Using Narrative Writing Interventions to Combat Trans Stigma

Max Staab & Victoria Shaffer

Study Aims

We aimed to examine measures of perspective taking and trans stigma in order to determine the effectiveness of fictional narrative writing interventions in combatting stigma against, and encouraging perspective taking for, trans people.

Hypothesis 1 ➔ We hypothesized that participants engaging in the experimental condition would demonstrate increased perspective taking scores after the intervention.

Hypothesis 2 ➔ We hypothesized that participants engaging in the experimental condition would exhibit a reduced amount of reported stigma against people who are transgender.

Introduction

•**Narrative Writing Interventions and Empathy** (Shaffer et al., 2019)
  • Engaging in a narrative writing intervention allowed participants to take the perspective of a woman engaged in a negative health behavior (smoking while pregnant)
  • Participating in the experimental condition was also associated with an increase in reported empathy for the fictional woman engaging in the negative health behavior

•**Trans Stigma Narrative Interventions** (Tompkins et al., 2015)
  • Two narrative conditions were used for comparison, a perspective taking narrative and an education only narrative
  • The perspective taking condition resulted in an increase in positive attitudes towards trans people
  • The education only condition resulted in an increase in reported stigma towards trans people

•**Trans Stigma Contact Interventions** (Boccanfuso et al., 2020)
  • Contact with trans people was associated with a reduction in prejudice
  • This effect is mediated by the gender identity of the participant: cisgender men reported lower levels of stigma after engaging in the experimental condition while stigma levels for cisgender women remained the same

Method

Procedures
• Selected from an intro psychology participant pool.
• Consent indicated.
• Randomly assigned to a condition.
• Responded to pre/post intervention questions, narrative writing prompts.
• Debriefed about study purpose and given contact info for lead researcher.
• Given class credit for participation.

Demographic Data n=121	
Race/Ethnicity	
Caucasian/White	90.91%
African American/Black	5.79%
Asian	4.13%
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.83%
Other	1.65%
Gender	
Female	61.79%
Male	38.21%
Have you known anyone who is transgender?	
Yes	64.23%
No	35.77%
Do you identify with your gender assigned at birth?	
Yes	99.19%
No	0.81%

Narrative Intervention
• Asked to imagine seeing someone wearing a "this is what trans looks like" pin
• Responded to a series of questions about attitudes towards this person and other trans people
• Developed the character via a series of questions (gender, race, age, economic status, etc.)
• Engaged in two (five minute long) writing exercises about their fictional trans characters in everyday scenarios.

Control
• Asked to imagine seeing someone wearing a "this is what trans looks like" pin
• Responded to a series of questions about attitudes towards this person and other trans people
• Engaged in two (five minute long) writing exercises about the room and a nearby building

Measures
Perspective Taking: A version of the Perspective Taking subscale of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index revised to refer in a gender neutral way to the fictional trans person. This scale contained 14 items and utilized a 0 (not at all) to 100 (very much) scale. (i.e "I imagined what it was like to be them"; Davis, 1983).
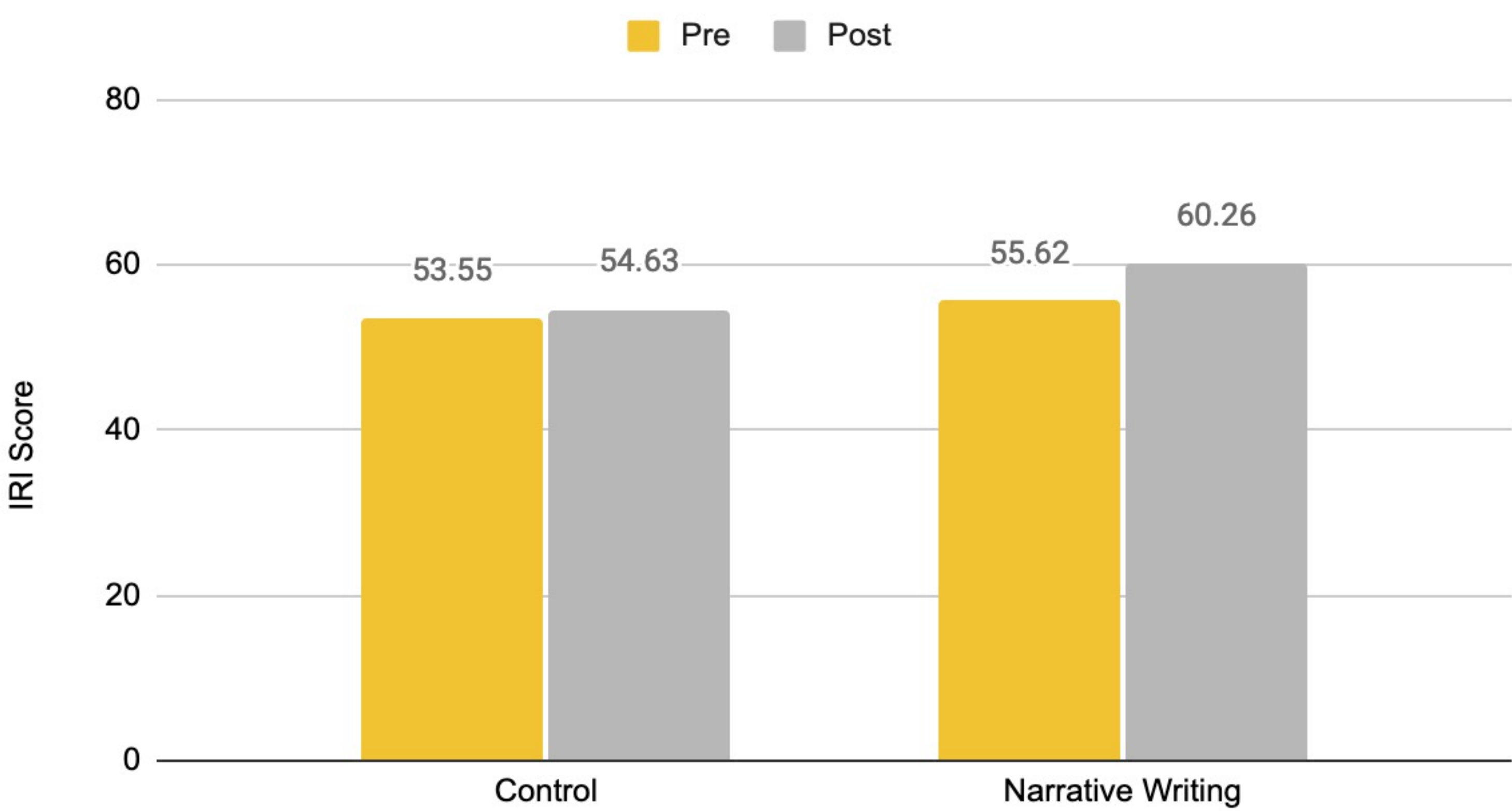
Trans Stigma: The Transgender Knowledge, Attitudes, and Beliefs scale contained 22 items and utilized a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). (i.e. "a person with a penis cannot be a woman, I avoid interacting with people whose gender is unclear to me"; Campione-Barr & Smetana, 2010).

Results

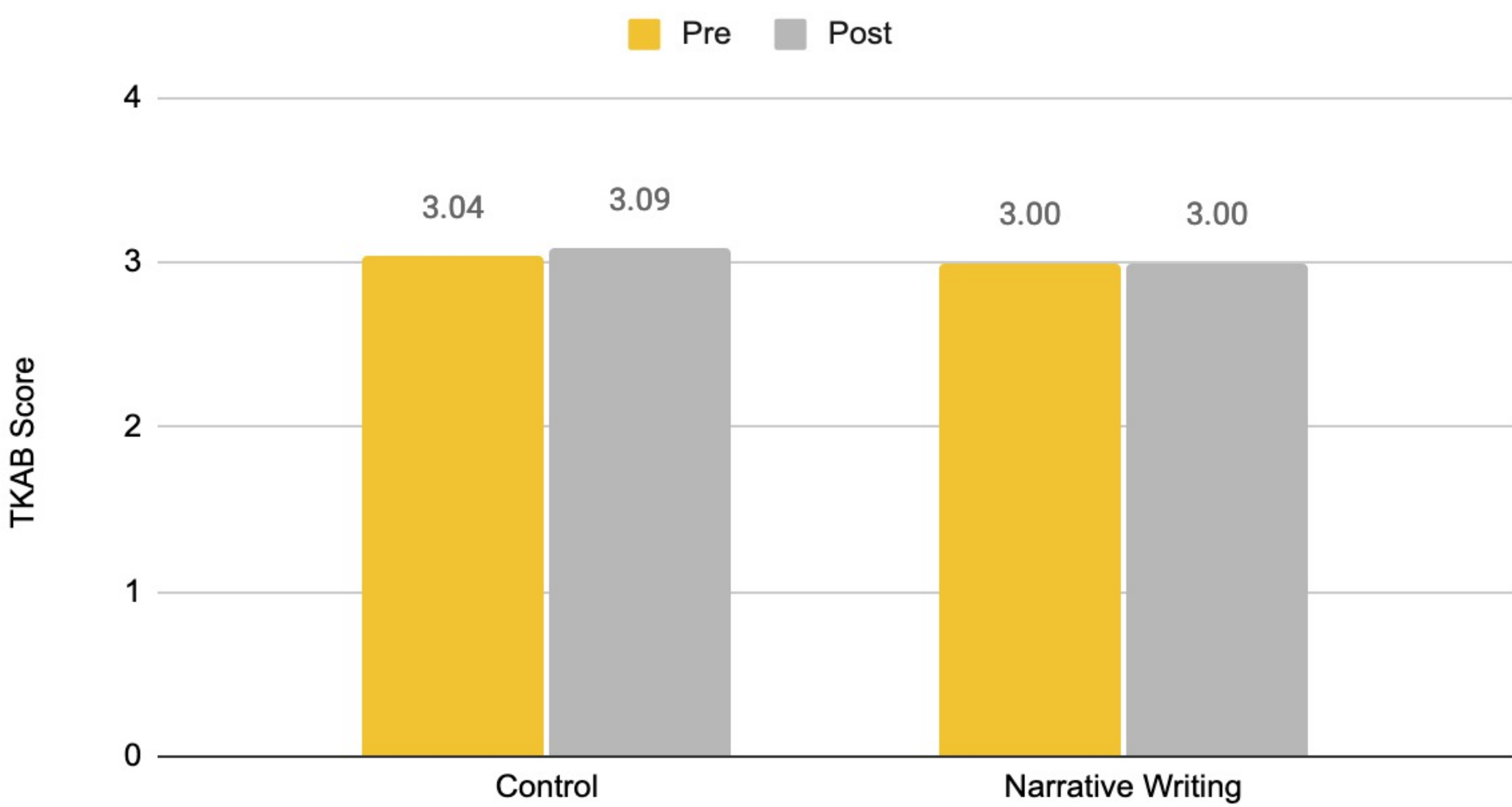### Perspective Taking
$t(56) = -3.483$, $p = .001$

Interpersonal Reactivity Index

Control: Pre 53.55, Post 54.63
Narrative Writing: Pre 55.62, Post 60.26

Trans Stigma
$t(56) = -0.031$, $p = .975$

Transgender Knowledge, Attitudes, and Beliefs

Control: Pre 3.04, Post 3.09
Narrative Writing: Pre 3.00, Post 3.00

Discussion

Hypothesis 1 ➔ Supported
• There were significant positive pre-post differences in Interpersonal Reactivity Index scores.

Hypothesis 2 ➔ Not Supported
• There were no significant pre-post differences in reported Transgender Attitudes, Knowledge, and Beliefs scores

Conclusions
Given these results, it can not be concluded that this narrative writing intervention is an effective method for combatting stigma against people who are transgender. The results indicate that this may an effective intervention when attempting to encourage perspective taking for trans people.

Future Research
• Use different measures of stigma
• Explore participant feelings about the study itself
• Measure the relationships between sexual orientation and trans stigma
• Measure the relationships between other factors (location, income, political affiliation) and stigma against trans people after engaging with an intervention
• Examine relationships between trans stigma and gender of trans person
• Utilize different types of interventions, or different narrative writing interventions

References

• Boccanfuso, E., White, F.A. & Maunder, R.D. Reducing Transgender Stigma via an E-contact Intervention. *Sex Roles* **84**, 326–336 (2021). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-020-01171-9
• Shaffer, V. A., Bohanek, J., Focella, E. S., Horstman, H., & Saffran, L. (2019). Encouraging perspective taking: Using narrative writing to induce empathy for others engaging in negative health behaviors. *Plos One, 14*(10). doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0224046
• Tompkins, T. L., Shields, C. N., Hillman, K. M., & White, K. (2015). Reducing stigma toward the transgender community: An evaluation of a humanizing and perspective-taking intervention. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity, 2*(1), 34–42. https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000088