

**Research article**

**POLITICAL LEANINGS AND ATTITUDES OF PHYSICAL  
EDUCATION STUDENTS TOWARDS HOMOSEXUALITY**

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**Abstract.** *The purpose of this study is to investigate the attitudes of students of the School of Physical Education and Sports Science of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens towards homosexuality in relation to their political leanings. The sample consisted of 557 undergraduate students. The Greek version of Herek's (1994) Attitudes towards Lesbians and Gay Men (ATLG) scale is used in this study with two factors, one for male homosexuality and one for female. The independent variables surveyed were gender, age, sexual orientation, and political leanings. A univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) and post-hoc Scheffe test were used wherever it was needed, for the detection of significant statistical differences between the three levels of the political leaning factor. The analysis of the results showed that political leanings influence attitudes towards homosexuality: left-wing oriented students showing greater acceptance of homosexuality; right-wing students more negative attitudes; students oriented towards the center displaying more moderate attitudes, ranging between those of the right-wing and left-wing.*

**Key words:** *Homosexuality, Homophobia, Discrimination, Sports*

INTRODUCTION

A multitude of international research on homosexuality in the field of sport and physical activity indicates that organized sport is a field with high levels of homonegativity and homophobic behaviors (Georgiou, Patsantaras, & Kamberidou, 2018; Symons, Sbaraglia, Hillier, & Mitchell, 2010; Hemphill & Symons, 2009; Elling & Janssens, 2009). Gay people

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experience various types of social discrimination and prejudicial treatment related to sports, which includes athletics and physical education (Kokkonen, 2012; Toivala, 2011).

Conservative social values and positions are usually associated with right wing affiliations or leanings and/or extreme right-wing authoritarianism, religious fundamentalism, and political opinions studies argue that right-wing authoritarianism entails a combination of aggression and prejudice towards non-mainstream groups considered incompatible with prevailing social norms, attitudes and values, which certainly include homosexuality (Patsantaras, 2015; Navarrete & Fessler, 2006; Faulkner, Schaller, Park, & Duncan, 2004; Laythe, Finkel, & Kirkpatrick, 2001).

The concept of right-wing authoritarianism is defined as the covariance between three variables: authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression and formality-consistency in preserving the traditional ceremonial (Altemeyer, 1981), in other words conserving formal social action, or the established gender order. The synthetic left-right divide, which ignores the bombs dropped on civilians abroad while promoting transgendered toilets, also poses a number of questions. For example, the synthetic *right* is a socio-cultural perspective that refers to attitudes and traditional values and norms, such as the submission imposed and legitimized by an authority or power structure in the consciousness of a society (Altemeyer, 1988, 1981).

Typical indicators of right-wing attitudes, social and cultural conservatism, include gender stereotypes with regard to traditional family roles, obligations, employment, and so forth (Kamberidou, Bonias, & Patsantaras, 2019; Kamberidou, 2019; Onraet, Van Hiel, & Dhont, 2013; Kamberidou, 2012; Kamberidou, 2007; Kamberidou & Patsantaras, 2006). The literature review indicates that right-wing autocracy supports and reproduces anachronistic or traditional social norms, especially in respect to power relations (Poteat & Mereish, 2012; Kamberidou, Tsopani, Dallas, & Patsantaras, 2009). Conventionally, people with such ideological perceptions strive to retain or preserve the established gender order, namely traditional social rules and norms, while holding negative attitudes towards social groups that deviate from them, along with supporting punishment of groups that violate/deviate or differentiate from dominant social values and behaviors (Altemeyer, 1988). For example, this occurs when individuals who are influenced by the right-wing authoritarian ideology reinforce all restrictive policies towards institutions and organizations that support sexual minorities.

In terms of the political placement of individuals, this does not mean belonging to a specific political party, but is related to the concept of conservatism usually associated with right-wing political orientation. Studies point out that individuals leaning towards the right-wing have authoritarian characteristics which are a prerequisite for the emergence of prejudices and discrimination against sexual minorities, in other words, discrimination against those who do not follow traditional social norms (Kamberidou et al., 2009). As regards centrism, viz. political outlooks associated with the center; here attitudes seem to be more neutral on the subject of homosexuality. On the other hand, individuals leaning towards the left-wing seem to hold more progressive attitudes (Georgiou et al., 2018).

Political leanings seem to affect and influence attitudes towards homosexuality. In particular, right-wing political leaning cultivates negative attitudes towards homosexuals and their equal rights. As a result, legal issues such as adoption by same-sex couples, receive negative attitudes and responses, even by homosexuals with right-wing political leanings, while left-wing same-sex couples show a positive attitude towards the perspective

of same-sex couple adoption (Pacilli, Taurino, Jost, & van der Toorn, 2011; Rowatt, LaBouff, Johnson, Froese, & Tsang, 2009). In general, political party affiliation as a political leaning expression influences peoples' social attitudes, with those having conservative or right-wing political leanings, showing more negative attitudes towards homosexuals as opposed to those holding other political orientations (Steffens & Wagner, 2004).

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to investigate the attitudes of students of the School of Physical Education and Sports Science of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens towards homosexuality in relation to their political leanings.

## METHODS

### Participants

The participants were students of the Department of Physical Education and Sport Science of Athens, Greece. For the purposes of this survey, 580 questionnaires were distributed. Three students refused to fill in the questionnaires and returned them, setting the response rate to 99.5%. Of the 577 students who participated, 300 (52%) were male and 277 (48%) were female. This present research was set up to detect the heterosexual PE students' attitudes towards the male and female homosexuality. For this reason 25 male and female students who were self-oriented as bisexual or homosexual were excluded from the research, which was conducted on a total of 552 participants' answered questionnaires.

### Research Tools

The demographic questionnaire included independent variables that concerned gender, age, and political leanings (left-wing, center or right-wing). The Greek version of the Herek's ATLG scale (1994) was used as the instrument for measuring the attitudes of heterosexual students toward homosexual men and women respectively (Grigoropoulos, Papacharitou, & Moraitou, 2010).

Questions e1-e20 of the questionnaire have previously been used in the literature and compose two scales on the scale of heterosexual attitudes towards male homosexuality and the scale of heterosexual attitudes towards female homosexuality. The first scale in its content contains questions e11 and e20 (e.g. "Gay marriage is a ridiculous fact", "Sex between two men is not at all right, I believe homosexual men are disgusting", etc.). The second scale includes 10 questions, e1 and e10 (e.g. "Female homosexuality puts at risk many of our main institutions", "Female homosexuality is devastating to society because it eliminates the biological difference between the two genders", etc.) and refers to attitudes towards female homosexuality.

The credibility of internal consistency of the two factors was found to be quite high. In particular, the first factor has a Cronbach  $\alpha=0.92$ , while the second one has a Cronbach  $\alpha=0.87$ . A cover letter was attached to this research tool. The letter describes the title of the survey, provides a brief summary that includes its purpose, how to complete the questionnaire, and the time required. It also includes the details of the researcher and the ways of communicating with him, for any question that may arise. Finally, it highlights the optional nature of student participation, ensuring the anonymity of their responses, the use of answers for research purposes only, and access to information on the results from the

researcher to the participants. The research was approved by the ethical committee of the department.

### Statistical analysis

After collecting the questionnaires, the data were analyzed with the use of the Statistical Package for Social Science SPSS 23.0 (Chicago, IL, USA). The statistical analysis carried out concerns descriptive statistical and chi-square analysis for the description of the sample concerning the variables of gender and age, and a simple analysis of variance (ANOVA) and post-hoc pairwise Scheffe criterion analysis wherever it was needed, for the detection of significant statistical differences between the male and the female homosexuality and the three levels of the political leaning factor (left, center, and right wing).

## RESULTS

Concerning the results of the statistical analyses, they present some interesting outcomes. More precisely, statistically significant differences were obtained for the independent variable of "political leanings" and its influence on the depended variables of the attitudes towards both male  $F(2,543)=37.927$ ,  $p<0.001$  (Table 1), and female homosexuality  $F(2,543) = 32,633$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) (Table 2).

**Table 1** One-Way Analysis of Variance of male homosexuality by political leanings

	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Between Groups	60.70	2	30.35	37.927	.000
Within Groups	434.54	543	.80		
Total	495.24	545			

**Table 2** One-Way Analysis of Variance of female homosexuality by political leanings

	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Between Groups	35.66	2	17.83	32.633	.000
Within Groups	285.78	523	.54		
Total	321.44	525			

Post hoc comparisons to evaluate pairwise differences among the Political Leaning factor's three levels means (1=left-wing political leaning, 2=center-wing political leaning, and 3=right-wing political leaning), were conducted with the use of the Scheffe test. The tests revealed significant pairwise differences between the mean scores of the left political leaning student group, and both the center and the right-wing, as far as between the center and the right-wing student political leaning groups. The right-wing political leaning group expresses the most negative attitudes towards male and female homosexuality, while students who opt more for the left have the most positive attitudes. The Scheffe criterion shows that the more the right is the dominant ideology, the greater the negative attitudes towards both male (Table 3) and female (Table 4) homosexuality. Students who belong or incline towards the center are those who are in between or in the

middle, and their attitudes towards homosexuality range between those of the right-wing and the left-wing oriented participants.

**Table 3** Multiple Comparisons using the Scheffe test

(I) Leaning	(J) Leaning	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
1	2	-.41318 *	.08909	.000
	3	-.87426 *	.10053	.000
2	3	-.46108 *	.09667	.000

**Table 4** Multiple Comparisons using the Scheffe test

(I) Leaning	(J) Leaning	Mean Difference (IJ)	Std. Error	Sig.
1	2	-.25240 *	.07510	.004
	3	-.68025 *	.08447	.000
2	3	-.42785 *	.08125	.000

## DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study was the evaluation of Physical Education students' attitudes towards male and female homosexuality based on their political leanings. The results show that statistically there are significant differences. Specifically, political space or affiliation determines attitudes towards male and female homosexuality. Students with leanings towards or belonging to the left-wing show the most positive attitudes towards homosexuality; those of the centrist leaning appear to be more moderate, while those in the right-wing display the most negative attitudes of all. Another significant finding here is that the three political spaces, the three levels (left-wing, center and right-wing) appear to be more tolerant of female homosexuality whereas they show more negative attitudes towards male homosexuality. These results are in line with previous studies and research where political leaning seems to play an important role in the configuration of attitudes towards minority groups with an emphasis on the non-heterosexual orientated community (Georgiou et al., 2018).

The results of this research indicate that political ideologies are a decisive factor in influencing attitudes towards homosexuality. However, one need reiterate, as regards the research limitations cited at the beginning of this paper, that the findings cannot be generalized since the population sample focuses on the male and female students of the School of Physical Education and Sport Science of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. The second limitation is that the students participating in the study are heterosexual. We could argue that political affiliation also determines one's attitude towards other social groups as well, i.e., minority-ethnic groups, the disability community, etc. The use of sport for diverse political aims is universally emphasized in the relevant literature which shows the ways in which sport activities are transformed into a tool for political agendas or interests, including those related to notions on the use of the human body (Patsantaras & Kamberidou, 2017). On the other hand, sport provides a platform for raising awareness, eliminating social exclusions. It serves as a tool or a means of social inclusion and integration, namely an instrument for changing stereotypes, eliminating attitudinal and institutional barriers (Kamberidou et al., 2019).

## CONCLUSION

The attitudes of students of the School of Physical Education and Sports Science of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens proved to be affected and influenced towards homosexuality in relation to their political leanings. Future studies that would include different types of courses are needed in order to investigate if acceptance of lesbians and gay men is associated with political leanings among a large cohort of students of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

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## POLITIČKE SKLONOSTI I STAVOVI STUDENATA FIZIČKOG VASPITANJA PREMA HOMOSEKSUALNOSTI

*Svrha ove studije je da ispita stavove studenata Fakulteta fizičkog vaspitanja i sportskih nauka Nacionalnog i Kapodistrijskog univerziteta u Atini prema homoseksualnosti u odnosu na njihove političke sklonosti. Uzorak je sačinjavalo 557 studenata. U ovoj studiji korišćena je grčka verzija skale odnosa prema lezbijkama i gej muškarcima (ATLG) sa dva faktora, jednim za mušku homoseksualnost i drugim za žensku (prema Herek, 1994). Ispitivane nezavisne varijable bile su pol, starost, seksualna orijentacija i političke sklonosti. Univarijantna analiza varijance (ANOVA) i post-hoc Scheffeov test korišćeni su za utvrđivanje statističkih značajnih razlika između tri nivoa faktora političkih sklonosti. Analiza rezultata pokazala je da političke sklonosti utiču na stav prema homoseksualnosti: levičarski orijentisani studenti pokazuju veće prihvatanje homoseksualnosti; desničarski orijentisane studente odlikuje više negativnih stavova; studenti orijentisani prema centru pokazuju umerenije stavove, u rasponu između desne i leve orijentacije.*

Ključne reči: *homoseksualnost, homofobija, diskriminacija, sport*