

## RELIGIOSITY AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS HOMOSEXUALITY

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**Abstract.** *The aim of the present study was to investigate the attitudes of self-oriented heterosexual students of the Department of Physical Education and Sports Science towards male and female homosexuality, in combination with the level of religiosity they display. The religiosity factor was evaluated based on the frequency of visits paid to temples to perform religious duties. Concerning their attitudes, the scale used was the Greek version of Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay Men (ATLG) with two factors, for male and female homosexuality respectively. The sample consisted of 552 self-oriented heterosexual students. The independent variables used were related to gender, age, and religiosity. From the analysis of the results, it was found that the factor of religiosity has a decisive influence on the formation of heterosexual students' attitudes towards both male and female homosexuality. It is further suggested to investigate the factor in combination with other variables.*

**Key words:** *Religion, Homonegativity, Sports*

### INTRODUCTION

A particular population which is of some interest to many researchers from many fields of science is university students, especially as far as the research concerns the relationship between religiousness and attitudes towards homosexuality (Harbaugh & Lindsey, 2015; Sarac, 2015; Olson & DeSouza, 2017). The reason why this happens concerns the exploration of the ideas and behaviors of a new generation that will lead in the future, shaping new structures and systems of relationships. Students present a particular audience to explore as they display one of the most liberal subcultures, where the probability of homophobia can

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also be detected at a lower frequency and lower intensity (Herek, 2000). Several factors, including religiosity, influence the formation of attitudes of students against homosexuality (Chapman, Watkins, Zappia, Nicol, & Shields, 2012; Georgiou, Patsantaras, Kamberidou, & Fotiou, 2019).

Religion is a very important and determinant factor in socializing and shaping individuals' attitudes and behaviors, especially in matters concerning the moral regulatory framework in which each believer is obliged to make their way (Yip, 2005; Sherry, Adelman, Whilde, & Quick, 2010). The doctrine of each religion defines the specific regulatory ethical framework and system of values by which the individual judges whether something is good or bad, moral or immoral, shaping specific attitudes and behaviors regarding specific social groups (Gray, et al., 1996; Jaspers, Lubbers, & De Graaf, 2007; Jaspers, 2008; Verbakel & Jaspers, 2010). Most religions appear negatively predisposed to homosexuality with some minor variations (Yip, 2005). In view of this perspective those who are more religious than others, and therefore follow more faithfully the dogmatic part of their religion and who are exposed to the influence of moral rules and their framework as defined by their religion, also adopt religious imperatives (Van de Meerendonck & Scheepers, 2004; Siker, 2007; Andersen & Fetner, 2008; Jaspers, 2008). Conservative behaviors and attitudes of believers, and especially those who perform their religious duties more frequently, appear to be more homophobic than those who lack such a high level of religiosity (Herek & Glunt, 1993; Gray, et al., 1996; Greene & Rademan, 1997).

Religiosity is a multidimensional concept. It consists of five dimensions: the experiential, the ritualistic, the ideological, the intellectual, and the consequential and can be explained as the religious beliefs, the commitment, and the activity involving the abovementioned dimensions (Glock, 1962). Regardless of the religion, religiosity is one of the most popular investigating factors in relation to heterosexual people's attitudes towards homosexuals. It is also referred to as one of the most important predictors of heterosexual's attitudes toward homosexuals (Arndt & de Bruin, 2006; Rowatt, LaBouff, Johnson, Froese, & Tsang, 2009; Georgiou, Patsantaras, & Kamberidou, 2015). The higher the degree of religiosity, the most negative the attitudes towards homosexuality are (Arndt & de Bruin, 2006; Gelbal & Duyan, 2006; Chapman et al., 2012). The fact that the three major monotheistic religions, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam present homosexuality as a sin and a sinful act, may interpret the fact that the more traditional, conservative, and attentive to religion the faithful are, the more negative their attitudes toward homosexuality (Sakalli, 2002).

The broader accepted definition of religious fundamentalism is that of Altemeyer and Hunsberger, (1992, p. 118) who define the concept as:

*“The belief that there is one set of religious teachings that clearly contains the fundamental, basic, intrinsic, essential, inerrant truth about humanity and deity; that this essential truth is fundamentally opposed by the forces of evil which must be vigorously fought; that this truth must be followed today according to the fundamental, unchangeable practices of the past; and that those who believe and follow these fundamental teachings have a special relationship with the deity.”*

Fundamentalists show particular zeal for their faith from any moderate believer of the same religion. Both the behaviors and the attitudes of fundamentalists towards homosexuals are negative (Altemeyer, 1981, 1988; Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Kirkpatrick, 1993;

Laythe, Finkel, & Kirkpatrick, 2001; Tee & Hegarty, 2006). This certain attitude can be seen as a barrier to establishing interpersonal friendly relationships with homosexually-oriented people also in the area of university education, as the high level of religiosity leads to disapproval of the homosexual orientation, setting a barrier to the creation of friendly relations with homosexuals (Mohr & Sedlacek, 2000).

However, it is worth noting that religion, in a paradoxical way, is also a means of helping and supporting homosexuals to overcome the psychological problems that arise from it, due to the internal homonegativity they experience. Concerning the relationship between homosexuality and religion, people's religious beliefs help them to more easily overcome their psychological traumas due to the experience of intense homonegativity (Walker & Longmire-Avital, 2013).

The aim of the present study was to investigate the attitudes of the self-oriented heterosexual students of the Department of Physical Education and Sports Science towards male and female homosexuality, in combination with the level of religiosity they display.

## METHODS

### The participants

For the purposes of this survey, 580 questionnaires were distributed to students of all four years of the School of the Physical Education and Sport Science, of Athens, Greece. The sampling design envisaged at least 50% plus one person per year so as to generalize the results both within the years and in the total of the school. Three students refused to fill in and returned them, setting the response rate to 99.5%. Of the 577 people who participated, 300 (52%) were men and 277 (48%) were women. 27.7% (81 men and 79 women) of the participants are in the 20-year age group, 22.9% (90 men and 42 women) are aged 22-26, 18.2% (42 men and 63 women) in the age group of 19, 18% (51 men and 53 women) are in the age group of 21 years and 13.2% (36 men and 40 women) are in the age group of 18 years. More women than men of 19 years and more men than women aged 22 to 26 participated in research  $\chi^2(4, n=577)=21.05, p<0.001$  (Table 1). From the present study 25 students self-oriented as bisexual or homosexual were excluded, and for this reason the final number of questionnaires analyzed was N=552.

**Table 1** Distribution of participants by gender and age

Age	Male		Female		Total	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
18	36	12	40	14.4	76	13.2
19	42	14	63	22.7	105	18.2
20	81	27	79	28.5	160	27.7
21	51	17	53	19.1	104	18.0
22-26	90	30	42	15.2	132	22.9
Total	300	52	277	48.0	577	100.0

Note: Frequencies have been calculated for gender

Regarding sexual orientation, 95.7% (552 students) declared themselves heterosexual, 1.9% (11 people) homosexual, and 2.4% (14 students) said they were bisexual. This research concerns only heterosexual students' attitudes and for this certain reason the 25

self-oriented homosexual and bisexual students were excluded. Thus, the final sample used was 552 questionnaires.

The majority of respondents (45.5%, 137 male and 113 women) report going to church once or twice a year, 38.4% (102 male and 109 women) declare they go church several times a year and 16.2% (55 male and 34 women) declare they never go to church. More males than females declare that they never go or go 1-2 times a year to church, while more females than males report going several times a year to church  $\chi^2(1, n=550)=4.89, p<0.05$  (Table 2).

**Table 2** Distribution of participants in terms of gender and frequency of visits to church

Visit Frequency	Male		Female		Total	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Never	55	18.7	34	13.3	89	16.2
1-2 times	137	46.6	113	44.1	250	45.5
Several times	102	34.7	109	42.6	213	38.4
Total	294	53.3	258	46.7	552	100.0

Note: Frequencies have been calculated for gender

### Research tools

The demographic questionnaire included independent variables related to gender, age, and frequency of religious duties as an indicator of religiosity. It is worth noting that in the results of an earlier study, the frequency with which individuals go to the church and exercise their religious duties is related to the levels of religiosity (Van day Akker, Van der Ploeg, & Scheepers, 2013).

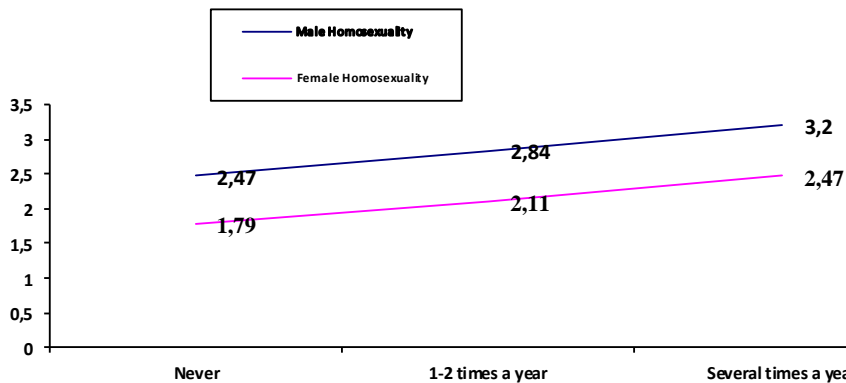
The scale Attitudes Toward Lesbian and Gay men (ATLG) of Herek (1994) was used as a research instrument for the PE students' attitudes towards the male and female homosexuality. This scale has been translated and adapted to the Greek language and Greek culture by Grigoriopoulos, Papacharitou, and Moraitou (2010).

### Data collection and analysis

A cover letter was attached to the questionnaire. It contained the title of the survey, a summary with its purpose, instructions to complete the questionnaire, and the time required. It also included contact details of the researcher, for any questions that might arise. It also highlighted that the participation in the survey was optional, that the participants and their answers will remain anonymous, that the responses will be used only for scientific reasons and that the participants could have access to any information concerning the survey. Statistical analysis was completed using the SPSS software version 19 (SPSS Inc., Chicago IL, USA) and included descriptive statistics with means (M) and standard deviations (SD), Simple regression analysis ANOVA and post-hoc Scheffe pairwise analysis.

## RESULTS

The independent between-groups ANOVA yielded a significant effect for both male  $F(2.497)=21.83, p<0.001, \eta^2=0.08$  and the female homosexuality  $F(2.497)=24.67, p<0.001, \eta^2=0.09$ . From the overview of Graph 1, it appears that the higher the levels of religiosity, the higher the negative attitudes towards both male and female homosexuality.



**Fig. 1** Mean differences of attitudes towards homosexuality based on religiosity levels

To evaluate the differences between the different levels of religiosity, according to the visits paid per year to temples, and the attitudes towards homosexuality both for male and female homosexuality, a pairwise Scheffe Post-hoc analysis was calculated (Table 3).

**Table 3** Pairwise Scheffe Post-hoc tests

Dependent variables	(I)Service Attendance	(J)Service Attendance	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. <sup>b</sup>
Male Homosexuality	Never	1-2 times	-.369*	.117	.002
		Several times	-.735*	.119	.000
Female Homosexuality	Never	1-2 times	-.288*	.100	.004
		Several times	-.647*	.102	.000
	1-2 Times	Never	.369*	.117	.002
	1-2 Times	Never	.288*	.100	.004

The post hoc tests results showed statistical significant differences between the “Never” and both the “1-2 times” and the “Several times” groups. There is also a statistically significant difference between the “1-2 times a year” group with the “Never” group. These results are respectively similar between groups for both the Male and Female Homosexuality.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to investigate the attitudes of self-oriented heterosexual students of the Department of Physical Education and Sports Science, of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece, regarding male and female homosexuality and based on the different levels of religiosity they display, which manifests itself with the frequency of visiting a temple for their religious duties. Based on the results, religiousness is an important factor in attitudes towards both male and female homosexuality. The correlation of the factor with the independent variables is positive as religiosity increases, while at the same time the negative attitudes towards both male and female homosexuality increase too. The results of this research show that religiosity is an important and determinant factor associated with attitudes towards homosexuality. They also show that female homosexuality is more acceptable and participatory attitudes are

more positive, both in general and in comparison with the same levels of religiosity. These results are in line with other research findings concerning the same factor (Gelbal & Duyan, 2006; Rowatt et al., 2009; Chapman et al., 2012).

Another prospect for research concerns the deeper exploration of the factor of religiosity. As reported by Inglehart and Baker (2000), according to Max Weber, the socio-economic development of the citizens of a society significantly affect the shaping of their value system. Religious tradition and religious heritage as important socialization agents contribute significantly in shaping individual's values, choices, attitudes and behaviors (Barkan, 2006). Belief in any religious doctrine affects and creates attitudes and behaviors towards sensitive social issues, depending on the interpretation, and the perspective of the particular religion towards them. Particular reference is made to the non-discrimination of homosexuals. As long as the doctrines refers to homosexuality as a deviation and dogmas hold against homosexuality, they will negatively predefine the believers' behavior towards homosexuality and it will be negatively oriented (Gerhards, 2010).

It is also important to highlight the relationship between athletic activity and religion and, by extension, religious doctrines. For example, athletic activity in the prospects of athletic - Olympic ideology is perceived as a religious element, as a religious concept of *religio athletae*, in which the meaning and use of the human body is determined (Patsantaras, 2007). Mainly at the beginning of the 20th century, the institutionally expressed athletic action, took the character of a secularized religious substitute and acquired a symbolic meaning of interconnecting physics with the metaphysical. In view of the fact that the religious discourse is generally of an androcentric nature and since the athletic space was an androcentric social space, the conditions for the prosperity of the hegemonic mastery of masculinity, which were supported by religion, were created. As a result the androcentric characters of sport, as well as the use of the body within this specific framework, were reinforced by specific ethical values. The use of the body out of the framework given by the religious doctrines and its being adopted by sports ideology in the athletic social field is considered to be a deviation from the *normality* and thus unacceptable. Especially during the modernity phases and on the basis of the western cultural example, a religious character was attributed to sports activity, which, in agreement with specific Christian doctrines, emerged as a means of promoting specific moral values in western-type societies (Patsantaras, 2007). This makes sport a social space within the religious doctrine which can easily influence the perceptions of the use of the athlete's or the common trainee's body. For example, sporting activity was promoted to the global social fabric during the colonial phases in collaboration with specific Christian associations (Patsantaras, 2007). Future research should also focus the connection of religiosity with other sociocultural variables within the sport context. In this sense there are perspectives to use the sports ethical values of inclusion and non-discrimination practices to tackle the negative attitudes coming from sociological factors such as religiosity.

## CONCLUSIONS

The present research has some limitations. The major one is that the results cannot and should not be generalized as the sample concerns a certain university department, that of Physical Education and Sport Science. The second one is the level of validity concerning the students' declaration of their sexual orientation. There might be an insincere sexual orientation declaration on behalf of non-heterosexual persons so as to

protect their sensitive personal data and the privacy of their life which works as a restriction. Finally, this research presented the attitudes of heterosexual students towards homosexuality. It would be interesting to search for the opinion of the non-heterosexual students, of how they are treated by their heterosexual colleagues within this specific university department, but also in the higher education institutions in general. By the time the results concerning the non-heterosexuals' opinion about the way they are being treated by their heterosexual co-students within higher education institutions, there will provide a good perspective from which to develop a strategy concerning the dissemination of free ideas, acceptance of diversity and the implementation of practices related to inclusion. All the above mentioned limitations show the path for further research in the sports science field, by adding more factors to the religiosity of the students. Further study of the relevant literature will help and guide the focus of the research.

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## RELIGIOZNOST I STAVOVI STUDENATA FIZIČKOG VASPITANJA PREMA HOMOSEKSUALNOSTI

*Svrha ovog istraživanja bila je ispitivanje uticaja religioznosti na stavove heteroseksualno orijentisanih studenata Departmana fizičkog vaspitanja i Sporta u Atini, Grčka, prema homoseksualno orijentisanim muškarcima i ženama u kombinaciji sa nivoom religioznosti koji iskazuju. Faktor religioznosti određen je na osnovu učestalosti poseta hramovima radi obavljanja verskih dužnosti. Što se tiče stavova, skala koja je korišćena je grčka verzija stavova prema lezbijkama i homoseksualcima (ATLG) sa dva faktora, za homoseksualnost muškaraca i žena, respektivno. Uzorak je sačinjavalo 552 heteroseksualno orijentisana učenika. Korišćene su nezavisne varijable koje se odnose na pol, starost i religioznost. Analizom rezultata utvrđeno je da faktor religioznosti ima presudni uticaj na oblikovanje stavova heteroseksualno orijentisanih učenika prema homoseksualnosti muškaraca i žena. Predlaže se dalje istraživanje faktora u kombinaciji sa drugim varijablama.*

**Ključne reči:** religija, negativan stav prema homoseksualnosti, sportovi