

## The Role of Direct and Indirect Exposure in Shaping Students' Attitudes Towards LGBT+ Individuals

Aysha Saifi<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Anita Moral<sup>2\*</sup>

### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Attitudes towards LGBT+ individuals are critical to promoting inclusivity in society. Understanding the impact of gender and exposure on these attitudes can provide valuable insights for society and educational institutions. **Objectives:** The purpose of this investigation was to analyze the attitudes of university students towards LGBT+ people, highlighting gender differences and the impact of both direct and indirect exposure. **Method:** A total sample of 80 university students (40 males, 40 females) participated in the study. Participants completed the Homosexuality Attitude Scale (HAS) to assess their attitudes toward LGBT+ individuals. Data were analyzed using a two-way ANOVA to examine the main effects of gender and exposure type, as well as their interaction. **Results:** The analysis revealed that gender had no significant effect on attitudes towards LGBT+ individuals  $F(1, 76) = 0.172, p = 0.679$ , indicating no significant statistical difference between males and females. In contrast, the type of exposure had a significant effect  $F(1, 76) = 4.247, p = 0.043$ , indicating that direct exposure led to more positive attitudes. However, the interaction effect between gender and exposure type was not statistically significant.  $F(1, 76) = 2.684, p = 0.106$ . **Conclusion:** The results suggest that while gender does not play a significant role in shaping attitudes towards LGBT+ individuals, direct exposure does have a positive impact. Educational strategies that enhance direct exposure may be beneficial in promoting more positive attitudes among students.

**Keywords:** LGBT+ attitudes, gender differences, exposure types

The term "LGBT community" encapsulates a vast and varied assembly of people differing in gender identity, sexual orientation, racial and ethnic background, and socioeconomic status. Although this report focuses on the LGBT community as a whole, it's important to recognize that "L" (lesbian), "G" (gay), "B" (bisexual), and "T" (transgender) signify distinct groups with their own particular health issues and needs. Even though these groups are often lumped together under the LGBT label, they face different experiences and challenges, all linked by the common theme of stigmatization.

Lesbians, gay men, and bisexual individuals are defined by their sexual orientation, which includes aspects like sexual attraction, behavior, and identity. These groups are linked by the

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, Meerut College, Meerut, U.P., India.

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Meerut College, Meerut, U.P. India

\*Corresponding Author

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fact that their sexual orientation is not exclusively heterosexual. However, this broad category includes men and women, those who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, and even those who do not use these labels but still experience same-sex attraction or engage in same-sex behavior. Each of these differences can have specific health implications.

Transgender individuals, on the other hand, are defined by their gender identity and how they present themselves. This group includes people whose gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned at birth, or whose gender expression is different from traditional gender norms. For example, some may have been identified as male at birth but later identify as female, and vice versa. The transgender community is diverse, with differences in gender identity, expression, and sexual orientation. Some may choose to undergo medical procedures to change their bodies, while others may not. Transgender individuals can also have varying sexual orientations, including heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual. The transgender population has unique health needs that differ from those of non-transgender people and also varies within the transgender community itself.

While "LGBT" is a helpful term for describing these combined groups, it can also mask the important differences between them. For example, grouping lesbians and gay men together can obscure gender differences, and combining the experiences of bisexual men and women can do the same. Additionally, terms like "LGB" can leave out those who experience same-sex attractions or behaviors but do not identify with these labels. The transgender community, which includes a range of different identities, has distinct needs separate from those of lesbians, gay men, and bisexual people.

### *Understanding Attitudes toward the LGBT Community*

An attitude can be defined as an enduring organization of motivational, emotional, perceptual and cognitive processes with respect to some aspect of the individual's world. In the present research, we are measuring the implicit attitudes of Indian youth toward homosexuality. An implicit attitude refers to an automatic and unconscious response to an attitude object, whereas an explicit attitude is conscious (Timothy D. Wilson, 2000). Implicit attitudes are measured because people often retain prejudices while appearing to have overcome them in order to be socially desirable. Prejudice is defined as a prejudgment of a group and its individual members (Myers, 2012). It is a social phenomenon involving depersonalization; in this case, group-based negative affect influences our attitudes toward homosexual individuals, as they are viewed as representatives of the homosexual community.

Attitude is defined as a relatively lasting evaluation of an object, person, group, issue, or concept, ranging from negative to positive. Attitudes offer a summary evaluation of their targets and are often shaped by specific beliefs, emotions, and past behaviors related to those objects (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2020). In this study, "attitude" refers to the psychological tendencies towards homosexual individuals (gay and lesbian) expressed through beliefs, emotions, and past behaviors that vary across different parts of the world.

An attitude is a positive or negative reaction toward someone or something, reflected in a person's beliefs, emotions, or intended actions. It represents a social orientation, meaning it's a fundamental inclination to respond to something favorably or unfavorably. Katz asserts that attitudes serve four psychological functions:

- **Instrumental:** We develop positive attitudes toward things that help us or reward us. We aim to maximize rewards and minimize punishments. For example, if someone

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notices that most people in society do not like people in the LGBT community, they might be more likely to also have a negative attitude toward the LGBT community to fit in or avoid criticism.

- **Knowledge:** Attitudes help us make sense of the world by providing structure and meaning. In life, we seek order, clarity, and stability, and attitudes help provide standards for evaluating things. Stereotypes, such as those related to gender, are examples of how attitudes help us simplify and understand complex social information.
- **Value-expressive:** Attitudes express our basic values and reinforce our self-image. For example, if someone sees themselves as homophobic, their negative attitude towards the LGBT community reinforces that self-image.
- **Ego-defensive:** Some attitudes protect us from recognizing uncomfortable truths about ourselves or harsh realities of life. These attitudes act as defense mechanisms. For example, people might develop negative attitudes to shield themselves from fears or insecurities they do not want to face.

### *Need of the Research*

Investigating The Role of Direct and Indirect Exposure in shaping Students' Attitudes towards LGBT+ Individuals is of paramount importance because it delves into a crucial facet of social inclusion and diversity within educational institutions. University students, poised to become the future leaders and professionals of society, play a significant role in shaping the cultural and social landscape. Consequently, their perceptions and attitudes towards marginalized groups such as the LGBT+ community are critical for fostering inclusive and accepting societies. By understanding how direct exposure—such as personal interactions with LGBT+ peers—and indirect exposure—such as media portrayals and educational content—affect attitudes, we can develop effective strategies to mitigate prejudice and encourage acceptance. This research has the potential to identify the factors that lead to positive or negative perceptions, thereby equipping educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals with the insights needed to craft targeted interventions that nurture empathy, diminish discrimination, and enhance the mental well-being of LGBT+ individuals.

In India, the legal landscape has witnessed substantial progress in recent years. The landmark judgment in the case of *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* in 2018 by the Supreme Court decriminalized consensual same-sex relationships by reading down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which had previously criminalized homosexual acts. This ruling marked a historic milestone in acknowledging the rights and dignity of the LGBT+ community in India, signifying a broader shift towards acceptance and inclusion. Addressing this sensitive topic through research is in harmony with these global and national efforts, contributing to the overarching societal objectives of equality and respect for human rights. Ultimately, this research endeavors to create a more supportive and inclusive environment for all university students, reinforcing the values of empathy, respect, and human dignity.

### *Statement of the Problem*

Understanding what shapes attitudes toward LGBT+ individuals is crucial for cultivating an inclusive environment in educational settings. Despite growing social acceptance, biases and discriminatory perspectives persist among university students, influenced by factors such as gender and interactions with LGBT+ communities. Both direct and indirect exposures may differently affect these attitudes; yet, the extent of their impact, especially when combining

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considerations of gender and exposure type remains unclear. This study aims to bridge this gap by analyzing how gender and type of exposure influence university students' views on LGBT+ individuals. The research seeks to offer evidence-based insights that could enhance educational programs and initiatives designed to promote inclusivity among students. By immersing into these dynamics, the study seeks to enrich our comprehension of fostering empathy and acceptance towards LGBT+ individuals in academia.

### ***Research Objectives***

- To assess the effect of gender (male and female) on university students' attitudes towards LGBT+ individuals.
- To assess the effect of exposure type (direct and indirect exposure) on university students' attitudes towards LGBT+ individuals.
- To examine the interaction effect between gender (male and female) and type of exposure (direct and indirect) on attitudes towards LGBT+ individuals among university students.

## **LITERATURE REVIEWS**

### ***Media Exposure and Homosexuality***

The media plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' attitudes towards various social phenomena by acting as a primary source of entertainment and information. It facilitates exposure to concepts that may have been previously unfamiliar to certain societies, thereby making such notions more common and acceptable among the people (Cordeiro et al., 2018). However, the rates of acceptance or rejection of these phenomena vary depending on social and religious contexts. The acceptance or rejection of media content is also influenced by the media's messaging and the nature of the audience's interaction with it, as media exposure helps construct a mediated reality through processes of comparison and self-conceptualization. As globalization continues to expand, cultures worldwide are experiencing a paradigm shift, leading to changes in societal attitudes towards phenomena such as homosexuality, aligning more closely with the Western perspective of acceptance (Martel et al., 2004).

Mainstream media, including television shows, films, music videos, and online streaming services like Netflix, Hulu, HBO Max, and Amazon Prime Video, have played a major role in presenting homosexuality in a more positive light (Harrington, 2003). As digital media grows, people are increasingly exposed to content featuring gay and lesbian characters, which contributes to more positive attitudes towards homosexuals. In the past, such characters were mostly absent from mainstream media, but over the last decade, they have become more visible, like Ellen Morgan, the well-known lesbian character played by Ellen DeGeneres (Bonds-Raacke et al., 2007).

Today, media is working hard to become more diverse and inclusive. For example, 92% of the 300 most-watched shows in 2019 featured a mix of characters, including those who are LGBTQ (Nielsen, 2020). By showing these characters on screen, the media helps viewers learn more about sexual minorities. Studies have shown that people who watch more news media are more willing to learn about homosexuality, while those who watch more entertainment media tend to accept it more easily (Gonta et al., 2017).

Regular exposure to homosexual characters in the media can shape people's attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals. When homosexual characters are shown positively, audiences

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are likely to develop more tolerance (Harrington, 2003). Viewers often form connections with the characters they see on TV, which helps them empathize with homosexual individuals and develop positive attitudes towards them (Bond & Compton, 2015). Even heterosexual people who do not know any homosexual individuals in real life may still support them because of their media interactions (Bond & Compton, 2015). This positive attitude also encourages young people to interact with homosexuals both online and offline (Lissitsa & Kushnirovich, 2021; Feng et al., 2012). Overall, media has become a powerful tool that helps young people see homosexuality in a more positive way and become more accepting of it (Sharpe, 2002).

### ***Homosexuality and Attitudes***

In many countries, people's attitudes toward homosexuality are still very negative. Homosexuality is considered a crime in some places, with punishments ranging from fines and imprisonment to even the death penalty (BBC, 2016). As a result, many people in these societies display hostile behaviors toward homosexuals, such as physical attacks, rejection by family, and derogatory jokes (Poushter & Kent, 2020; Reasons & Hughson, 2000). Cultural beliefs and social norms often promote prejudice and negative attitudes toward lesbian and gay people, leading to intolerance, harassment, mockery, and even threats of violence (Ventura et al., 2004; Subhrajit, 2014). Even heterosexual men may feel uncomfortable around homosexual men, often due to stereotypes about effeminate behavior or beliefs that homosexuality is sinful (Azrowani et al., 2012).

Attitudes toward homosexuality can change over time. In many places, it has shifted from being seen as criminal behavior or a mental illness to being accepted as normal (Cao et al., 2010; Landicho et al., 2014). As globalization brings different cultures closer, many societies are beginning to adopt more open-minded views on homosexuality, influenced by Western ideas (Martel et al., 2004). Researchers have studied various factors that affect attitudes toward gay and lesbian people. They found that men with a strong sense of traditional gender identity often have more negative attitudes towards homosexuals than women (Gulevich et al., 2023). For example, women are generally more comfortable working with gay men than men (Lim, 2002).

Lin et al., (2016) conducted a study examining the factors that influence attitudes toward homosexuality among Chinese college students. Using survey data from 494 students from two universities in China, researchers investigated the roles of traditional cultural factors—such as filial piety, parental perspectives on homosexuality, and overall sexual views—as well as modern influences like intergroup contact and media exposure to homosexuality in shaping student attitudes. The results showed that while Chinese college students tend to be accepting of homosexuality, their tolerance is somewhat limited by various influences. Traditional cultural elements were linked to lower acceptance rates for homosexuals and LGBT+ individuals. On the other hand, modernizing elements such as media exposure and intergroup interactions were associated with higher levels of tolerance. Researchers concluded that both traditional and modernizing factors affect current views on homosexuality within Chinese society; however, modern influences typically have a stronger impact. The study also delves into theoretical insights and policy implications for addressing public attitudes toward homosexuality in China.

People's attitudes toward homosexuality can also differ based on their cultural backgrounds and gender beliefs (Kyes & Tumbelaka, 1994). Those with a strong sense of gender identity tend to hold more stereotypical views and may have more positive or negative attitudes

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based on those stereotypes (Bosson & Michniewicz, 2013). Masculine men, for instance, often have more positive views about their own gender identity than feminine men (Glick et al., 2015).

While there are gender differences in attitudes toward homosexuals, research shows that people with strong traditional gender beliefs tend to dislike gay and lesbian people more (Kite & Whitley, 1998). Similarly, those with authoritarian beliefs are more likely to have negative attitudes towards homosexuals (Altemeyer & Altemeyer, 1996). Studies have shown a strong link between conservative beliefs and negative attitudes towards homosexuality, especially among people with high levels of authoritarianism (Whitley & Lee, 2000). Other research suggests that social dominance and gender roles play a significant role in shaping these attitudes (Cheng et al., 2016).

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### *Research Design*

This quantitative cross-sectional research focused on investigating university students' attitudes towards LGBT+ individuals. An equal representation of 80 students, consisting of 40 males and 40 females, was chosen. Participants were segmented into two groups based on their level of exposure to LGBT+ individuals: direct (personal interactions) and indirect (media consumption). This design permitted a comprehensive evaluation of the impact of gender and exposure type on students' perceptions of the LGBT+ community.

#### *Sample Size*

A total sample of 80 university students aged 18-30 was recruited using a combination of random and convenience sampling methods. Informed consent was obtained from all participants for the survey. The sample was designed to include approximately equal numbers of male and female students (40-40), enabling a thorough analysis of gender differences and exposure types in relation to attitudes toward the LGBT+ individuals.

#### *Research Hypotheses*

- There will be a significant effect of gender on attitudes towards LGBT+ individuals among male and female students.
- There will be a significant effect of exposure type (direct vs. indirect) on university students' attitudes towards LGBT+ individuals.
- There will be a significant interaction effect between gender and exposure type on attitudes towards LGBT+ individuals.

#### *Variables*

- **Dependent Variable (DV):** Attitudes towards LGBT+ Individuals.
- **Independent Variables (IV):** Gender (categorical: Male, Female), type of Exposure (Direct and Indirect). **Direct Exposure:** Measured by asking participants how many LGBT+ individuals they know personally and the frequency of interactions. **Indirect Exposure:** Measured through questions about the consumption of LGBT+ media (e.g., TV shows, movies, social media).

#### *Instrument*

**Homosexuality Attitude Scale (HAS):** Developed by Kite & Deaux in 1986, the Homosexuality Attitude Scale (HAS) assesses students' attitudes towards lesbian and gay individuals. This Likert scale evaluates stereotypes, misconceptions, and anxieties about

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homosexuals through a unidimensional factor that signifies either favorable or unfavorable views of homosexuals. The HAS exhibited exceptional internal consistency (alphas  $> .92$ ) along with strong test-retest reliability ( $r = .71$ ). It was found to be equally reliable for both gay male and lesbian subjects. No notable differences were detected in attitude scores for "gay male," "lesbian," and "homosexual" targets. Researchers are encouraged to select specific targets rather than using "homosexual" as an attitude object.

### Data Collection

Data were collected through face-to-face interaction and offline surveys conducted with the necessary permissions. Participants were informed of the study's purpose and their rights. To ensure confidentiality, all responses were anonymous, and measures were taken to protect privacy throughout the research. Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation and the right to withdraw, and avoiding the collection of personal data. All responses were kept confidential throughout the research process.

### Data Analysis

The statistical analysis utilized a Two-Way ANOVA to examine the data collected. The Two-Way ANOVA enabled the assessment of the main effects of each independent variable—gender and exposure type—as well as their interaction effect on the attitudes. This approach provided a comprehensive understanding of how gender and exposure types influenced attitudes towards LGBT+ individuals, allowing for the interpretation of significant differences in mean attitude scores across different groups.

## INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULT

### Main Effect

**Effect of Gender**—The study examined the effect of gender on attitudes toward LGBT+ individuals. An analysis revealed no significant difference between male and female students ( $F(1, 76) = 0.172, p < 0.679$ ). The small effect size (partial eta squared = 0.002) indicates that gender explains a negligible amount of variance in attitudes. These results suggest that gender does not significantly influence how participants view LGBT+ individuals in this study.

### The Results

*Table 1 Summary Table of Analysis of Variance for Attitude Towards of Homosexuality Score*

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Gender	37.812	1	37.812	.172	.679	.002
Exposure	931.612	1	931.612	4.247*	.043	.053
Gender * Exposure	588.613	1	588.613	2.684	.106	.034
Error	16669.450	76	219.335			
Total	490855.000	80				

Note. \* $p < .05$

**Effect of Exposure**—The analysis of the main effect of exposure in the two category (Direct & Indirect) revealed a significant difference in attitudes towards LGBT+ individuals based on the type of exposure, with  $F(1, 76) = 4.247, p < 0.043$ . Since the p-value is less than the

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common significance threshold of 0.05, this suggests that the type of exposure—“direct or indirect”—has a statistically significant impact on participant’s attitudes. Consequently, the hypothesis positing that university students will exhibit significantly positive attitudes towards LGBT+ individuals, influenced by the type of exposure, is accepted. The partial eta squared value of 0.053 indicates that exposure type accounts for 5.3% of the variance in attitudes, suggesting a moderate effect size.

Participants with direct exposure to LGBT+ individuals, such as through personal relationships or interactions, had a mean attitude score of 80.28 with a standard deviation of 13.71, indicating relatively more positive attitudes. In contrast, those with indirect exposure, such as through media representations had a mean score of 73.45 with a standard deviation of 15.98, indicating less positive attitudes. These findings suggest that direct exposure is associated with more positive attitudes towards LGBT+ individuals compared to indirect exposure.

### ***Interaction Effect***

**Interaction effect of gender and exposure**-An analysis of the interaction between gender and exposure type revealed no significant effect on attitudes toward LGBT+ individuals  $F(1, 76) = 2.684, p < 0.106$ ). The small effect size (partial eta squared = 0.034) indicates that the combined influence of gender and exposure is negligible. These results suggest that while gender and exposure type individually affect attitudes, their effects do not depend on each other in this study. For example, the difference in attitudes between direct and indirect exposure is similar for both male and female participants.

***Table 2 Mean Scores and Standard Error of Attitude Towards Homosexuality***

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Exposure</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>N</b>
Female	Direct Exposure	78.2500	11.51601	20
	Indirect Exposure	76.8500	13.18801	20
	Total	77.5500	12.24106	40
Male	Direct Exposure	82.3000	15.64104	20
	Indirect Exposure	70.0500	18.05977	20
	Total	76.1750	17.79209	40
Total	Direct Exposure	80.2750	13.71129	40
	Indirect Exposure	73.4500	15.98389	40
	Total	76.8625	15.18972	80

Table 2 reveal differences in mean scores based on gender and exposure type. For female participants, the mean score for direct exposure to LGBT+ individuals is 78.25 (with a standard deviation of 11.52), indicating a relatively positive attitude. In contrast, for indirect exposure, the mean score is slightly lower at 76.85 (standard deviation of 13.19). This suggests that while females generally have positive attitudes towards LGBT+ individuals, those with direct exposure tend to have a more favorable view compared to those who have only had indirect exposure.

On the other hand, male participants show a more pronounced difference based on exposure type. The mean score for direct exposure is significantly higher at 82.30 ( $SD = 15.64$ ),

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suggesting that males with direct exposure have very positive attitudes. Conversely, for indirect exposure, the mean score drops to 70.05 ( $SD=18.06$ ), indicating a much less favorable attitude among males who have not had direct contact with LGBT+ individuals.

Overall, the data indicates that both genders exhibit more positive attitudes towards LGBT+ individuals when there is direct exposure. However, the disparity is particularly striking for males, who display a significantly higher mean score with direct exposure compared to indirect exposure. This highlights the potential impact of direct interactions on attitudes and suggests that fostering opportunities for such exposure may be beneficial in promoting positive attitudes towards LGBT+ individuals among university students.

**Figure 1 Mean Scores and Error Bars of Attitude toward Homosexuality by Gender and Exposure**

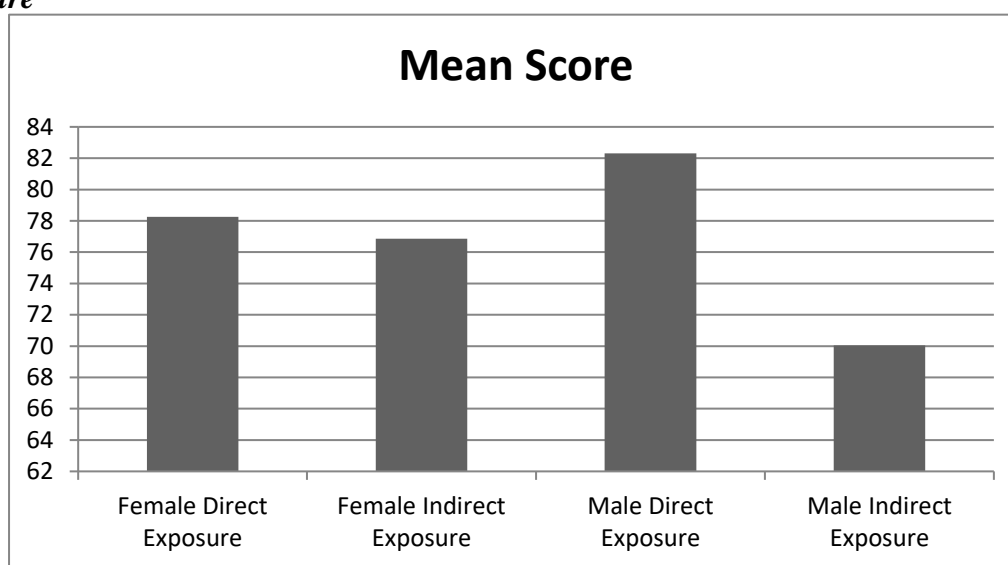


Figure 1 shows that the mean scores of attitudes towards LGBT+ individuals based on gender and exposure type. Each bar represents the mean score for female and male participants, distinguishing between direct and indirect exposure. The error bars indicate the standard deviation for each group, providing insight into the variability of attitudes within each category.

The results of the study indicate a significant influence of exposure type and gender on attitudes towards LGBT+ individuals among university students. Notably, male participants exhibited more positive attitudes compared to female participants across both exposure categories. Specifically, those with direct exposure to LGBT+ individuals demonstrated the highest levels of positive attitudes, suggesting that personal interactions significantly enhance acceptance and understanding. In contrast, individuals with indirect exposure, such as through media representations, showed comparatively lower scores, particularly among male participants.

Additionally, the interaction effect between gender and exposure revealed that the differences in attitudes were more pronounced among male participants than female participants, particularly in the context of direct exposure. This suggests that while both genders benefit from direct exposure, males tend to respond more positively than females. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of fostering direct interactions with LGBT+ individuals to promote positive attitudes, as well as considering the varying impacts of

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gender in shaping these attitudes. This underscores the need for targeted educational interventions that encourage direct engagement with the LGBT+ community to enhance acceptance and understanding among university students.

### DISCUSSION

This study investigated the factors that influence university students' attitudes toward LGBT+ individuals, specifically focusing on the roles of gender and exposure type (direct vs. indirect). The findings offer valuable insights into how these variables shape attitudes, contributing to the existing research on this topic.

First, the analysis found no significant difference in attitudes toward LGBT+ individuals between male and female students. This suggests that gender alone is not a primary factor in shaping students' views on LGBT+ individuals. Other factors, such as personal experiences or cultural influences, may be more influential in shaping opinions on this topic.

However, the type of exposure emerged as a significant factor in influencing attitudes. Direct exposure, which includes personal relationships and interactions with LGBT+ individuals, was associated with more positive attitudes compared to indirect exposure, which involves media representations and educational content. This finding highlights the importance of direct contact in reducing prejudice and fostering empathy towards marginalized groups. It supports the contact hypothesis, which posits that direct interaction with diverse groups can reduce biases and promote more inclusive attitudes.

This research demonstrated a substantial difference between exposure to and attitudes toward the LGBT+ community among college students. This finding corresponds with Collier et al. (2015), who posited that factors like social dynamics, education, and urbanization foster a more meaningful life for gay and lesbian individuals. Educational attainment, religious background, and urban settings are pivotal elements shaping attitudes toward gays and lesbians. Furthermore, economic progress and income levels significantly influence perspectives on homosexuality. Apart from social behaviors, the personality traits of gay individuals—such as sensitivity and tendencies towards self-isolation—add complexity to comprehending homosexual behavior (Roslee et al., 2017).

These findings suggest practical implications for educational institutions seeking to foster inclusive environments. Encouraging direct interactions with LGBT+ individuals through support groups, workshops, or community engagement may be more effective in shaping positive attitudes than relying solely on indirect methods like media campaigns or general educational programs. By emphasizing direct contact, institutions can create opportunities for students to develop empathy and understanding, contributing to a more accepting and supportive atmosphere for LGBT+ students. In America, beliefs about homosexuality tend to be more supportive among those who think people are inherently lesbian or gay. A person's religious background is another significant determinant affecting views on the LGBT+ community, as different religions have diverse stances on homosexuality. Additionally, public policies shape societal perspectives towards homosexuals. Across Europe, LGBT+ individuals have seen increasing acceptance along with expanded rights and protections like anti-discrimination laws, adoption rights, and legalized marriage (Collier et al., 2015). According to a study by Röder and Lubbers (2015), which surveyed 1,056 migrants in Ireland and 874 in the Netherlands, religion has an impact on views towards homosexuality. The study discovered that those with devout religious backgrounds who regularly practice their faith show greater respect and favorable attitudes toward the

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LGBT+ community. Parallel research conducted in China by Cao et al. (2010) found that residents of prosperous cities are more tolerant of homosexuals. The research also highlighted that both gender and age play roles in tolerance levels: women and younger people are generally more accepting of the LGBT+ community. Among college students, there's a tendency for greater openness and acceptance of new ideas, fostering more positive views towards homosexuality within this group.

In summary, this study highlights the importance of direct exposure in fostering positive attitudes toward LGBT+ individuals. It also reveals that gender differences may not be as significant as once believed. The research underscores the benefits of personal connections and suggests that initiatives aimed at increasing direct interactions can effectively reduce stigma and cultivate a more inclusive university environment. Future studies could examine these dynamics in varied cultural settings or among larger and more diverse populations to expand on these insights.

### CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This research explored the influence of gender and exposure type (direct vs. indirect) on university students' attitudes toward LGBT+ individuals. The results indicate that gender alone does not significantly shape these attitudes, while the type of exposure plays a crucial role. Direct exposure to LGBT+ individuals fosters more positive attitudes compared to indirect exposure. This highlights the effectiveness of encouraging direct interactions to enhance understanding and acceptance of LGBT+ individuals within educational environments. Furthermore, the absence of a significant interaction effect between gender and exposure type suggests that initiatives aimed at improving attitudes through exposure should be gender-neutral, as the positive impact of direct interaction is consistent across both male and female students.

- 1. Expanded demographic range:** Future studies should aim to include a larger and more diverse sample group encompassing students from various universities, regions, and cultural backgrounds. This would enhance the generalizability of the results and reveal if the study's trends are consistent in different environments.
- 2. Long-term studies:** Undertaking longitudinal studies could offer a deeper insight into how perceptions of LGBT+ individuals shift over time, especially concerning different levels and forms of exposure. These studies could document changes in attitudes and provide stronger evidence regarding causality.
- 3. In-depth qualitative analysis:** Integrating qualitative techniques like interviews or focus groups can uncover richer insights into why students hold certain attitudes. This method can capture unique personal stories and viewpoints that quantitative data might miss.
- 4. Influence of other factors:** Further research might investigate other elements that impact attitudes, such as religious convictions, political views, or prior experiences with discrimination. Examining how these factors interact with types of exposure could deliver a more detailed understanding of what shapes opinions about LGBT+ individuals.
- 5. Educational intervention effects:** Studies could also measure the success of targeted educational interventions aimed at improving perceptions of LGBT+ people. For example, evaluating different direct education programs (e.g., workshops, mentoring initiatives) might identify the most effective approaches to fostering inclusivity.

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