

## COMPARATIVE STUDY OF STUDENT ATTITUDES TOWARDS LGBTQ+ INDIVIDUALS ACROSS ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES

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### Abstract

Gender identity and sexual orientation are complex aspects of human identity. This study explores the intricate interplay between sexual identity, sexual orientation, and social role behaviors, with a focus on the transgender experience. It delves into how an individual's perception and acknowledgment of their body and gender may lead to discomfort and gender dysphoria when it does not align with societal expectations and their own self-awareness. The study examines the journey of transsexual individuals who identify with a gender different from the one assigned at birth and their desire to have primary and secondary characteristics of the opposite gender.

### Introduction

The differentiation of almost all living species in two basic forms as female and male, especially over their reproductive organs and systems, is called "gender" (Kaos GL, 2014). Sexual identity is an individual's perception and acknowledgment of his/her body and self in a certain gender; sexual orientation is the attraction of an individual's desire, emotion, and behaviors to a certain gender, while the sexual role is the social profile of an individual's sexual behaviors. Role behaviors towards the opposite gender generally start at the age of 3-5 and become a personality trait in the adolescence period. Trans-sexuality is defined as the sexual identity disorder characterized by an individual's perception of himself/herself in the opposite gender, being uncomfortable with the characteristics related to his/her biological gender and trying to hide them, desiring to have the primary and secondary characteristics of the opposite gender (Keskin et al., 2015). Transsexuals are individuals who believe that they were assigned with the wrong gender at birth, and the factors defining their current genders (like chromosomes) do not correspond with their awareness of gender (Yarnset al., 2016). According to the DSM-V (The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders), there is an unconformity between the biological gender and sexual identity, and this conformity results in discomfort and distress in the trans-sexuality discussed as gender dysphoria. (Keskin et al., 2015; Hudson et al., 1980).

Sexual orientation refers to the emotional and sexual attraction towards others (Yarns et al., 2016). The type of sexual orientation that is widely accepted and realized in societies today is the orientation of individuals to the opposite sex. However, there are individuals who are attracted to the same gender as they are or both genders. Women or men who are attracted to those of the same gender as they are called homosexual; male homosexuals are called "gay" and female homosexuals are called "lesbian". A bisexual is a woman or man who is in an emotional, erotic, and sexual orientation towards both his/her own gender and the opposite gender. A transsexual is a woman or man who considers himself/herself as someone of the opposite sex in their inner worlds rather than behaviors (Kaos GL, 2014).

In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is specified that all humans are born free in equal dignity and rights, and everyone, regardless of their race, color, gender, language, religion, political or any other opinion,

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national or social origin, without discrimination of property, birth or another status should benefit from the rights (<http://www.danistay.gov.tr/upload/insanhaklarievrenselbeyannamesi.pdf>). However, in many countries of the world today, LGBT individuals are often disapproved by society and can be subjected to many practices such as exclusion, harassment, denunciation, pushed to work as sex workers. Practices that involve prejudice and discrimination negatively affect LGBT people's use of education, health care, transportation, and other services, resulting in a disadvantageous position (<http://www.danistay.gov.tr/upload/insanhaklarievrenselbeyannamesi.pdf>; Mete and Ozerdogan, 2019).

There are many studies conducted to examine the attitudes towards gay and lesbian individuals in the world, and these studies were mostly conducted in the United States of America and Canada. A study conducted to examine the discrimination based on sexual orientation and sexual identity in Europe found that all 47 countries that were included in the study had homophobic and transphobic attitudes; however, the attitudes varied significantly in the same country or depending on the country (<https://rm.coe.int/avrupa-da-cinsel-yonelim-vecinsiyet-kimligine-dayal-ayr-mc-l-k-rapord/16807ba838>). The study by Kabacaoglu found that the most important problem in the coming out process for gay and lesbian individuals was the homophobic and heterosexist attitudes in the society and the negative attitudes towards homosexuality and homosexuals (Kabacaoglu, 2015). In the study by Mete and Özerdoğan, almost all students stated that there was a prejudice in the society against homosexuals (Mete and Ozerdogan, 2019). In the study by Küçükkaya and Kahyaoğlu Süt, it was found that compared to female students, male students knew what is LGBT better, they thought that the reason why LGBT individuals could not openly express their sexual orientation/identity was social pressure, LGBT was a disease and should be treated, they would be uncomfortable while providing care to LGBT individual, LGBT individual could have sexually transmitted infections, they would discriminate LGBT individual due to his/her sexual orientation/identity (Küçükkaya and Kahyaoğlu Süt, 2018). The present study aims to compare the attitudes of students in different departments towards Lesbian and Gay people.

## **Material Method**

**Type of the Study:** This study is cross-sectional and descriptive type.

**Place and Characteristics of the Study:** The study was conducted with the 4-grade students in different departments of Atatürk University (Health- Science- Social) in the 2020-2021 educational year. In order to evaluate whether the education had an impact on the attitudes towards Lesbian and Gay people, senior students were selected.

**Sample of the Study:** The universe of the was 30594 students enrolled in undergraduate formal education in Atatürk University, and 383 students were selected using the stratified sampling method in the selection of the sample. In each stratum, 130-150 students were tried to be reached. The stratified sampling method was preferred as "cluster content might be similar, inter-cluster is different". The multistage cluster sampling method was used in this study. The clusters will include Health, Science, and Social fields. The faculties to be included in the cluster were determined by casting lots. Faculties and departments with active students were alphabetically sorted and numbered based on fields. The number as many as the faculty number was separately written on small papers, folded, and thrown into three different bags. A number was drawn from each bag, respectively, and taken into the sampling. The same method (determination of faculty) was used in the process of selecting departments from faculties. For each field, 3 faculties and departments (1 official+2 substitute). The reason for choosing three faculties and departments was to use other faculties and departments in case of inadequate participation from a faculty. In the draw, the selected faculties were Science, Engineering, and Agriculture faculties in the science field; Medicine, Dentistry, and Nursing in the health field; and Literature, Education, and Fine Arts in the social field. At the end of the study, 146 students from the health field, 127 students from the science field, and 124 students from the social field participated in the study.

## **Data Collection Tools**

In data collection, an 8-question introductory information form prepared by the researchers and the Short Form of the Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay Men Scale (ATLG), developed by Herek (Herek 2002) adapted to Turkish by Duyan and Gelbal (Duyan and Gelbal, 2006), was used to measure students' attitudes towards LGBT individuals.

**Introductory Information Form:** The information form prepared by the researchers consisted of 8 items questioning the introductory characteristics (gender, marital status, age, high school, place of residence, etc.) of students.

**The Short Form of the Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay Men Scale:** the adaptation, validation, and reliability studies of the Short Form of the Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay Men Scale (ATLG) developed by Herek (Herek 2002) were conducted by Duyan and Gelbal (Duyan and Gelbal, 2006) on students. The ATLG scale aims to determine the attitudes of individuals towards female and male homosexuality and consists of 10 items, five of which question the homosexuality of women and five of which question that of men. The individuals were asked to give their opinions to the stated thought in 5 levels: "I strongly disagree", "I disagree", "I cannot decide", "I agree", "I fully agree". Of the items regarding homosexuality, six had negative and four had positive meanings. While grading the positive items, the answer "I fully agree" was scored with "5" and the answer "I strongly disagree" was scored with "1". While grading the negative items, the answer "I strongly disagree" was scored with "5" and the answer "I fully agree" was scored with "1". High scores obtained from the scale indicated positive attitudes towards homosexuality; while low scores indicated the opposite (Duyan and Gelbal, 2006).

### **Data Collection**

The study aimed to reach all students who agreed to fill the survey sent online by the researchers through the sampling selection mentioned above. The completion of the surveys was carried out entirely on a voluntary basis. In the conduction of the survey, it was thought that the identifications of the participants should remain private so that they would express their opinions more comfortably and the participation would increase. Therefore, the form did not contain any sections about students' ID information, student numbers, classes.

The survey was conducted between October 2020-January 2021. The survey form prepared using the Google form was sent to students through learning tools (WhatsApp, zoom, Atatürk University Course Information System). The home page opens after clicking on the survey link to inform the students about the aim of the survey and study. The students who agreed to fill the online survey form were asked to click on the "Yes" button. Students who approved filled the form through the link. Students who did not want to fill the form clicked "No" and were excluded from the study and were allowed to leave the page without seeing the survey questions.

It is possible to see the participation status to the survey, time of start and finish, and the time spent for the survey instantly over the system used to prepare the survey form. This information was monitored during the survey. The participants were given approximately four months to answer the survey. Reminder messages were sent to students two weeks after the start of the survey, 15 days before the closure of the study, and on the last day of the survey. It was observed that reminder messages increased participation in the study.

### **Evaluation of Data**

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 22.0 was used in data analysis and evaluation, and proper analysis was performed by using the package program. In the comparison of the averages between the groups, the t-test was used in independent inter-groups in two groups; the One Way Anova test was used in groups of more than two. The results were evaluated between a confidence interval of 95%, and the significance was evaluated at the level of  $p < 0.05$ . Bonferroni Post-Hoc analysis was used to determine which group caused the difference. The normal distribution of the data was tested via the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

**The Ethical Principles of the Study:** Permission was obtained from the Atatürk University Health Sciences Faculty Ethics Committee (dated 21.05.2020, no 18) before starting the study. Official permission was then obtained from the institution where the study would be conducted (11.08.2020). Additionally, consent was obtained from the participants of the study before starting the survey. The principles of the Helsinki Declaration were also followed in every stage of the study.

## Results

**Table 1. Comparison of the Introductory Characteristics of the Groups**

Characteristics	Science (n = 127)		Health Sciences (n=146)		Social Sciences (n=124)		Test and p-value
	n	%	n	%	n	%	
<b>Gender</b>							
Female	67	52.8	60	41.1	58	46.8	$X^2=3.71$ p=0.15
Male	60	47.2	86	58.9	66	53.2	
<b>Marital status</b>							
Single	124	97.6	141	96.6	117	94.4	$X^2=1.93$ p=0.37
Married	3	2.4	5	3.4	7	5.6	
<b>High School</b>							
Regular High School	25	19.7	29	19.9	35	28.2	$X^2=12.97$ p=0.11
Private School	6	4.7	18	12.3	14	11.3	
Vocational High School	23	18.1	26	17.8	25	20.2	
Anatolian High School, Science	65	51.2	67	45.9	42	33.9	
High School, High School,							
Anatolian Teacher	8	6.3	6	4.1	8	6.5	
Training High School							
Religious Vocational High School							
<b>Long-lived Residence</b>							
Rural	27	21.3	31	21.2	35	28.2	$X^2=2.82$ p=0.58
Moved from rural to urban	40	31.5	50	34.2	40	32.3	
City	60	47.2	65	44.5	49	39.5	
<b>Religious status</b>							
I only do not believe in Allah	3	2.4	13	8.9	9	7.3	$X^2=8.64$ p=0.07
I believe in Allah but I do not believe in religion	14	11.0	9	6.2	6	4.8	
I believe in a religion and I fulfill its requirements	110	86.6	124	84.9	109	87.9	
<b>Do you know any homosexual person?</b>							
Yes	44	34.6	63	43.2	36	29.0	$X^2=5.95$ p=0.05
No	83	65.4	83	56.8	88	71.0	
<b>Closeness of the Homosexual Individual</b>	(n=44)		(n=63)		(n=36)		$X^2=7.57$ p=0.10
Relative	12		19		15		
Acquaintance	32		44		21		

Table 1 shows the comparison of students' introductory characteristics included in the study. When the comparison of the introductory characteristics of the groups was examined, it was found that the groups were homogeneous in terms of introductory characteristics, and there was no statistical difference between the groups.

**Table 2. The comparison of Average Scores of Groups in the Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay Men Scale**

SCALE	Groups			Test and p-value
	Science	Health Sciences	Social Sciences	
	$\bar{X} \pm SS$	$\bar{X} \pm SS$	$\bar{X} \pm SS$	
<b>Towards Men</b>	17.08 $\pm$ 3.20	15.70 $\pm$ 4.25	17.35 $\pm$ 4.07	F=7.13, <b>p=0.001</b>
<b>Towards Women</b>	16.83 $\pm$ 3.32	15.84 $\pm$ 4.27	16.89 $\pm$ 4.10	F=3.11, <b>p=0.04</b>
<b>Total</b>	33.92 $\pm$ 6.10	31.54 $\pm$ 7.98	34.25 $\pm$ 7.42	F=5.70, <b>p=0.004</b>

When the comparison of average scores of groups in the Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay Men Scale was studied, the sub-dimension average score towards men of science students was 17.08 $\pm$ 3.20, health science students was 15.70 $\pm$ 4.25, social sciences students was 17.35 $\pm$ 4.07, and the difference between the average score of the groups was statistically significant. The sub-dimension average score towards women of science students was 16.83 $\pm$ 3.32, health sciences students was 15.84 $\pm$ 4.27, social sciences students was 16.89 $\pm$ 4.10, and the difference between the average score of the groups was statistically significant. Total average score of Groups in the Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay Men Scale of science students was 33.92 $\pm$ 6.10, health sciences students was 31.54 $\pm$ 7.98, social sciences students was 34.25 $\pm$ 7.42, and the difference between the average score of the groups was statistically significant. The advanced analysis found that the difference resulted from the students who received an education.

### Discussion:

The results obtained from the study were discussed with the related literature. After examining the literature, it was found that the studies were mostly qualitative and on the gender variable, or they were conducted only for situation determination (Mete and Özerdoğan, 2019; Kabacaoğlu, 2015; <https://rm.coe.int/avrupa-dacinselyonelim-ve-cinsiyet-kimligine-dayal-ayr-mc-l-k-rapord/16807ba838,9,12-18>; Küçükaya and Kahyaoğlu Süt, Toplu-Demirtaş, Akçabozan-Kayabol, 2018; Tuna, 2019). There were not any studies that considered the people who received education as in this study. The average scores of the Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay Men Scale of students showed that students with the least negative attitude were those who received education in the health field.

In the study where Mete and Özerdoğan (Mete and Özerdoğan, 2019) studied the information, opinion, and attitudes of students in the midwifery department on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual people, it was found that the student's prejudice was low. In the study by Küçükaya and Kahyaoğlu Süt, where the attitudes of nursing students towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex individuals were studied, it was found that compared to female students, male students knew what is LGBT better, they thought that the reason why LGBT individuals could not openly express their sexual orientation/identity was social pressure, LGBT was a disease and should be treated, they would be uncomfortable while providing care to LGBT individual, LGBT individual could have sexually transmitted infections, they would discriminate LGBT individual due to his/her sexual orientation/identity (Küçükaya and Kahyaoğlu Süt, 2018). The fact that courses on sexuality, training, seminars, etc. are many in the health field and these subjects are discussed may have caused this result. The study showed that the most negative attitudes belonged to students who received education in the social sciences field. The study by Bardakçı Bayar (Bardakcioglu Bayar, 2016), which studied the attitudes of teachers towards



homosexual students, found that teachers had prejudice against homosexuals. It may be considered that the students in science and social departments had more prejudice because subjects such as sexuality, sexual health, etc., were not included sufficiently in the education curriculum. The study by Tuna showed that participants generally had positive attitudes towards homosexuals. Additionally, there was no difference between people's attitudes according to gender, marital status, and educational level. When variables predicting the attitudes were considered, it was found that as age and level of religiosity increased, negative attitudes towards homosexuality also increased (Tuna, 2019).

### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

The study found that the students in the social field had the most negative attitude towards lesbians and gays, and students in the health field had the least negative attitude. In line with this result, it can be recommended to educate students in more detail in the subjects of sexual health, reproductive health in students' curriculum or within the context of courses, conduct studies with LGBT individuals, study the difficulties experienced by them, and help to solve the problems.

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