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ATTITUDES AND APPROACHES OF BELIEVERS AND NON-BELIEVERS AMONG PEDAGOGY STUDENTS FROM POLAND, THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND SLOVAKIA TOWARDS LGBT PEOPLE – A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The article presents the results of a survey conducted among 314 pedagogy (i.e. educational studies) students from Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Its goal was to learn about attitudes and approaches towards LGBT people of believers and non-believers among students. The choice of these three countries was deliberate due to their different levels of religiosity. The study was conducted using the diagnostic survey method.

The results of the survey analysis showed significant differences in attitudes towards LGBT people depending on the respondents' faith. The level of acceptance of LGBT people is higher among non-believers than among believers. The respondents are most accepting of lesbians and gays, but less accepting of transgender people. Both the general attitude towards LGBT people and the general attitude towards the rights of homosexual people were higher in the group of non-believers. The non-believers were also more likely to declare that homosexuality is normal and should be tolerated.

Key words: homosexuality, LGBT, religion, faith

Introduction

We live in a multicultural environment where different nationalities and social groups coexist side by side. Their mutual acceptance can lead to the enrichment and support of an open, diverse and inclusive environment. A special role in the education and upbringing process is assigned to teachers who shape the attitudes of the young generation. Learning about the beliefs of future teachers on socially important topics is crucial from the point of view of the educational program implemented at universities.

The concept of “Other” is often used to refer to biological, social, cultural, political, and economic differences. Most often, these categories describe people in relation to racial and national differences. However, it also includes other

groups of people, including: the poor, mentally ill, addicted, disabled, as well as members of sexual minorities. They often experience a lack of understanding, lack of acceptance related to their differences, prejudice and discrimination (Grzybowski, 2008a; 2008b).

This article presents the attitudes and approaches of believers and non-believers among pedagogy students from Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia towards one of the groups often considered in society as “Other” – LGBT people. These three neighboring countries are characterized by different degrees of religiosity, which may be important for the perception of LGBT people, especially among future teachers who should be open and respectful of diversity.

The relationship between religiosity and attitudes towards LGBT people

Religion can play an important role in social life. Research shows that it is important for well-being, mental and physical health (Koenig, King, & Carson, 2012; VanderWeele, 2017), social attitudes and behaviors (Donahue & Nielsen, 2005), and emotion regulation (Vishkin, Bigman & Tamir, 2014), impact on psychological well-being and life satisfaction (Newman, & Graham, 2018; Yaden, Batz-Barbarich, Ng, Vaziri, Gladstone, Pawelski & Tay, 2022). Religion can provide social support, meaning in life, and coping strategies, but it can also cause feelings of guilt or stress related to religious adherence (Schieman, Bierman, & Ellison, 2013).

The topic of the relationship between religiosity and attitudes towards LGBT people has been discussed many times in the literature on the subject. The results of research by various authors show, first of all, that religiosity is one of the factors important for attitudes towards homosexual people (Besen & Zicklin, 2007; Roggemans, Spruyt, Droogenbroeck & Keppens, 2015).

Research conducted by the Pew Research Centre (2020) analyzed attitudes towards homosexuality in 34 countries and cultures. Their results showed that in recent years, many of them have seen an increase in acceptance of homosexuality. It is highest in Western Europe and North America. The study also referred to the relationship between acceptance of homosexual people and religiosity and showed that religiosity is an important factor influencing attitudes towards LGBT people, and the level of acceptability depends on the religion professed. People with more conservative religious beliefs are more likely to display prejudice against homosexual people (Rowatt, Tsang, Kelly, LaMartina, McCullers & McKinley, 2006). A study conducted in Malaysia (Ng, Yee, Pathmawathi, Loh & Moreira, 2015), where Islam is the dominant religion, showed that nursing students have a negative attitude towards homosexuality, and there

is a significant correlation between homosexuality and intrinsic religiosity. Other research (Olson, Cadge & Harrison, 2006) shows that people who do not identify as Protestants are significantly more likely to support same-sex relationships compared to Protestants. In turn, people with conservative views on morality and secularism, as well as (to a lesser extent) people actively participating in religious practices, are more likely to express opposition to such relationships.

In the context of this work, the social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) was adopted, according to which people categorize themselves and others into social groups, which affects their perception of others and themselves. It allows us to highlight differences between two categories and to weaken differences within a category – in which members are perceived as similar (by members of other groups). Social identity theory allows people to understand their social environment and build their own identity. Identification with the group (“we”) is important for increasing self-esteem, while comparison with outside groups (“they”) can lead to prejudice and conflict. These mechanisms can be used to analyze prejudice against the LGBT community as an “outside group” in certain social contexts where heteronormative values prevail. The process of categorization is inherent in our daily lives. It is a result of the overabundance of information that reaches us, allowing us to simplify it and categorize it into specific groups. One category might be “faith”/“religiosity” and another might be “sexual orientation.” People who identify strongly with a religious group may be less tolerant of groups they perceive as “different,” including LGBT people. Group identity may, therefore, influence attitudes towards homosexual people depending on the degree of religiosity and cultural norms prevailing in a given country. Perceiving the out-group as homogeneous also influences discrimination towards it and justifies the behavior towards it.

Contact theory can be used to alleviate prejudice against LGBT people (Allport, 1954). Contacts between heterosexual people and LGBT people in favorable conditions (equality of status, common goals, cooperation, institutional support) may lead to reduced prejudice and greater acceptance towards homosexual people. Increased intergroup contact may reduce prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). The effectiveness of contact theory in the context of the relationship between these two groups is confirmed by empirical research (Collier, Bos & Sandfort, 2012; Herek & Capitanio, 1996; Swank & Raiz, 2010; Vonofakou, Hewstone & Voci, 2007).

According to the IPSOS global LGBT+ PRIDE 2024 survey, one in three Polish respondents (36%) say they have a homosexual person among their relatives or close work acquaintances. The CBOS survey (2024) indicates that people who personally know a gay or lesbian person are significantly more likely to be in favor of their rights to both publicly display their lifestyle, marry and

adopt children. These results can be interpreted as potential confirmation of the contact hypothesis. This suggests that the increasing number of people in close contact with LGBT+ people may be influencing an increase in acceptance or a decrease in prejudice against this group. Knowing a homosexual person (especially in a personal or professional context) increases the chances of face-to-face interactions, which, according to the contact hypothesis, promotes breaking down stereotypes and building empathy. However, it is worth noting that the effectiveness of contact depends on the quality of these interactions. If these contacts are positive and based on equality and cooperation, they can more effectively lead to reducing prejudice and promoting greater acceptance. According to the contact hypothesis, personal relationships allow the other person to be seen through the prism of his or her individual characteristics, rather than through the prism of prejudices and negative perceptions of the group as a whole.

Methodology

The aim of this research was to understand attitudes and approaches of believers and non-believers among pedagogy students from Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia towards LGBT people.

The following main problem was formulated:

- What are the attitudes and approaches of believers and non-believers among pedagogy students from Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia towards LBGT people?

The study puts forward a research hypothesis: religious beliefs are important for the attitudes and approaches of pedagogy students from Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia towards LGBT people. Students declaring faith have a more negative attitude towards LGBT people compared to non-believing students.

An independent variable was distinguished – declaration of faith (believers and non-believers) and a dependent variable – attitudes and approaches towards LGBT people. Data on declarations of faith by country are summarized in Table 1.

The study was conducted using the diagnostic survey method. The author's survey questionnaire included questions about personal attitudes towards various LGBT groups, perception of homosexuality, assessment of the rights of homosexual people, and violence against people of homosexual orientation.

Two research scales were created for the purposes of this study. The scale of general attitudes towards LGBT people was built on the basis of six questions about attitudes towards lesbians, gays, bisexual women, bisexual men, transgender women and transgender men. The items were recorded such that a higher value indicated a more positive attitude. High reliability of the constructed scale

was noted, $\alpha = 0.92$. The scale of attitudes towards the rights of homosexual people included six items regarding the rights of gays and lesbians, assessing whether people with a homosexual orientation are excluded from certain spheres of social life and assessing whether people with a homosexual orientation should fight for equal rights. The penultimate of the items mentioned had a reduced discriminatory power and was therefore removed from the scale. The seven-item scale had high reliability, $\alpha = 0.94$.

To verify the research hypothesis, statistical analyses were performed using the IBM SPSS Statistics 25 package. Descriptive statistics were analysed along with Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests, Student's t tests for independent samples, Mann-Whitney U test, Student's t tests for dependent samples, one-factor analyses of variance in the between-groups design, Kruskal-Wallis and Wilcoxon tests, Friedman tests, χ^2 tests and Fisher's exact tests. The classic threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$ was considered the level of significance.

1. Selection of the research area

The choice of the research area was determined by taking into account the religious diversity of three neighboring countries: Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. This allowed the study to include an independent variable, which was the issue of faith, and to determine the importance of religion for attitudes and approaches towards LGBT people.

In the Christian vision of morality, issues of sexuality and family life play a key role. "Christian morality presupposes a special character of the normative order, since ethical orders and prohibitions are treated as established by God and thus included in the order of the sphere of the »sacrum«. Violation of a moral norm is treated here as an undermining of the religious order (sin). For Christianity, the family – above all, monogamous marriage – is an important part of the almost Divine order" (Mariański, 2004, p. 342). Ethical norms are seen as inherent in the order established by God. In the traditional teaching of Christianity, monogamous marriage between a man and a woman is seen as the only form of union in accordance with the Divine plan. As a result, homosexual relations are often treated as incompatible with the Christian vision of moral order and family life. "In the Catholic Church, homosexuality is judged negatively. For many centuries, it was considered a sin against nature" (Lew-Starowicz & Lew-Starowicz, 2014, p. 84).

Poland is a country with a high level of religiosity. Sławomir Romański-Cebula (2021), in an attempt to identify and describe the most important events, processes and historical experiences that had a bearing on the current religious situation in Poland, distinguished:

- the political transformation of 1989, characterized by the transition to democracy, pluralism of worldview, political pluralism, the emergence of

new religious associations and the regulation of relations between the State and Churches and religious associations;

- The pontificate of John Paul II – characterized by an increase in priestly vocations and the deepening religiosity of Catholics;
- Communism – considered a “multidimensional step backward” in which Poland lost its ethnic and religious diversity, and the Roman Catholic Church was seen as an enemy of the authorities;
- the effects of World War II, whose legacy was, above all, a nearly homogeneous denominational structure;
- the period of partition, during which the “Pole-Catholic” model was perpetuated;
- The Union of Brest of 1596, which initiated the formation of an entire group of Unitarian denominations.

In recent years, undoubtedly, a factor that strongly affected the religiosity of Polish society was the coronavirus pandemic. The results of a survey conducted by CBOS (2022) indicate that the restrictions brought about by the pandemic (including those related to attendance at Mass) caused the percentage of Poles going to church every Sunday to decline. As Father Janusz Mariański (2010, p. 57) notes: “Declining participation of the faithful in religious practices always means some signal of changes in traditional religiosity”. These changes are confirmed by reports from the Institute of Catholic Church Statistics (2024), which indicate a decline in Poles’ participation in Sunday Mass. In 2023, the *dominicantes* rate was: 29.02%. In comparison – in 2018 it was: 38.2%, in 2008: 40.4%, and in 1998: 47.5%.

Despite the reports cited, it should be remembered that the Catholic Church plays an important role in shaping the social attitudes of Poles. Data collected in the National Census (2021a) show that among people who answered the question about religion, 72.57% declared belonging to one of the religions existing in Poland. According to research conducted by CBOS (2024), there are 89% of Catholics in Poland, of which 88.8% of adult Poles feel they belong to the Roman Catholic Church. It is a country characterized by strong religious traditions. Examining the attitudes of believers and non-believers among pedagogy students from Poland allows us to determine the extent to which religiosity matters for attitudes towards LGBT people.

The Czech Republic, on the other hand, is one of the least religious countries in Europe. In the National Census (2021b), only 13% of Czechs declared their faith and membership in a church or religious association. Therefore, it can be assumed that religion does not have a significant impact on the everyday life of Czechs. The low level of religious practices and secularization of society is a contrast in the context of faith to Polish society, which is an interesting area of research exploration.

Aniela Róžańska (2019), analyzing the religiosity of Czech society, notes that the Czech people are not an atheist nation, but a nation that is characterized by secularization and pluralization of religious forms. The attitudes of Czech society toward religion have been conditioned by historical and socio-cultural factors, which date back to the Hussite movement, followed by the period of Habsburg rule, the national revival, the views of national liberals at the turn of the 20th century, the process of modernization and economic growth, and the actions of the communist regime. The consequence of these conditions is a change in the religiosity of Czechs, which is characterized by a shift toward an individual approach to spirituality – often a “mixed” religiosity.

Slovaks are characterized by a high level of religiosity, but it is not as dominant as in Poland. In the National Census (2021c), 56% of Slovaks declared their religion as Roman Catholic. This allows us to examine how moderate religiosity influences attitudes towards LGBT people in a society with mixed religious and secular values.

Although under communism, the Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia was forced to function under restrictions imposed by state policy (Moravčíková, 2014; Podolinska, Tižik, & Majo, 2019), the history of Czechoslovakia, and later independent Slovakia, shows that perceptions of homosexuality were shaped by prevailing religious norms and state policy. Catholic teaching on sexuality, which promoted an exclusively heteronormative family, was reflected, among other things, in anti-sodomy laws passed in 1918. Between 1948 and 1989, described as the decade of “actually existing socialism,” the Czechoslovak authorities promoted a heteronormative narrative of the citizen – monogamous, married, heterosexual (Wallace-Lorencová, 2003, p. 105).

An analysis of three decades of religious development in Slovakia shows an increase in the number of believers, a return to faith traditions and an attempt to rebuild a partnership between state and church in the first decade (1989–2000) through a gradual decline in religious practice, abandonment of traditional forms of religiosity and the development of religious pluralism in the second decade (2000–2010) to progressive secularization and the search for new forms of spirituality in the third decade (2010–2020) (Kondrla, Leskova & Durkova, 2023).

In a historical context, it can be noted that although the Czech Republic and Slovakia were subject to the same laws and state policies while co-creating Czechoslovakia, their trajectories after the breakup of the state differed significantly – the Czech Republic became a more secular country (Pałka-Szyszlak, 2012; Róžańska, 2019) while Slovakia remained strongly influenced by the Catholic Church, which contributes to the spread of homophobic discourses that are relevant to public perceptions of LGBTQ+ people (Jovanović, 2020).

The choice of pedagogy students was deliberate due to their future professional opportunities – education and upbringing of children and youth. Students as a group of young adults, on the one hand, are open to social changes and

the surrounding diversity, on the other hand, their attitudes and beliefs may be strongly shaped by their family and social environment. Comparing the declarations of believers and non-believers from three religiously diverse countries is an attempt to understand how religiosity and secularization influence attitudes and approaches towards LGBT people.

2. Study group

The study group consisted of 314 students – 102 from Poland, 104 from the Czech Republic and 108 from Slovakia. Believers constituted 62.1% of the respondents, and non-believers 37.9%. 233 women and 81 men took part in the study. A slight majority of them were city residents (54.8%). The age of the participants in the study varied (Polish students from 19 to 37, Czech students from 19 to 54, Slovak students from 20 to 37). The study was conducted in Poland at the University of Silesia in Katowice, in the Czech Republic at the University of Ostrava, and in the Slovak Republic at the University of Banská Bystrica. All surveyed students were studying pedagogy.

Most of the surveyed pedagogy students from Poland (88.2%) declared that they were believers, which may indicate the important role of religion in the social and cultural life of Poland. In the group of students from Slovakia, the percentage of believers (72.2%) is slightly lower than in Poland, while in the Czech Republic, only 26% of the surveyed students declared that they were believers, while as many as 74% of people were non-believers. This is a clear dominance of non-believers compared to Poland and Slovakia, which reflects the strong trend of secularization in Czech society.

Table 1. Demographics of participants surveyed

			Poland	Slovakia	Czech Republic
Gender	Female	<i>N</i>	97	78	58
		%	95.10%	72.20%	55.80%
	Male	<i>N</i>	5	30	46
		%	4.90%	27.80%	44.20%
Declaration of faith	Religious person	<i>N</i>	90	78	27
		%	88.20%	72.20%	26.00%
	Non-religious person	<i>N</i>	12	30	77
		%	11.80%	27.80%	74.00%
Place of residence	Town/City	<i>N</i>	48	47	77
		%	47.10%	43.50%	74.00%
	Village	<i>N</i>	54	61	27
		%	52.90%	56.50%	26.00%

Results

1. Attitudes and approaches towards homosexual people

The research results compare the respondents' declarations of faith and their answers regarding attitudes towards homosexual people. Analyses were performed in the entire sample of respondents and in subgroups of respondents from different countries.

In order to examine the respondents' attitude towards individual LGBT people, χ^2 tests were performed. Four statistically significant differences were noted (Table 2). Positive attitudes towards lesbians, bisexual women, bisexual men and transgender women were higher in the group of non-believers. The strength of the observed effects was weak. The remaining differences were not statistically significant.

Religious people most often declared that they accepted lesbians (73.3%) and gays (70.3%). They feel the greatest indifference towards transgender women (48.7%) and transgender men (47.7%). There is also greater reluctance towards these two groups (compared to lesbians, gays and bisexual people) – 14.4% feel it towards transgender women, and 14.9% towards transgender men. Reluctance towards all LGBT groups is more common among believers than among non-believers.

In the group of Polish students, two statistically significant differences were noted – a higher level of acceptance in the group of non-believers towards transgender women ($p < 0.001$; $V = 0.43$) and men ($p < 0.001$; $V = 0.42$). The strength of the observed effects was moderate. 12.2% of religious students from Poland feel reluctance towards transgender women, and 13.3% of respondents feel towards transgender men. The remaining differences were not statistically significant. Polish students declaring faith show greater indifference compared to non-believers towards all LGBT groups.

The results of the research conducted among Czech students showed two statistically significant differences – a better attitude towards gays ($\chi^2(2) = 7.54$; $p = 0.023$; $V = 0.27$) and bisexual men ($\chi^2(2) = 9.01$; $p = 0.011$; $V = 0.29$) was observed in the group of non-believers. The strength of the observed effects was low.

In the group of pedagogy students from Slovakia, no differences were statistically significant. In Slovakia, as in Poland, believers often show a higher level of hostility (than non-believers), especially towards transgender women (11.5%) and transgender men (11.5%). The differences between groups of believers and infidels in Slovakia are less clear than in Poland.

The results of the study can be analyzed in the context of social identity theory, which assumes that individuals categorize themselves and others on the basis of social group membership, which influences attitudes toward members

of their own and foreign groups. Faith can act as a strong determinant of group identity, which can lead to a clearer distinction between “us” (believers) and “them” (LGBT people as an “outgroup”). Lesbians and gays are perhaps perceived as less “outsiders” than transgender people, who may be more distant from traditional norms related to gender and sexuality. Differences in acceptance may be related to cultural and religious differences that reinforce the group identity of believers.

Taking into account the gender of the respondents – women declared greater (than men) acceptance toward gay men ($\chi^2(2) = 14.19$; $p = 0.001$; $V = 0.21$), bisexual men ($\chi^2(2) = 12.15$; $p = 0.002$; $V = 0.20$), transgender women ($\chi^2(2) = 31.17$; $p < 0.001$; $V = 0.32$) and transgender men ($\chi^2(2) = 30.10$; $p < 0.001$; $V = 0.31$). The strength of the first two of these effects, as measured by Cramer’s V coefficient, was low, while the other two were moderately high. For relations with lesbian and bisexual women, there were no statistically significant differences.

The results of Hereek’s (2002) study confirm that women are more accepting of LGBT people than men, who rate this group less favorably, regardless of whether they are bisexual or homosexual. The reason for these divergent attitudes may be motivation to respond without prejudice – men have lower levels of internal motivation to respond without prejudice than women. Men also show greater attachment to traditional gender roles than women, which may be relevant to their more negative perceptions of LGBT people (Ratcliff, Lassiter, Markman & Snyder, 2006).

Taking into account the place of residence of the respondents – attitudes toward transgender women were better in the group of students living in urban areas ($\chi^2(2) = 6.86$; $p = 0.032$; $V = 0.15$), than in the group of students living in rural areas. The strength of the observed effect was negligible. The remaining differences were not statistically significant.

Table 2. Attitude towards various LGBT groups and respondents’ declaration of faith – analysis for the entire sample

		a believer	non-believer		
Attitude towards lesbians	reluctance	<i>N</i>	6	2	
		%	3.10%	1.70%	
	indifference	<i>N</i>	46	13	$\chi^2(2) = 8.73$ $p = 0.013$ $V = 0.17$
		%	23.60%	10.90%	
	acceptance	<i>N</i>	143	104	
		%	73.30%	87.40%	

Attitude towards gays	reluctance	<i>N</i>	12	4	$\chi^2(2) = 4.99$ $p = 0.083$
		%	6.20%	3.40%	
	indifference	<i>N</i>	46	18	
		%	23.60%	15.10%	
	acceptance	<i>N</i>	137	97	
		%	70.30%	81.50%	
Attitude towards bisexual women	reluctance	<i>N</i>	9	2	$\chi^2(2) = 13.26$ $p = 0.001$ $V = 0.21$
		%	4.60%	1.70%	
	indifference	<i>N</i>	61	18	
		%	31.30%	15.10%	
	acceptance	<i>N</i>	125	99	
		%	64.10%	83.20%	
Attitude towards bisexual men	reluctance	<i>N</i>	16	3	$\chi^2(2) = 9.73$ $p = 0.008$ $V = 0.18$
		%	8.20%	2.50%	
	indifference	<i>N</i>	63	26	
		%	32.30%	21.80%	
	acceptance	<i>N</i>	116	90	
		%	59.50%	75.60%	
Attitude towards transgender women	reluctance	<i>N</i>	28	14	$\chi^2(2) = 6.26$ $p = 0.044$ $V = 0.14$
		%	14.40%	11.80%	
	indifference	<i>N</i>	95	44	
		%	48.70%	37.00%	
	acceptance	<i>N</i>	72	61	
		%	36.90%	51.30%	
Attitude towards transgender men	reluctance	<i>N</i>	29	14	$\chi^2(2) = 5.10$ $p = 0.078$
		%	14.90%	11.80%	
	indifference	<i>N</i>	93	45	
		%	47.70%	37.80%	
	acceptance	<i>N</i>	73	60	
		%	37.40%	50.40%	

The level of general attitude towards LGBT people and the general attitude towards the rights of homosexual people were also compared. Mann-Whitney *U* tests were performed. Both results turned out to be statistically significant (Table 3). Both the general attitude towards LGBT people and the general attitude towards the rights of homosexual people were higher in the group of non-believers. The strength of the first of these effects was low, while the second one was high.

Table 3. Scale results and respondents' declaration of faith – analysis for the entire sample

	a believer (n = 195)		non-believer (n = 119)		<i>U</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
General attitude towards LGBT people	1.48	0.53	1.66	0.46	9289.5	-3.09	0.002	0.17
Attitude towards the rights of homosexual people	3.38	1.09	4.27	0.85	5891.5	-7.34	<0.001	0.41

Taking into account the gender and place of residence of the respondents in the survey results – the general attitude towards LGBT people and the general attitude towards the rights of homosexuals was higher in the group of female respondents (than in the group of male respondents), as well as in the group of students living in cities (than in the group of students living in rural areas).

2. Perception of homosexuality

We also examined whether the distribution of responses regarding the perception of homosexuality was different (Table 4). The χ^2 test turned out to be statistically significant, $\chi^2(3) = 19.53$; $p < 0.001$. Non-believers had a more positive attitude towards people with homosexual orientation – they believed that homosexuality was normal and should be tolerated. The strength of the observed effect was low, $V = 0.25$.

Table 4. Perception of homosexuality and respondents' declaration of faith – analysis for the entire sample

			a believer	non-believer
Perception of homosexuality	hard to say	<i>N</i>	23	4
		%	11.80%	3.40%
	homosexuality is normal and should be tolerated	<i>N</i>	92	85
		%	47.20%	71.40%
	homosexuality is not normal, but it should be tolerated	<i>N</i>	71	28
		%	36.40%	23.50%
	homosexuality is not normal and should not be tolerated	<i>N</i>	9	2
		%	4.60%	1.70%

The research results were also analysed taking into account individual countries. Fisher's exact test was performed, which turned out to be statistically

insignificant, $p = 0.204$ in the group of Poles and Czech students, $p = 0.078$. The study of respondents from Slovakia showed statistically significant differences, $p = 0.004$. Non-believers had a more positive perception of homosexuality. The strength of the observed effect was moderately large, $V = 0.35$.

A more positive attitude regarding the perception of homosexuality was also noted in the group of female respondents (compared to male respondents). The strength of the recorded effect was low, $V = 0.25$.

Taking into account the place of residence (urban, rural), the χ^2 test performed proved statistically insignificant, $\chi^2(3) = 3.18$; $p = 0.364$.

3. Assessment of gay and lesbian rights

In the next step, questions regarding gay and lesbian rights were taken into account. A series of Mann-Whitney U tests were performed due to the strong inequality of the compared groups. There were seven statistically significant differences (Table 5). Non-believers declared greater support for the rights of lesbians and gays in all aspects examined (entering into civil partnerships, having children, public displays of affection) and agreed more with the statement that people of homosexual orientation should fight for equal rights. The strength of the last of these effects was low, for the rights of gays and lesbians to enter into civil partnerships, it was moderately high, and the remaining four effects were large. It was not statistically significant only in terms of assessing whether people with homosexual orientation are excluded from certain spheres of public life. The results are presented graphically in Figure 1.

Also, taking into account the results of students from Poland and Slovakia, seven statistically significant differences were noted – non-believers more often than believers declared greater support for the rights of lesbians and gays in terms of entering into partnerships, having children, public displays of affection, and more often agreed with the statement that people with homosexual orientation should fight for equal rights. Among Polish students, the strength of the effect observed for the right of lesbians and gays to have children was large, and the remaining effects were moderately large. Among students from Slovakia, the strength of the observed effect for the right of lesbians to have children and of lesbians and gays to publicly express affection was large, the remaining effects were moderately large.

The research results of Czech students indicated five statistically significant differences. Non-believers, more often than believers, declared support for the rights of lesbians and gays in terms of entering into civil partnerships, the rights of gays to have children and to publicly express their feelings and also more often agreed with the statement that people of homosexual orientation should fight for equal rights. The strength of the effect observed for the rights to enter

into civil partnerships was moderately high, and for the remaining variables, it was low.

Referring to the theoretical assumptions of social identity theory – students declaring faith through commitment to traditional norms, may perceive equal rights for LGBT people as a threat to the values of their own group; hence, perhaps their lower support for gay and lesbian rights

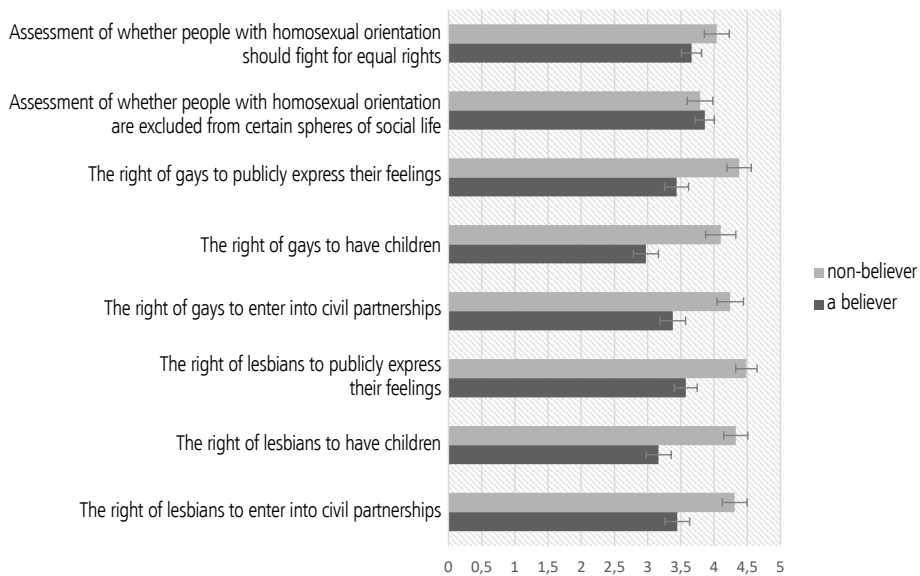
Table 5. Assessment of the rights of homosexual people and the respondents' declaration of faith – analysis for the entire sample

	a believer (n = 195)		non-believer (n = 119)		<i>U</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
The right of lesbians to enter into civil partnerships	3.45	1.33	4.31	1.04	6963.0	-6.21	<0.001	0.35
The right of lesbians to have children	3.16	1.36	4.33	1.01	5717.5	-7.80	<0.001	0.44
The right of lesbians to publicly express their feelings	3.57	1.23	4.49	0.89	6365.0	-7.08	<0.001	0.40
The right of gays to enter into civil partnerships	3.38	1.37	4.24	1.11	7079.0	-6.04	<0.001	0.34
The right of gays to have children	2.97	1.35	4.10	1.26	6128.0	-7.21	<0.001	0.41
The right of gays to publicly express their feelings	3.44	1.29	4.38	1.02	6472.0	-6.88	<0.001	0.39
Assessment of whether people with homosexual orientation are excluded from certain spheres of social life	3.86	1.02	3.79	1.07	11247.5	-0.48	0.631	0.03
Assessment of whether people with homosexual orientation should fight for equal rights	3.66	1.07	4.04	1.04	9192.0	-3.22	0.001	0.18

Taking into account the gender of the respondents – women were more positive (than men) about the right of lesbians and gays to enter into civil partnerships, the right of gays to show their feelings in public, and were more in agreement with the assessment of whether people with homosexual orientation are excluded from certain spheres of social life and whether they should fight for equal rights. The strength of the effects noted, as measured by the *r* coefficient, was low. Other differences were not statistically significant.

Surveyed students living in urban areas declared greater support (than students living in rural areas) for lesbian and gay rights in all aspects surveyed. The strength of the effects noted, as measured by the *r* coefficient, was low. Other differences were not statistically significant.

Figure 1. Assessment of the rights of homosexual people and the respondents' declaration of faith – analysis for the entire sample



4. Violence against homosexual people

The level of violence against people of homosexual orientation was also examined. Mann-Whitney U tests were performed. There were no statistically significant differences for the entire sample (Table 6) or for individual countries. The results of the analysis indicate that regardless of the declaration of faith, 92% of the respondents did not use verbal violence, and 97.8% did not use physical violence against people of homosexual orientation.

However, the results of the survey indicated differences, taking into account the gender of the respondents. The level of aggression was lower in the female group than in the male group. The strength of the recorded effect for verbal aggression was high ($U = 5541$; $Z = -7.58$; $p < 0.001$; $r = 0.43$), for physical aggression low ($U = 8319$; $Z = -4.0$; $p < 0.001$; $r = 0.24$).

The level of physical aggression was also differentiated by place of residence – it was higher in the group of students living in the countryside than in the group of students living in the city. The strength of the observed effect was low ($U = 11552$; $Z = -2.23$; $p = 0.026$; $r = 0.13$). For the level of verbal aggression, there were no statistically significant differences ($U = 12166$; $Z = -0.08$; $p = 0.937$). The lower level of aggression of students living in cities may be due to more pluralistic environments and greater acceptance of diversity.

The results of the present study can be related to the experience of LGBT students living in rural and urban areas, which indicate that LGBT students living in rural areas experienced isolation, social discrimination and lack of adequate

Table 6. Violence against people of homosexual orientation and respondents' declaration of faith – analysis for the entire sample

		a believer	non-believer		
The use of verbal violence against people of homosexual orientation	definitely not	<i>N</i>	154	89	
		%	79.00%	74.80%	
	I don't think so	<i>N</i>	29	17	
		%	14.90%	14.30%	
	hard to say	<i>N</i>	4	5	<i>U</i> = 11030.5 <i>Z</i> = -1.00 <i>p</i> = 0.316
		%	2.10%	4.20%	
	probably yes	<i>N</i>	4	3	
		%	2.10%	2.50%	
	definitely yes	<i>N</i>	4	5	
		%	2.10%	4.20%	
The use of physical violence against people of homosexual orientation	definitely not	<i>N</i>	187	112	
		%	95.90%	94.10%	
	I don't think so	<i>N</i>	4	4	
		%	2.10%	3.40%	
	hard to say	<i>N</i>	3	1	<i>U</i> = 11394.5 <i>Z</i> = -0.72 <i>p</i> = 0.471
		%	1.50%	0.80%	
	probably yes	<i>N</i>	1	0	
		%	0.50%	0.00%	
	definitely yes	<i>N</i>	0	2	
		%	0.00%	1.70%	

services and support, and were less likely to feel safe at school than their peers living in cities (Jones, 2015). Findings by other authors (Kosciw, Clark, Truong & Zongrone, 2020; Kosciw, Greytak & Diaz, 2009) indicate that LGBT youth from rural communities may face a particularly hostile school climate, manifested by, among other things, homophobic remarks used against them. A report by *The Trevor Project* (2021) highlights that *LGBTQ youth living in rural areas and small towns face higher rates of discrimination and physical aggression than youth living in urban and suburban areas*. LGBT youth in rural areas also experience higher levels of psychological distress, which is related to where they live (Grant, Amos, Power, Lyons, Hill & Bournea, 2024).

Summary

The theoretical basis of the work was the social identity theory. It assumes that people categorize themselves and others into social groups, which in turn has implications for their perception of other people. People who declare faith may be less tolerant towards LGBT people due to their religious beliefs. The hypothesis assumed that religious beliefs are important for the attitudes and approaches of pedagogy students from Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia towards LGBT people, and students declaring faith have a more negative attitude towards LGBT people compared to non-believing students.

Religious group affiliation, gender, place of residence and cultural values influence the process of social categorization and evaluation of outgroups such as LGBT people. A strong group identity (religious or associated with traditional norms) can reinforce prejudice and indifference, while a lack of affiliation with such a group can foster greater openness and acceptance. The process of categorization revolves around inferring the similarities of people who are within one group and what distinguishes it from other groups, while ignoring individual differences among members of the categorized group.

Research has shown that religiosity has a significant impact on attitudes towards LGBT people. Pedagogical students declaring faith show a less positive attitude towards LGBT people than non-believing students. These differences are particularly visible in relation to transgender people, where religious people showed greater indifference and reluctance.

The results of the conducted research confirm the relationship between the religiosity of pedagogy students and attitudes and approaches to LGBT people.

These differences are visible in all the countries surveyed: Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, where the level of religiosity is different. Poland, with the highest percentage of religious people, shows a lower level of acceptance of LGBT people. The Czech Republic, as a country with a low level of religiosity, is characterized by higher acceptance. Slovakia occupies an intermediate position, where the differences in attitudes between believers and non-believers are less pronounced than in Poland.

Research results indicate that faith and related doctrines play a role in the more negative perception of LGBT people. Non-believers are more open, tolerant and accepting of sexual minorities.

Students differed in attitudes toward LGBT people according to gender and place of residence. Women showed more acceptance than men, were more positive about the rights of homosexuals, and showed lower levels of verbal and physical aggression compared to men. This may be due to their lower attachment to traditional gender roles, as well as their greater empathy and motivation to nullify prejudice.

Students living in urban areas showed more positive attitudes toward LGBT rights than their peers in rural areas, especially regarding transgender women's rights. With regard to physical aggression, surveyed students from rural areas were more likely to show higher levels of physical aggression toward LGBT people than urban students. The more positive attitudes of students living in urban areas may be due to greater social diversity and more frequent contact with people from the "outgroup." Rural residents may live and reside in a more homogeneous environment, which encourages the perpetuation of prejudice.

The research included students of pedagogical faculties due to their future role as educators. By assumption, they should be characterized by understanding and respect for differences. In their professional work, they will often encounter issues and problems of children and young people related to gender identity. The school environment for work in which they are prepared is characterized by diversity. From the point of view of educational practice, it is important to introduce additional educational programs at universities, such as classes, workshops or training on sexual diversity, tolerance and inclusion. Such initiatives can help future educators develop empathy and the ability to create a safe, supportive environment for all students, regardless of their sexual orientation.

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