Attitudes Towards Parents of Trans Children and Their Rights: An Australian Study

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Abstract

Introduction Trans children and their parents face challenges in both their private and public lives. In terms of the latter, public attitudes toward trans children and their parents can significantly impact experiences of inclusion or exclusion, including in terms of rights. Yet, to date, while a substantive body of research has focused on attitudes toward trans people in general, lacking is a focus on trans children and their parents.

Methods The study reported in this paper involved data collected in 2021 with a convenience sample of people living in Australia, who were asked to respond to a series of vignettes featuring accounts of parents of children of different gender modalities and genders, and participants were asked to rate the parents of the children in the vignettes. Participants also completed measures about traditional views of motherhood and fatherhood, a social dominance measure, a measure of values, and a measure of attitudes towards trans rights.

Results The findings suggest mothers were rated more negatively than fathers, those with more traditional views about mothers and fathers rated all vignettes more negatively, and those with more positive attitudes toward trans rights rated all vignettes more positively. There were no differences in ratings of parents based on the gender modality of the child; however, parents of non-binary children were rated most negatively.

Conclusions Together, the findings suggest broad support for trans children and their parents among the sample.

Policy Implications The findings suggest that any restrictions to the rights or inclusion of trans children and their parents would likely not align with the views of people living in Australia.

Keywords Attitudes · Social dominance · Rights · Trans children and their parents · Values · Vignette study

Introduction

Trans children and their parents are often met with a wide range of challenges, both external and internal to the family unit. These include navigating discrimination in schools (Davy & Cordoba, 2020), barriers to accessing gender affirming clinical services (Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2020), the potential impact of the young person's experiences of

their gender on their developmental pathways (Medico et al., 2020), and parents having to confront and challenge their own biases regarding their child's gender (Hill & Menvielle, 2009). Parents of trans children may also find themselves dealing with issues of privacy (Schlehofer et al., 2021), discrimination within their extended family (Schlehofer et al., 2020), and the isolation which comes from feeling under-resourced, unsupported, and lacking in peers with similar experiences (Platero, 2014). These challenges facing trans children and their parents reflect the persistence and pervasiveness of cisgenderism throughout every social system (Giametta & Havkin, 2021), leading to marginalization (Doan et al., 2019; Gülgöz et al., 2018; Riggs & Bartholomaeus, 2018). While there is now a significant body of research on how trans people in general are perceived by cisgender people (e.g., see Brown et al., 2018), less focus has been placed on how those closest to trans people are viewed, in particular cisgender parents

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of trans children. The study reported in the present paper sought to explore attitudes towards parents of trans young people in an Australian sample.

Central to attitudes about any marginalised group are values, which may be understood as general principles that guide our lives (Schwartz et al., 2012). Schwartz and colleagues have proposed a set of core values that are likely common across cultures, shaped by two overarching binaries: whether a person is more prone to either self-centric or other-centric values, and whether a person is focused on holding onto what they have or being open to growth. Research on parents of trans children has often emphasized parental capacity for accepting changes in a child's life (Carlozzi, 2018), with core values which foster capacity for change and self-transcendence (i.e., being other-centric) being vital indicators of a parent's attitude towards, and treatment of, their trans child. These values may manifest in parents who are more likely to advocate for their child, speak positively of gender diversity, and view their child as capable of finding happiness and community (Brill & Pepper, 2008). Research to date, however, has not examined whether such trans-affirming values held by some parents are read as markers of a person's fitness-for-parenthood in society more broadly. Given anti-trans sentiment, the same values that may make a parent the perfect support for their trans child, may lead to them being viewed by some as an unfit parent.

Further in terms of societal assessments about parental fitness, parental gender has significant implications. Narratives of parenting tend to situate mothers and fathers in a relationship to a particular set of traditional, normative, gendered role expectations. Mothers in particular bear the brunt of such expectations, with normative constructions of the 'good mother' (i.e., a woman who is expected to stay at home with her children, to enjoy doing so, and who devotes her life selflessly to her children) serving to regulate all women, with significant implications for mothers who do not conform to this normative standard (Swift, 2018). Fathers, by contrast, are often excused from such normative expectations, or are praised when they are 'actively involved' with their children (Jordan, 2009). There is also a rehabilitative aspect to attempts at reframing fathers as inherently loving and present, which either skirts or ignores that many fathers continue to adopt a more traditional role (i.e., less involvement with children, focused on paid work outside the home), in addition to the high rates at which men abuse both children and mothers (Cater, 2007; Freeman, 2003; MacDonald et al., 2009).

These gendered differences in perceptions of parenting extend to the parenting of trans children. Men are much more likely to experience a trans child as a threat to their masculinity (Harrison & Michelson, 2019; Konopka et al., 2021; McKinnon, 2014; Türkoğlu & Sayılan, 2021),

which feeds into the violence which trans people (and trans women in particular) experience at the hands of men (Walker, 2015). In contrast, several studies suggest that mothers are much more likely to be open to, and accepting of, their trans child compared to fathers (Ishii, 2018; Kuvalanka et al., 2014; Pearlman, 2012). Despite this, mothers continue to experience distinct stigmatization related to raising a transgender child (Dyer & Bradley, 2020; Johnson & Benson, 2014), which sits in a long history of mother-blaming in regard to people who are trans, and continues in current responses to trans children in some countries (Horton, 2021). For some mothers this continues to have real world consequences, including loss of custody for trans-affirming mothers (Kuvalanka et al., 2019), which may be exacerbated in legislative contexts where the rights of parents and medical professionals to affirm trans children are being undermined by legislative changes.

Support for parents of trans children is thus likely to be shaped not only by the gender of the parent (with mothers of trans children viewed more negatively than fathers), but also by views on social dominance (i.e., either the belief in a just world and social equality, or the belief in social hierarchies and an 'everyone should fend for themselves' mentality). Previous research has found that attitudes toward trans people are explained by social dominance, such that those who are committed to existing social hierarchies are more likely to hold negative attitudes toward trans people (e.g., Perez-Arche & Miller, 2021; Puckett et al., 2020). Further, it is likely that social dominance bears a relationship to individual values, in particular the relationship between being self-centric or other-centric. To date, however, research has not explored whether social dominance (and its relationship to individual values) helps to explain attitudes toward parents of trans children.

Finally regarding attitudes towards parents of trans children, it is likely that the gender of the child plays a role. Most obviously, given the literature summarised above, what Ashley (2019) refers to as 'gender modality' (i.e., being transgender or cisgender) is likely to play a role, such that it is reasonable to expect parents of cisgender children to be viewed more favorably than parents of trans children. A focus on gender is more complex. Older research suggests that internationally parents may prefer to have at least one son (e.g., Kippen et al. 2007), though whether this remains true in the Australian context is unclear. Given that previous research suggests non-binary people are viewed more negatively than trans people with a binary gender (e.g., Worthen, 2021), it is reasonable to expect that parents of non-binary children might be viewed least favorably. With regard to the intersections of gender modality and gender, a concerted negative focus on trans boys has been apparent in recent Australian media, such as in concerns by those who identify as 'gender critical' that children who were assigned female

at birth are being 'influenced' into being trans. Whether such attitudes translate into more positive attitudes towards trans girls as compared to trans boys is as yet untested.

All of the above is particularly salient in the contemporary Australian context, given recent political events that have led to a new wave of scrutiny regarding parents who support their children in transitioning. An *Education Legislation Amendment (Parental Rights Bill)* was introduced to state parliament in New South Wales in 2020, for example, framing the inclusion of "gender fluidity" as an ideology. While it has since been defeated, this bill fed into a pre-existing narrative regarding the inclusion of discussions of gender and sexuality in educational settings (Ferfolja & Ullman, 2017; Ullman, 2017), as well as in other sectors such as the media (McIntyre, 2017), positioning trans people's lives as politically and morally controversial topics (Shannon & Smith, 2017). Following the aforementioned Bill, a federal *Religious Discrimination Bill* has been introduced, which seeks to allow religious organizations to discriminate on the basis of gender and sexuality, highlighting ongoing attempts at legislating for discrimination.

The aforementioned defeated bill also hinged on the notion that Australian parents have a singular value system, and that discussions of gender diversity are "inconsistent with the values held by parents of students" as a group, a claim that is in direct contrast to the findings of Ullman et al. (2021), who report that the Australian parents they surveyed were overwhelmingly in support of inclusive education about gender and sexuality diversity. Ironically, the parents most likely to find themselves up against educational morals and ethics as advocated for in the defeated bill are precisely those parents of trans children, who have to contend with their trans child experiencing transphobic bullying by peers (Strauss et al., 2020), mistreatment by school staff (Jones et al., 2016), and highly segregated gender binary frameworks which influence everything from bathrooms to school uniforms (Bragg et al., 2018). Whether, as the defeated Bill (and others like it since have) suggested, this type of legislative amendment actually reflects the views of people living in Australia with regard to trans children and their parents and their right to social inclusion, however, is far from an established fact.

Research Questions

Drawing on the literature summarised above, the study reported in this paper sought to explore how a representative sample of people living in Australia viewed parents of trans children. Using a series of fictional vignettes featuring either a mother or a father of either a trans or cisgender boy or girl, or a child with a non-binary gender, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. Are there differences in attitudes towards parents based on the gender of the parent in the vignette and the gender modality and gender of the child?
2. Are traditional views about mothers and fathers related to attitudes towards parents in the vignettes?
3. Are social dominance and individual values related to attitudes towards parents in the vignettes?
4. Are attitudes towards parents in vignettes differentiated by attitudes towards the rights of trans people?

Method

Sample

Ethics approval was granted by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee. Participants were recruited as members of a Qualtrics audience panel. Qualtrics offers a paid service that provides researchers with representative samples of a chosen population. For the present study, the audience panel was weighted to ensure it was representative of both gender and age against Australian population norms. Inclusion criteria were living in Australia and being aged 18 years or older. Recruitment occurred over two weeks in March 2021, and closed once the minimum sample size was exceeded (based on the population size of Australia, a 95% confidence level, and a 4% margin of error). Participants were asked to give consent to participation, and were advised that they could withdraw at any time prior to submitting their completed responses. Participants were paid a small honorarium for their time as members of a Qualtrics audience panel.

Materials

Participants completed a survey designed by the authors, hosted on Qualtrics. The survey opened with an information screen, detailing the purpose of the study, outlining inclusion criteria, and then asked participants to consent to participation. Participants were then presented with a series of demographic questions: gender; whether or not they were trans; sexuality; age, whether or not they were in an intimate relationship; whether they were Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, both, or neither; whether or not they were a parent; their degree of religiosity: 1 = not at all, 2 = somewhat, 3 = quite a bit, 4 = a lot; their political views (liberal, centrist, or conservative); what State or Territory they lived in; their highest educational qualification; their average household annual income; and their current employment status.

Participants were then presented with a screen providing definitions for 'trans', 'cisgender', and 'non-binary'. This screen included a mandatory 10-s wait time before participants could click through to the next screen, to increase the

likelihood that participants read the definitions. Participants were then randomly presented with three of the following possible potential fictional vignettes: (1) mother of a trans girl, (2) mother of a cisgender girl, (3) mother of a trans boy, (4) mother of a cisgender boy, (5) mother of a child with a non-binary gender, (6) father of a trans girl, (7) father of a cisgender girl, (8) father of a trans boy, (9) father of a cisgender boy, (10) father of a child with a non-binary gender. While these were randomly presented, each participant was presented with a vignette that included one each of (1) a trans child, (2) a cisgender child, (3) a child with a non-binary gender.

The fictional vignettes were identical, with just the name of the parent, the name of the child, and the gender (of the parent) or gender and gender modality of the child manipulated. An example vignette is "Sarah is the mother of Miranda, a transgender girl. Sarah believes that, as a parent, her role is to support her daughter to be happy, to allow her daughter to make decisions about her life, and to help her daughter navigate the complexities of growing up in contemporary Australia". Vignettes were designed to be relatively neutral, so as not to provoke extreme responses (either from those strongly for or against trans children and their parents). The language of 'decision' was used not to reflect that being trans is a 'choice', but rather reflecting a decision about how to live one's gender and to enact self-determination (hence the vignettes refer to 'decisions about [child's] life', rather than about their gender).

After reading each vignette participants responded to a series of five statements designed by the authors. These were (1) "[Parent name] is a good [mother/father]", (2) '[Parent name's] beliefs about parenting seem reasonable", (3) "[Parent name] needs to be more assertive and not let their child make so many decisions", (4) "[Parent name] is an overly permissive [mother/father]", and (5) "Any complexities experienced by [parents name's] child are caused by [parent name]. Participants responded to these statements on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, 5 = somewhat agree, 6 = agree, 7 = strongly disagree. Items 3–5 are reverse scored, and scores then summed to give an overall score for each vignette, with higher scores indicating more positive appraisal of the parent in the vignette. Having responded to the statements for each of the three vignettes they were randomly presented with, participants then were asked to respond to five measures.

Traditional Motherhood Scale

The Traditional Motherhood Scale (TMS, Whatley & Knox, 2005) asks participants to respond to a series of ten statements that reflect traditional views about what it means to be a mother. Examples include "Mothers know the most about

their child", "Motherhood is an essential part of a woman's life", and "Mothers have the strongest emotional bond with their child". Participants respond to each of these statements using a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Higher scores on the scale reflect more traditional views about motherhood. The authors report an alpha level of 0.89 for the TMS, in the present study the alpha level was 0.92.

Traditional Fatherhood Scale

The Traditional Fatherhood Scale (TFS, Whatley & Knox, 2005) asks participants to respond to a series of ten statements that reflect traditional views about what it means to be a father. Examples include "Fathers do not spend much time with their children", "fathers should be the disciplinarian in the family", and "Fathers are not actively involved with their children". Participants respond to each of these statements using a 7-point Likert scale, from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. Higher scores on the scale reflect more traditional views about fatherhood. The authors report an alpha level of 0.84 for the TFS, in the present study the alpha level was 0.89.

Schwartz Values Survey

The Schwartz Values Survey (SVS, Schwartz et al., 2012) asks participants to respond to a series of values, asking them to rate the degree to which they feel that each value is opposed to or important to their own principles. The SVS encompasses the ten values of security, conformity, tradition, benevolence, universalism, self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, and power. These 10 core value dimensions are encompassed by two binary groupings: openness to change versus conservation, and self-transcendence versus self-enhancement (Knafo-Noam et al., 2020). Examples of the values as described in the measure are "achievement (success, ambition, influence on people and events" and "stimulation (daring, a varied and challenging life, an exciting life)". Participants respond to each prompt on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = opposed to my principles, 2 = somewhat opposed to my principles, 3 = neither opposed nor important to my principles, 4 = somewhat important to my principles, and 5 = of supreme importance to my principles. Given that the SVS does not sum to a singular overall value, alpha values cannot be calculated.

Social Dominance Short Scale

The Social Dominance Short Scale (SDO$_7$, Ho et al., 2015) asks participants to rate the degree to which they oppose or favor a series of eight statements that ask about social dominance. The statements reflect one of four domains of

social dominance: (1) Protrait dominance (e.g., "An ideal society requires some groups to be on top and others to be on the bottom"), (2) Contrait dominance (e.g., "No one group should dominate in society), (3) Protrait anti-egalitarianism (e.g., "Group equality should not be our primary goal"), and (4) Contrait egalitarianism (e.g., "We should do what we can to equalize conditions for different groups). Participants respond to each item on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly oppose, 2 = somewhat oppose, 3 = slightly oppose, 4 = neutral, 5 = slightly favor, 6 = somewhat favor, and 7 = strongly favor. Contrait items are reverse scored. Higher scores on the scale reflect greater adherence to social dominance norms. The authors report an alpha level of 0.79 for the SDO_7, in the present study the alpha level was 0.82.

Trans Rights Scale

Designed by the authors given a lack of measures focusing on the rights of transgender people in the Australian context (though drawing on the Trans Persons' Civil Rights Scale, developed by Tee & Hegarty, 2006, in the context of the United Kingdom), the Trans Rights Scale (TRS) asks participants to rate their agreement with a series of five statements. The instructions to the scale note that the statements pertain to transgender people (including children) in Australia. The five statements are (1) "Trans people should have the right to have a new passport issued to reflect their gender", (2) "Trans people should have the right to have a new birth certificate issued to reflect their gender", (3) "Trans people should have the right to access affirming medical care without requiring Court approval", (4) "Trans people should have the right to attend schools or workplaces that are respectful of their gender", and (5) "Trans people should have the right to live free from discrimination". Participants respond to each statement on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagreed, and 4 = somewhat agree, and 5 = strongly agree. Higher scores on the scale indicate greater agreement with the rights of trans people in Australia. The alpha level for the TRS was 0.94.

Analytic Approach

The survey was open for two weeks. In this time 1140 Qualtrics audience panel members completed the survey in full. Of these four were considered problematic as they provided open-ended responses to the gender demographic question that indicated a vexatious approach to the study topic.

Upon closure of the survey, data were exported from SurveyMonkey into SPSS 25.0. The data were then cleaned in the following ways. First, the four problematic participants as outlined above were removed. Negatively scored items on the parental vignettes and the SDO_7 were reverse scored.

The factor structure of each of the TMS, the TFS, the SVS, the SDO_7, and the TRS was then analyzed. The factor structure of all but the SVS provided a single factor solution, with no items requiring removal. The SVS produced a two-factor solution with orthogonal rotation, these factors mapping across to self-transcendence and self-enhancement as outlined by Knafo-Noam et al. (2020). Items pertaining solely to these two factors were thus retained for analysis. Reliability tests were undertaken for all measures. Item means were then calculated for the parental vignettes, the TMS, the TFS, the SVS, the SDO_7, and the TRS.

In terms of planned analyses, a full overview of the analytic approach and outputs is available in the following Open Science Framework record: https://osf.io/4qyt9/?view_only=90b00ed5d62a4531901cda8f587fa16f. This record details each step of the analysis undertaken, the reasoning for specific decisions about the analytic approach, and a detailed overview of the outputs from each step of the analysis.

Results

Table 1 summarizes the demographics of the sample. The average age of participants was 45.41 years (range 18–87 years). On average, participants reported being not very religious (M = 1.68, SD = 0.88).

Table 2 reports on the means for each of the measures. On average, participants gave somewhat positive appraisals of parents in each of the vignettes. On average, participants were neutral about traditional motherhood beliefs, and somewhat disagreed with traditional fatherhood beliefs. On average, participants were somewhat in agreement in terms of the rights of trans people. On average, participants saw self-transcendence or self-enhancement values as neither opposed to nor important to their principles. Finally, on average, participants reported relatively low levels of social dominance.

Table 3 reports the final model including all variables of interest as they relate to ratings of the fictional vignettes. Mothers in the vignettes were rated slightly more negatively than fathers, corresponding to a difference of 0.045 points on the 7-point scale. The gender modality of the child had no statistical impact on the overall rating, though in terms of the gender of the child parents of non-binary children were rated more negatively.

All covariates had an impact on parental ratings. An increase of one point on the trans rights scale translated to an overall increase of 0.47: those who reported more positive attitudes to the rights of trans people rated parents in vignettes more favorably. An increase of one point on the traditional parent norms scales translated to an overall decrease of 0.39: those with more traditional views of

Table 1 Demographics of sample (*n* = 1136)

Variable	Category	*N*
Gender	Man	552
	Woman	584
Transgender	No	1106
	Yes	30
Sexuality	Heterosexual	954
	Bisexual	67
	Lesbian	16
	Queer/pansexual	55
	Gay	27
	Asexual	17
Relationship status	In a relationship	660
	Single	381
	Dating	95
Parent	Yes	664
	No	472
Employment status	Full time	384
	Part time	248
	Retired	228
	Student	48
	Unable to work	46
	Unemployed	87
	Home duties	95
Political views	Liberal	451
	Centrist	434
	Conservative	251
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	Yes	64
	No	1072
State or Territory of Residence	South Australia	101
	New South Wales	345
	Victoria	286
	Queensland	268
	Western Australia	83
	Australian Capital Territory	13
	Tasmania	36
	Northern Territory	4
Household income AUD	$0–$18, 200	115
	$18, 201–$37, 000	210
	$37, 001–$80, 000	366
	$80, 001–$180, 000	344
	$180, 001+	101
Highest qualification	No formal education	30
	Secondary school	359
	Certificate	242
	Diploma	172
	Undergraduate degree	214
	Postgraduate degree	119

Table 2 Means and standard deviations for each of the measures

	Category	*M*	*SD*
Vignette rating × parent gender	Mother	5.19	1.22
	Father	5.23	1.19
Vignette rating × child gender	Girl	5.23	1.14
	Boy	5.23	1.15
	Non-binary	5.13	1.22
Vignette rating × child gender modality	Trans	5.21	1.22
	Cisgender	5.22	5.10
Parent norms	Motherhood	3.54	0.73
	Fatherhood	2.92	1.15
Trans inclusion		3.87	0.97
Values	Transcendence	3.28	0.65
	Enhancement	3.82	0.70
SDO_7		3.09	1.06

more positively. And an increase of one point on the social dominance scale translated to an overall decrease of 0.14: those who reported greater social dominance rated parents in vignettes more negatively.

No significant interactions were identified between the covariates, other than between social dominance and gender of child, specifically in regard to parents of non-binary children. An increase of one point on the social dominance scale translated to an additional decreased parent rating of 0.03 points for parents of non-binary children specifically: those who reported greater social dominance rated parents of non-binary children in vignettes more negatively. Likely demographic variables of participant gender, whether or not participants were a parent, and participant political beliefs were also tested against the model, and did not make any additional contribution in terms of the explanatory power of the model reported in Table 3.

Table 3 Final model of ratings of vignettes

	β	97.5% CI, LL, UL	χ^2	p
Intercept	4.62	4.13, 5.10		
Parent gender	−0.04	−0.04, −0.08	5.48	*
Child gender	0.14	−0.12, 0.40	17.60	***
Child gender modality	−0.11	−0.26, 0.02	0.12	
Parent norms	−0.38	−0.46, −0.30	89.80	***
Trans inclusion	0.44	0.38, 0.51	264.79	***
Values transcendence	−0.11	−0.17, −0.04	12.83	***
Values enhancement	0.18	0.11, 0.25	26.17	***
SDO_7	−0.12	−0.18, −0.06	24.47	***

[**]p = .01; [*]p = .05; [***]p = .001

motherhood and fatherhood rated parents in vignettes more negatively. An increase of one point on self-transcendence values translated to an overall decrease of 0.12: those who indicated that their values were more other-centric rated parents in vignettes more negatively. An increase of one point on self-enhancement values translated to an overall increase of 0.19: those who indicated that their values were more self-centric rated parents in vignettes

Discussion

The findings reported in this paper make a useful contribution to current debates in the Australian context in regard to support for parents who are affirming of their trans children. In terms of the first research question, mothers in general were rated somewhat more poorly than were fathers, echoing previous research suggesting that there are gendered dimensions to the evaluation of parenting (e.g., Swift, 2018). In terms of the gender modality or gender of children in the vignettes, parents of non-binary children were rated more negatively, echoing research on attitudes toward non-binary people more broadly (e.g., Worthen, 2021), though interestingly there were no significant differences when comparing trans and cisgender boys and girls. In terms of the second research question focused on traditional views about mothers and fathers, while participants who reported more traditional views rated both mothers and fathers more negatively, there was no interaction between traditional views and the gender modality or gender of the child in the vignette. For the third research question, participants with a greater social dominance orientation unsurprisingly rated all parents more negatively, but somewhat surprisingly participants with higher self-enhancement (i.e., being self-centric) scores rated all parents more positively, while those with higher self-transcendence (i.e., being other-centric) scores rated all parents more negatively. Finally for research question four, people with higher scores on the TRS rated all parents more positively, though the effect was more pronounced in regard to ratings of parents with a trans child, suggesting that those with more positive attitudes towards the rights of trans people might be better informed about a diversity of genders, and hence more affirming of parents of a trans child.

What, then, might we make of these findings? The finding that parents of non-binary children were rated most negatively might reflect the fact that, despite the descriptions provided, for some participants non-binary children were an unfamiliar group. While we might expect parents of trans girls and boys to also be rated negatively, their binary genders might have outweighed the fact of their gender modality. While traditional views about mothers and fathers negatively impacted attitudes towards all parents, it is perhaps logical that this was not differentiated by child's gender modality or gender, given all vignettes reported on parents who were affirming of their child's agency and decision-making capacity. In other words, it might be seemingly 'liberal' parents who were the issue for those with more traditional values, not the gender modality or gender of the child. As we note below in terms of research question three, the issue might be that those

who hold more traditional views about motherhood and fatherhood also do not support any view of children where they should be accorded agency in their lives.

The findings of the third research question with regard to values are surprising, given Knafo-Noam et al. (2020) define self-transcendence through the values of universalism and benevolence, and self-enhancement through the values of power and achievement. This finding may again potentially have more to do with the agency accorded to the children in the vignettes than to their gender modality, gender, or their parent's values. In other words, those with higher self-enhancement scores may have read into the vignettes a desire for the children to enhance their social situation, thus affirming the parents as supporting that, whereas those with higher self-transcendence scores may have viewed the children as asserting their own agency over that of their parents. As such, the participants may have responded less to vignette depictions of parental self-transcendence (i.e., seeking the best for their children), and instead responded more to the child's actions in the vignettes. This may speak to issues of developmentalism (i.e., the view that young children are incapable of or should not be permitted to assert agency), suggesting the importance of measuring attitudes towards child obedience in future studies.

The finding that higher scores on the TRS were related to more positive attitudes towards all parents (even if somewhat more so for parents of trans and non-binary children) potentially adds weight to the argument above. Given all parents were depicted as affirming, regardless of the child's gender modality or gender, it is possible that this was viewed positively by those with more inclusive attitudes towards the rights of trans people (including children). In other words, the TRS and the measures of attitudes towards parents potentially assess similar concepts, namely attitudes towards self-determination.

Together, these findings paint an important picture of the current Australian context. Certainly, there were specific points of dissent with regard to attitudes toward parents (namely in regard to parents of non-binary children), but overall we see a picture of relatively high levels of support for trans rights, high levels of support for parents regardless of the child's gender modality or gender, and while traditional values about mothers and fathers, social dominance, and self-enhancement or -transcendence add complexity to the picture, they do not override a primary focus on inclusion. Such findings are important given current conversations between some government figures and their constituents about the inclusion of trans people in schools and the rights of parents to affirm their trans children and see them reflected in educational contexts. The findings reported here, from a representative Australian sample, do not support the idea that Australians in general endorse the marginalization of trans children and their parents.

Beyond implications for current debates over the rights of trans children and their parents, the findings reported in this paper have specific implications for where public information to foster inclusion might be best directed. The findings suggest that a focus on the experiences, needs, and rights of non-binary children and their parents might be especially important. This could include ensuring commensurate representation of non-binary children in the media, given that often it is typically trans children with a binary gender who are a focus. It could also involve ensuring that discussions that use the umbrella term 'trans' (as used in this paper) incorporate a diversity of genders, so as to ensure that non-binary genders are not erased. Finally, teaching materials and other materials for young people should be sure to include representations of non-binary children and their families, so that from a young age people are learning about non-binary genders (and non-binary children see themselves reflected in the world around them). At the same time, teachers, including pre-service teachers, need support and training to feel confident to utilise such materials, especially in a climate of fear where the lives of trans people are treated as fodder for political gain.

Although the findings reported in this paper were robust and have clear implications, some limitations must be noted. While the sample was designed to be representative, it is entirely possible that particular cohorts of people may hold different views about parents of trans children. Specifically, the sample reported not being very religious, and thus a sample with stronger religious views may hold different attitudes. Similarly, the study did not ask participants about cultural background (other than First Nations status). Cultural diversity may play a role in attitudes towards parents of trans children. Further, while participants were asked if they were a parent, they were not asked if they were a parent of a trans child. Given such people are likely to hold favorable attitudes, asking this question will be important in future research. As noted above, the inclusion of a measure of views about child obedience (e.g., the ANES Child Rearing Scale, see Hooper, 2020) may help to further explore aspects of attitudes toward parents of trans children. Finally, it is possible that attitudes toward parents of trans children might be influenced by the age of the child, with affirming parents of very young children being viewed less positively. The present study did not include child age as a potential variable in the vignettes, and future research would benefit from examining the effect of child age on ratings of attitudes toward parents.

In conclusion, the findings reported in this paper suggest that in the sample there was broad support for parents of trans children. More specifically, and to return topic of parental fitness raised in the introduction to this paper, the findings reported in this paper would suggest that among the sample views about parental fitness were on the whole not negatively influenced by views about gender modality (even if to a small extent it is possible there was a detrimental effect on views about parental fitness with regard to parents of non-binary children, though whether this pertains to parental fitness or broader views about non-binary people requires further research). Along with other research examining, for example, support for the inclusion of teaching about gender diversity in Australian sex education (e.g., Ferfolja & Ullman, 2017), this paper provides further support for recognising the rights of trans children and their parents. While people living in Australia are likely to hold a diversity of views, including those not canvassed in the study reported in this paper, it is reasonable to suggest that legislative or policy attempts to curtail the inclusion of trans children and their parents is likely not supported by a majority of people living in Australia. Further studies that examine public attitudes about parents of trans children are vital to ensuring that (likely minority) views and political ideologies are not weaponised to justify discrimination against trans children and their parents.

Declarations

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