.g., perceptual) that exert top-down influences into all of life's domains including social attitudes. The present study (*N*=200 women) examined individual differences in sex-based and race-based social attitudes as a function of the Big Five traits, the Dark Triad traits, and sexual orientation. We found that affiliative-based motivations in the form of agreeableness, openness, and narcissism predicted the desire and tendency to affiliate with other women. We also found fear-based (i.e., neuroticism) and entitlement-based (i.e., narcissism) traits were associated with efforts towards political action for gender equality. We found a "go-along" disposition (i.e., agreeableness and openness) was associated with greater endorsement of traditional gender roles. We replicated associations between the Big Five traits (i.e., openness and agreeableness) and race-based social attitudes. Uniquely, Machiavellianism was associated with more race-based social attitudes but with diminished endorsement of traditional gender roles. And last, we suggest that experienced discrimination among bisexual women may lead them to be less likely to hold both undesirable race-based and sex-based social attitudes.

Keywords: attitudes, personality, individual differences, sexual orientation, discrimination

Is personality psychology merely a descriptive science or can personality traits be used to predict important social outcomes like race-based and gender-based prejudice? The study of prejudice has typically been the purview of social psychologists who have focused on group membership, social identity, categorization, and resource competition (e.g., Sherif, 1966; Tajfel, 1974; Turner,

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1985). In contrast, personality psychologists suggest that traits are causally prior to social attitudes like prejudice (e.g., Altemeyer, 1996, 2004; Duckitt, 2001; McFarland, 2010; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) and may reflect underlying biases in neurological and motivational systems (Jonason & Ferrell, 2016; Jonason & Jackson, 2016; Smillie, Pickering, & Jackson, 2006). Although prejudicial attitudes are temporally stable (Zick et al., 2008) and personality traits are related to prejudicial attitudes (Akrami, Ekehammar, & Bergh, 2011), the debate as to the utility of personality psychology to understand prejudice rages on (Hodson & Dhont, 2015). In this study we examine the utility of individual differences in personality and sexuality in predicting race-based social attitudes and extend this to include sexbased social attitudes through the examination of individual differences in feminist identity in a sample of women.

Personality and Prejudice

In a larger, theoretical sense, we contend that personality traits reflect underlying, systematic bases in cognition, neurology, and preferences and exert topdown pressure on downstream attitudes and behaviors like prejudice. Broadband personality traits, in this sense, act as distal predictors of social outcomes. We focus on the Big Five traits (i.e., openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism; Donnellan, Oswald, Baird, & Lucas, 2006) and the Dark Triad traits (i.e., narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). While most personality psychologists are familiar with the Big Five traits, the Dark Triad traits are relatively less well-known, especially when expressed subclinically. Therefore, a brief introduction to these traits is warranted. The traits are characterized by vanity and self-centeredness (i.e., narcissism), manipulation and cynicism (i.e., Machiavellianism), and callous social attitudes and amorality (i.e., psychopathy). These traits have implications for a broad range of social and personality phenomena (see Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013). The Dark Triad may be associated with individual differences in prejudice through aggression (Jones & Neria, 2015), limited empathy (Jonason, Lyons, Bethell, & Ross, 2013), and a "selfish" (Jonason, Strosser, Kroll, Duineveld, & Baruffi, 2015). Prejudice might be seen as a downstream effect facilitated by these antisocial dispositions.

The Big Five and the Dark Triad, capturing both socially desirable and undesirable (respectively) individual differences in personality, are related to race-based prejudice (for a review see Hodson & Dhont, 2015), and, therefore, may predict sex-based prejudice as well (Swim, Aiken, Hall, & Hunter, 1995). For instance, disagreeableness, limited openness to experience, and the Dark Triad traits predict race-based prejudice (Akrami et al., 2011; Ekehammar & Akrami, 2003, 2007; Ekehammar, Akrami, Gylje, & Zakrisson, 2004; Hodson, Hogg, & MacInnis, 2009; Jonason, 2015; Jones, 2013; Sibley & Duckitt, 2008). Therefore, we expect to replicate race-based social attitude effects here.

While we expect that broadband personality traits to matter in understanding individual differences in attitudes towards women, the specific nature of those associations surely differs from race-based social attitudes given the different foci of the attitudes. Unfortunately, there is little work on sex-based social attitudes with most work focusing on factors like ambient (Bradley-Geist, Rivera, & Geringer, 2015), hostile, and ambivalent sexism (Glicke & Fiske, 1997). When examining personality correlates of sex-based social attitudes, researchers have, for instance, focused on religiosity (Fine-Davis, 1979), psychological well-being, gender-role identity (Saunders & Kashubeck-West, 2006), psychological dysfunction (Moradi & Subich, 2002), and collective self-esteem (Carpenter & Johnson, 2001) as opposed to more general measures of personality. Instead, we examine individual differences in one's desires to affiliate with women (i.e., Active Commitment), to advocate for gender equality or women's rights (i.e., Embeddedness-Emanation), and the degree of adoption of traditional gender roles (i.e., Passive Acceptance). We, therefore, make predictions specific to each kind of sex-based social attitude. First, if affiliative motivations towards women are associated with a desire to be near women we would expect individual differences that tap such a motivation to be associated with the affiliation desires. Traits like narcissism (Jonason & Jackson, 2016), extraversion, agreeableness, and openness (Smillie et al., 2006) reflect affliative-based motivational systems and, therefore, should be associated with women's desires to affiliate with other women. Second. neuroticism (as a measure anxiety/worrisomeness) and narcissism (as a measure of entitlement) may be related to women's desire to fight for equal rights. Such women might be particularly worried about women's place in the world, seeing potential slights to gender equality everywhere (whether present or not; see Chon, 2016 who suggests some spuriosity) and simultaneously having a sense of entitlement may motivate women to work towards gender equality. Third, women who accept traditional gender roles may have a unique personality profile as well. For instance, given the centrality that Machiavellian people place on power (Jonason & Ferrell, 2016; Semenyna & Honey, 2015), the abdication of power found in traditional relationships may not fit with a person characterized by high rates of Machiavellianism. Individuals with a more "goalong" mentality (i.e., high in openness and agreeableness) may also passively endorse traditional gender roles as a form of inertia where they are disinclined to make a "noise" and complain about what they perceived as the status quo.

Sexual Orientation and Prejudice

Just like with broadband personality traits, we expect sexual orientation to exert top-down influence on downstream outcomes like social attitudes. Both personality traits and sexual orientations have biological, hormonal, physiological, and neurological substrates. What are referred to as personality traits and sexual orientations are phenotypic expressions of these underlying biases. These biases

color the way one sees and experiences the world which may then result in differences in race-based and sex-based social attitudes.

In an exploratory way, we explore how individual differences in sexual orientation might account for individual differences in race-based and sex-based social attitudes. People who identify with different sexual orientations experience different amounts of discrimination (Balsam, Rothblum, & Beauchaine, 2005). As heterosexuals conform the most to societal expectations of "proper" relationships, they receive the least discrimination, whereas, bisexuals, who simultaneously do not conform to heteronormative standards (Jackson, 2006) but also do not conform to binary views (i.e., either/or) of human sexuality, may experience the most discrimination (Myer, 2003). Coupled with the well-established discrimination against women in general (Banchefsky, Westfall, Park, & Judd, 2016; Morelli, Bianchi, Baiocco, Pezzuti, & Chirumbolo, 2016), these experiences might prime bisexual women to hold particularly socially progressive attitudes relative to heterosexuals and homosexuals. In the case of race-based social attitudes, bisexual women may be particularly unlikely to hold negative attitudes towards members of racial out-groups. In the case of sex-based social attitudes, this may encourage bisexual women to both affiliate with those who they perceive as less likely to victimize them (i.e., women) and to even advocate for equality. Indeed, given that bisexual women are likely to engage in heterosexual relationships with men, they may be especially concerned with gender equality as it directly affects them in ways that solely homosexual women do not experience.

In this study, we provide some evidence for our model of personality traits (e.g., Jonason & Ferrell, 2016). We envision a hierarchical system of individual differences where personality traits like the Dark Triad are casually prior to social attitudes. We conceive of personality traits as descriptive traits to account for systematic biases in motivational, cognitive, and affective systems that exert top-down influence on social and life outcome like social attitudes through traditional, heritable and socio-cognitive personality traits like the Big Five. In so doing, we provide some descriptive data as to what individual differences might allow us to better understand attitudes towards women and members of racial outgroups among women. We focus here on individual differences in distal personality traits and sexual orientation.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Female volunteers (*N*=200) from exclusively Western countries (64% North American; 33% Australian; 3% other), who were mostly attracted to members of the opposite sex (67%), of European ancestry (80%; 10% African; 3% Asian; 7% other), and in a committed relationship/married (64%; 46% single), aged 18-87 (*M*=32.35, *SD*=12.17) were contacted through social media sites like Reddit and Facebook to

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complete a larger project about personality, women's health, and social attitudes. Participants were informed of the nature of the study, completed a number of self-report measures, and were debriefed¹.

Measures

We measured the Big Five traits using the 20-item short *International Personality Item Pool* (Donnellan et al., 2006). Participants were asked the degree to which they agreed (1 = Strongly disagree; 5 = Strongly agree) with the following statements: "Have a vivid imagination" (i.e., openness), "Get chores done right away" (i.e., conscientiousness), "I am the life of the party" (i.e., extraversion), "Sympathize with others' feelings" (i.e., agreeableness), and "Have frequent mood swings" (i.e., neuroticism). Items were averaged to create composites of openness (α =.40), conscientiousness (α =.65), extraversion (α =.81), agreeableness (α =.65), and neuroticism (α =.66).

The 27-item *Short Dark Triad questionnaire* (Jones & Paulhus, 2014) was used to assess the Dark Triad traits. Participants indicated how much they agreed (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 5 = *Strongly agree*) with items such as "It's not wise to tell your secrets" (i.e., Machiavellianism), "People see me as a natural leader" (i.e., narcissism), and "Payback needs to be quick and nasty" (i.e., psychopathy). Items were averaged for the corresponding measures of Machiavellianism (α =.74), narcissism (α =.74), and psychopathy (α =.73).²

Sex-based social attitudes were measured with the *Feminist Identity Development Scale* (Bargad & Hyde, 1991), trimmed to 27 items (Cowan, 2014), where participants report their agreement (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 5 = *Strongly agree*) with items like "I don't think there is any need for an Equal Rights Amendment; women are doing well" (i.e., Passive Acceptance), "Being a part of a women's community is important to me" (i.e., Embeddedness-Emanation), and "I want to work to improve women's status" (i.e., Active Commitment). Items on the respective scales were averaged to created indexes of Embeddedness-Emanation (Cronbach's α =.85), Passive Acceptance (α =.87), and Active Commitment (α =.86). We tested the trustworthiness of one-dimensional (χ^2 (299)=812.81, p<01, χ^2 /df=2.72, NFI=.65, CFI=.74, RMSEA=.09 90%CI [.09, .10], p-closeness<.01) and nested three-dimensional (χ^2 (296)=529.95, p<01, χ^2 /df=1.79, NFI=.77, CFI=.88, RMSEA=.06 90%CI [.05, .07], p-closeness<.01; Appendix A) Confirmatory Factor models; the latter fit the data best albeit not that good in terms of the NFI and CFI ($\Delta\chi^2$ =282.86,

¹ Participants and measures of personality overlap with Jonason and Lavertu (2017).

² Machiavellianism was correlated with narcissism (r(198)=.30, p<.01) and psychopathy (r(198)=.49, p<.01) and psychopathy was correlated with narcissism (r(198)=.33, p<.01).

³ Embeddedness was correlated with active commitment (r(198)=.59, p<.01) and passive acceptance (r(198)=.35, p<.01). Passive acceptance was correlated with active commitment (r(198)=.63, p<.01).

p<.01), inconsistent with prior failures to demonstrate a multidimensional measure but similar to other work that revealed limited structure validity nonetheless (Fischer et al., 2000).

Race-based prejudice was measured with the eight most "central" (i.e., strongest factor loadings to reduce participant fatigue) items from the *Quick Discrimination Index* (Ponterotto et al., 1995) were used to measure attitudes (i.e., cognitive and affective) about racial diversity. Participants reported their level of agreement (1 = $Strongly\ disagree$; 5 = $Strongly\ agree$) with statements such as "I think racial minorities complain too much about racial discrimination" and "There has been too much attention directed towards multicultural issues in business". The questions were averaged (after reversing the relevant items) to create an index of racial diversity attitudes (α =.81).⁴

Results

We begin with examination of the nomological network surrounding racial and sex-based social attitudes (Table 1). Embeddedness-emanation was associated with more narcissism and neuroticism. Active commitment was associated more narcissism, extraversion, agreeableness, and openness. Passive acceptance was associated with low scores on Machiavellianism but more extraversion, agreeableness, and openness. Individual differences in race-based prejudice were associated with more Machiavellianism and conscientiousness and less agreeableness and openness.

Table 1 Nomolog	ical Network (r's) Surrour	nding Pro-Women	Social Attitudes in Women

	Embeddedness-	Active	Passive	Race-Based
	Emanation	Commitment	Ecceptence	Prejudice
Machiavellianism	.03	08	39**	.29**
Narcissism	.16*	.29**	.02	.04
Psychopathy	.07	.03	12	.05
Extraversion	.12	.34**	.15*	09
Agreeableness	.10	.24**	.31**	23**
Conscientiousness	06	11	05	.22**
Neuroticism	.18*	.06	.11	05
Openness	.04	.19**	.33**	19**

^{*}p<.05; **p<01.

⁴ In confirmation of our assumption that racial and sex-based prejudice are correlated (Swim et al.,1995), we found that racial prejudice was correlated with embeddedness (r(198)=-.29, p<.01), passive acceptance (r(198)=-.66, p<.01), and active commitment (r(198)=.54, p<.01).

Next, we examined the manner by which individual differences in sexual orientation (i.e., who participant's report being attracted to) predicts differences in sex-based and race-based social attitudes. In the case of race-based prejudice, there was a main effect of sexual orientation (F(1, 198)=4.77, p<.01, η_p^2 =.05), suggesting women attracted to both sexes (i.e., bisexual; n=33; M=1.94, SD=0.82) were the least racist whereas women attracted to the opposite sex (i.e., heterosexual; n=133; M=2.37, SD=0.73) were the most racist, with homosexual women in the middle (n=16; M=2.13, SD=0.66). When we included sexual orientation in a mixed model ANOVA, nothing was detected. However, when we treated the three measures of attitudes as a linear composite in a MANOVA and used only Roy's Largest Root, we found that women attracted to both sexes held the most positive attitudes (Roy's=.05; F(3, 197)=2.92, p<.05, η_p^2 =.05) in the embeddeness-emanation (F(2, 198)=3.20, p<.05, η_p^2 =.04) and active commitment (F(2, 198)=3.55, p<.05, η_p^2 =.04) dimensions only (Figure 1). However, such sexual orientation effects are suspect and weak given imbalanced sample size cells along with the need to rely on a liberal multivariate test.

Same sex
Opposite sex
Both sexes

EE
AC
PA

Attitudes towards Women

Figure 1. Individual Differences in Attitudes Towards Women as a Function of Self-Reports of who Women are Attracted to

 ${\it Note}. \ EE{\rm =}Embeddedness{\rm -}Emanation; \ AC{\rm =}Active\ Commitment; \ PA{\rm =}Passive\ Acceptance$

Discussion

We contend that personality traits and individual differences in sexuality represent descriptive terms to refer to systematic biases in neurology, motivation, and physiology (Jonason & Ferrell, 2016; Jonason & Jackson, 2016). These systematic biases exert top-down influences in all areas of life including social attitudes

including prejudice (Hodson & Dhont, 2015). If true, we would expect individual differences in personality and sexuality to relate to individual differences in sexbased and race-based social attitudes. In this study, we examined the role of the Big Five traits, the Dark Triad traits, and sexual orientation in understanding the social attitudes racism and gender equality in a sample of women.

To begin, we replicated work on a person-centered model of race-based social attitudes. Considerable evidence suggests disagreeableness and limited openness to experience predict race-based social attitudes (Akrami et al., 2011; Ekehammar & Akrami, 2003, 2007; Sibley & Duckitt, 2008) and we have conceptually replicated these effects here. Less is known about the relationship between the Dark Triad traits and prejudice (Hodson & Dhont, 2015; Hodson et al., 2009). For instance, consistent with work examinig members of the KKK in America (Jones, 2013) suggests psychopathy and Machiavellianism may be associated with racial prejudice. Through the use of a rather simple (relative to other studies; Jonason, 2015) attitudinal measure of racial prejudice, it appears only Machiavellianism was associated with such prejudice. It is unfortunate that there is not more consistency across studies in the Dark Triad traits that are associated with racial prejudice. We suspect this may have to do with the nature of the questions being asked to assess racism. For instance, the measure we used may represent a rather benign form of racism when racism often takes a violent form (e.g., lynchings in 1950s America, riots in Cronulla, NSW, AUS). Future work may need to better examine how and when the Dark Triad traits are associated with racial prejudice (see Akrami et al., 2011).

Fairly unique to this study is an examination of the individual differences in affiliative attitudes towards women, tendencies in taking political action towards gender equality, and acceptance of traditional gender sex roles in women. We found that most of our sample had stronger passive acceptance of traditional gender roles than the other forms of attitudes towards women but these were qualified by individual differences in personality that may reflect a "go-along-get-along" disposition in the form of traits like agreeableness and openness. While more openness may be associated more progressive political attitudes (Jonason, 2014), the association we found between openness and more traditional gender roles may be a result of their willingness to be more accepting of others but may not say as much about themselves. Openness then, may not be about intellect, art, or esthetics, but instead, is about compassion (Shiota, Keltner, & John, 2006). The desire to help others in the form of advocating for equality may be especially female approaches to the world. It seems to us that the affliative motivations, entitlement, and anxiety that may characterize personality traits (Jonason & Jackson, 2016; Smillie et al., 2006) influence sex-based social attitudes. It appears as though traits like extraversion, narcissism, and openness—all with affiliative-motivation links—lead women to want to affiliate with other women. In contrast, a sense of deserving more from the world as measured with narcissism and the fearfulness associated with neuroticism may drive women towards taking action to rectify perceived slights of gender-based equality. And last, we revealed that women low on Machiavellianism may be rather opposed to conforming to traditional gender roles. One of the core features of this trait is a desire for power (Jonason & Ferrell, 2016; Semenyna & Honey, 2015). In as much as traditional gender roles undermine the power of women, women who are dispositionally oriented towards power may find traditional gender roles offensive. Such evidence is consistent with our contention that personality traits exert top-down influences on social attitudes.

We followed analyses on personality traits to examine the role of sexual orientation in predicting race-based and sex-based social attitudes. Like personality traits, sexual orientation is, at its core, a descriptive framework to understand latent biases in mate preferences, social interests, physiology, and more. It acts as the proximal descriptor for these deeper differences. However, this is not to say that external influences do not act upon the individual differences that compromise sexual orientation. Indeed, there is strong evidence for heterosexuals receiving limited discrimination whereas bisexuals may experience a greater amount (Balsam et al., 2005; Myer, 2003). Women already experience considerable prejudice around their sexual identity (Banchefsky et al., 2016; Morelli et al., 2016), making women who are bisexual especially prone to discrimination. This may translate to both political activism and a greater desire to affiliate with other women (i.e., a safe-zone), but also a diminished tendency towards race-based discrimination. Collectively, we contend that it is discriminated groups that may be biased away from sex-based and gender-based discrimination as they have experienced their own form of discrimination.

Limitations and Conclusions

Our results are qualified by a number of limitations. First, our sample was exclusively female. The data for this study represent secondary analyses for a project on women's health and, thus, no male participants were solicited. A juxtaposition of patterns in men and women might be informative in future research. Indeed, men do experience some sex-based prejudice in the workplace, for example (Clow, Ricciardelli, & Bartfay, 2015). In addition, while the data was collected from a nonstudent sample, the sample can still be characterized as WEIRD (i.e., western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010) and convenience in nature. If economic factors exacerbate or attenuate race-based and sex-based prejudice, cross-cultural differences might matter. While we examined cross-country effects in preliminary analyses, none were detected, but we cannot rule out diminished power for sample sizes and a conflation of country and culture. Third, we relied on self-report measures throughout. It is unclear how personality traits can be measured efficiently in non-self-report ways and there is even some doubt as to whether implicit tests might not be a trustworthy test of prejudicial attitudes (Carlsson & Agerström, 2016). Nevertheless, future research might adopt implicit measure of sex-based and race-based social attitudes to bolster our claims here.

Fourth, we relied on simple, univariate tests throughout. For instance, in theory, one wants to control for the shared variance among the Dark Triad traits. However, this is only essential when there is a manifold of correlations among the three traits. If present, multivariate tests (e.g., latent variable analyses) allow researchers to remove potentially spurious relationships, but as we failed to find any such effects, doing so was unnecessary. Fifth, we examined only distal personality traits whereas other traits like social dominance and authoritarianism might play a proximal, mediating role between distal traits and social outcomes (Jonason, 2015; McFarland, 2010). And, sixth, the validity of the Feminist Identity Development Scale is unclear (Fischer et al., 2000; Gerstmann & Kramer, 1997) and, thus future work might adopt other scales like the Attitudes Toward Women scale (Spence & Helmreich, 1972).

For the last 50 years personality psychology has predominantly been a descriptive enterprise. Even when it is used to assess predictive power in domains like organizational psychology, it still tends to be characterized by an examination of shared variance. This may reflect some early missteps (or oversteps) in the field by researchers like Freud and may also reflect understandable-yet-potentially-exaggerated concerns over conflating correlation with causation. If we organize personality and individual differences in a hierarchal system whereby motivational, hormonal, and perceptual systems exert top-down, distal influences on behaviors and attitudes and what are traditionally coined as personality traits as descriptive labels of patterns of these higher-order systems (Jonason & Ferrell, 2016). That is, we contend with a strong theoretical framework, researcher may be permitted to make quasicausal statements given *a priori* assumptions. In this study, we have conducted some preliminary tests of this model by examining how individual differences in personality and sexual orientation relate to sex-based and gender-based social attitudes.

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Actitudes sociales femeninas basadas en la raza y el género: Perspectiva de diferencias individuales

Resumen

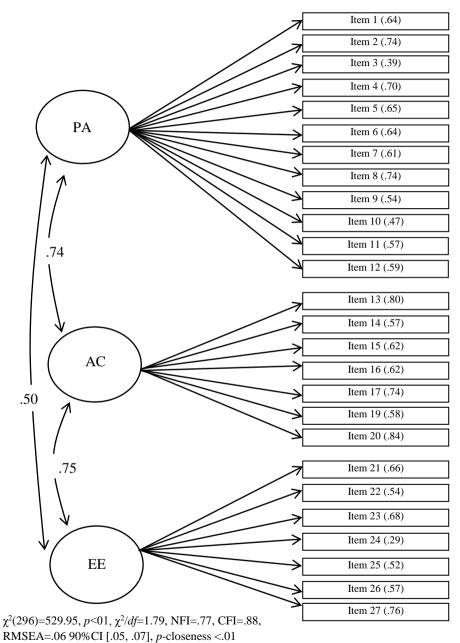
¿Qué tienen que ver diferencias individuales en la personalidad y la sexualidad con las actitudes sociales? Hemos afirmado que los rasgos de personalidad y la orientación sexual son tipos de sesgos subyacentes (p. ej. perceptivos) que ejercen influencias de arriba hacia abajo sobre todos los ámbitos de la vida, incluidas las actitudes sociales. Este estudio (N=200 mujeres) ha examinado diferencias individuales en las actitudes sociales basadas en el género y la raza en función de los cinco grandes rasgos de personalidad, la tríada oscura y la orientación sexual. Hemos descubierto que las motivaciones basadas en la afiliación en forma de amabilidad. apertura a nuevas experiencias y narcisismo predicen el deseo y la tendencia a relacionarse con otra mujer. También hemos encontrado que los rasgos basados en el miedo (neuroticismo) y en derechos (narcisismo) se asocian con la participación política en cuanto a la igualdad de género. Además, hemos afirmado que la disposición a la cooperación (amabilidad y apertura a nuevas experiencias) se asocian con mayor protección de roles tradicionales de género. Hemos confirmado la relación entre los cinco grandes rasgos de personalidad (apertura a nuevas experiencias y amabilidad) y las actitudes sociales basadas en la raza. Sólo maquiavelismo se asocia con más actitudes sociales basadas en la raza, pero con reducida protección de roles tradicionales de género. Al final, sugerimos que la discriminación experimentada por las bisexuales podría causar actitudes sociales no deseadas basadas tanto en la raza como en el género.

Palabras claves: actitudes, personalidad, diferencias individuales, orientación sexual, discriminación

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Appendix A

Nested Three-Factor Model of Attitudes towards Women



Note. EE=Embeddedness-Emanation; AC=Active Commitment; PA=Passive Acceptance; Item-loadings in parentheses; all paths significant *p*<.01.