**Can Virtual Reality and Immersive Storytelling Reduce Prejudice and Enhance Empathy towards Gay Men: An Explorative Study in Taiwan**

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**Abstract**

**Objective:** Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people are still often experienced prejudice and discrimination in Taiwan. Much psychological research has been devoted to finding effective intervention strategies to reduce prejudice. One of the effective factors with empirical evidence is what Gordon Allport (1954) termed “the contact hypothesis.” It means that people with more contact with outgroup members might have lower prejudice tendencies. Research also shows that prejudice is related to empathy. These thoughts are in line with a global movement “human library” that has been gaining popularity in the past twenty years. The human library concept is that via sharing personal life stories by the minority or marginalized groups, their experiences are similar to “books,” therefore the listeners or “readers” can broaden their viewpoints and feelings to reduce prejudice and promote empathy. The current study tries to implement these ideas and adds the component of virtual reality (VR) to make these interventions attainable without face-to-face contact. **Method:** Based on the ideas of the human library and contact hypothesis, this study developed an intervention of virtual reality movies. In this immersive storytelling film, a gay man shared his personal life stories related to his sexual orientation in front of a 360-degree camera. The resulting VR immersive storytelling film is for the experimental intervention. The research design is a single-group pretest-posttest experiment. Twenty-four participants watched the film through the VR helmet and completed pretest and posttest questionnaires. **Results:** Participants’ posttest scores of prejudice towards gay men are significantly lower than the pretest after watching the VR film. Also, the posttest scores of trait empathy are significantly higher than the pretest. After watching the film, participants showed high scores on the state empathy toward the gay character of the film. These findings can be used to develop gender equity education, multicultural education, and other counseling and guidance programs based on human narratives and virtual reality.

Keywords: *Virtual Reality, Immersive Storytelling, Gay Men, Prejudice Reduction, Empathy*