

## *Belief in Unsubstantiated Claims about LGBTQ+ and Discriminatory Behaviour of Slovak LGBTQ+ and Heterosexually-identified Adolescent Boys and Girls Towards Sexual and Gender Minorities*

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### abstract

The study aimed to map the homonegative, binegative, and transnegative behaviour rates in Slovak LGBTQ+ boys and girls and heterosexual boys and girls. The study involved an analysis of unsubstantiated LGBTQ+ claims and myths, which significantly increase the rate of discriminatory behaviour in adolescence. Research tools used include the Homonegativity, Binegativity, and Transnegativity Scale and the Unsubstantiated Claims and Myths about LGBTQ+ Scale. The research involved 209 adolescents from the Slovak Republic: 77 heterosexually-identified boys, 25 LGBTQ+-identified boys, 71 heterosexually-identified girls, and 36 LGBTQ+-identified girls. Results show that the heterosexually-identified adolescent population manifests higher homonegative, binegative, and transnegative behaviour rates. These differences manifest at both cognitive and emotional levels, as well as at a behavioural level. We identified the rate of belief in unsubstantiated LGBTQ+ statements and myths. Heterosexually-identified adolescents are more likely to be influenced by such statements than LGBTQ+-identified adolescents.

### keywords

LGBTQ+ myths, attitudes, sexual prejudice, sexual identification, gender identification

## Introduction

The spread of disinformation, misinformation, and unsubstantiated claims is becoming a powerful phenomenon in modern society, capable of forming and changing people's perceptions, attitudes, and behaviour toward the objects and subjects they are attached to. The establishment of personal attitudes is influenced by many factors, including personality traits, information gained from other people, and internalising social and group norms and beliefs (Jedlička et al., 2018). Therefore, personal experiences and socialisation play a crucial role in a person's life, influencing their interactions with and interpretation of the surrounding world (Wang et al., 2019).

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This article focuses on analysing the discriminatory tendency in circles of heterosexual boys and girls in comparison with LGBTQ+ boys and girls from Slovakia. This article also examines the extent of beliefs in unsubstantiated claims and myths about LGBTQ+ people and attitudes toward them in the context of gender–sexual identification. We conceptualised the article into three areas: 1) disinformation, unsubstantiated claims, and myths about LGBTQ+ behaviour, 2) attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people in the Slovak population, and 3) attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people in the context of gender and sexual identification.

### Disinformation, unsubstantiated claims, and myths in the context of LGBTQ+

An unsubstantiated claim is a "statement or knowledge about the state of the world that has not been sufficiently supported with good evidence" (Bensley, 2020). Such claims have not been scientifically analysed, nor has their validity been confirmed or statements and information supported by relevant scientific research. In the context of the LGBTQ+ community, these myths and claims include the promiscuity of LGBTQ+ individuals (Adam, 1992); atypical gender behaviour – the feminine behaviour of gays and masculine behaviour of lesbians (Fejes and Petrich, 1993); the perception of trans identities as a modern-day fabrication in the context of sex (Canadian Aids Society, 2016); and bisexual individuals being the main vectors of HIV infection into groups of gays and lesbians (Ames, 1996). Jurkovič (2019) points out that polarising attitudes of political parties and alternative media pave the way for hate speech, extremist attitudes, and disinformation regarding minority groups within society. However, some political parties have delivered hate speeches towards LGBTQ+ people in Slovakia, which has led to the spread of misinformation among the Slovak population, and which could harm people in the LGBTQ+ community. For example, the leader of party SMER (Social Democracy), Robert Fico, stated in 2019 that adoption by same-sex couples is a "perversion" (TASR, 2019). In the same year, the Ministry of Culture denied donating to Rainbow Pride, and none of the projects submitted by organisations representing LGBTQ+ were given financial support (Inakost', 2019).

Astuti et al. (2017) pointed out that the more media information is available to an individual, the greater their tendency to perceive particular objects negatively. In their research on a sample of 120 midwifery students, they found that 50% of respondents were convinced that the LGBTQ+ population suffers from a sexual disorder; 28% refused to establish contact with any LGBTQ+ individual; and 51% did not want to have any form of relationship with an LGBTQ+ individual. On the contrary, this research has also confirmed the hypothesis that respondents who had improved accessibility to various media forms exhibited more positive attitudes and a reduced tendency to stigmatise different social groups. Results showed that 61% of respondents stated that they would support a family member if they

identified as LGBTQ+; 69% stated that the majority of society should not exclude the LGBTQ+ minority, and 40% stated they would visit the household of an LGBTQ+ individual.

Strand and Svensson (2021) identified current disinformation, unsubstantiated claims, and misinformation about LGBTQ+ people through source analysis. These kinds of disinformation can lead to misconceptions and misunderstandings of the LGBTQ+ community and can be a source of discriminatory behaviour. These so-called "disinformation narratives" are disseminated by alternative media or political figures to harm people in the LGBTQ+ community. These "disinformation narratives" include 1) LGBTQ+ inclusion as a modern form of Western colonialism, 2) liberal gender ideology, and 3) restoration of a natural order ordained by God.

### Attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people in Slovakia

Even though high inclusion levels characterise the modern era, attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community are constantly on a sinusoid line. Flores' research (Flores, 2019; 2020) shows that Slovakia has declined in the Global Acceptance Index over two decades. Slovakia is currently ranked at 70th place in the GAI with 4.82 points in this index, reaching its peak from 2000 to 2003 with 5.6 points in the GAI. This sinusoid shows that attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people and the LGBTQ+ community generally fluctuate in the Slovak community, and there is a marked regression rather than progress.

Another significant example of regression in the acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community is a survey by Poushter and Kent, which found that 46% of Slovak people say that homosexuality should not be accepted. On the other hand, this survey showed that younger generations hold more accepting attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community. About 61% of younger people from Slovakia aged from 18 to 26 said that homosexuality should be accepted in society (Poushter and Kent, 2020). Historically, the LGBTQ+ community has long been heavily stigmatised and discriminated against. This can be one of the reasons why people establish their attitude towards this community prevalently based on indirect experience, for example through medialised disinformation and long-ago disproven myths. This attitude can be culturally and socially formed (Lenghart and Čerešník, 2022).

### Attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people in the context of gender and sexual identification

Few surveys have been conducted in the Slovak Republic regarding attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people. Surveys that have been carried out have not included gender differences in attitudes. However, from the analysis of Poushter and Kent (2020), we can deduce that there are no gender differences in attitudes towards

LGBTQ+ people in the Slovak population. The analysis showed that there were no significant differences between men and women. As there are no direct comparative studies of attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people between the heterosexual and LGBTQ+ populations in the Slovakia, this section primarily uses foreign research findings. Research findings (Gulevich et al., 2021) have shown that attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people vary in the context of both gender and sexual identification.

Research has long shown that heterosexual men hold more significant prejudice against gay people than heterosexual women because gender-associated beliefs influence them more (Kite and Whitley, 1996; Lingiardi et al., 2005; Ciocca et al., 2015; Adams et al., 2016). Heterosexual men score higher in the emotional component of attitudes towards gay men and lesbians, tending to hold more negative emotions towards lesbians and gays than heterosexual women (Gulevitch et al., 2021). However, men do not just score higher in negative emotions towards gays and lesbians. Other research has shown (Wright et al., 1999) that heterosexual men, compared to heterosexual women, show higher rates of both cognitive negativity and behavioural reactions (aggression or avoidance) toward gays and lesbians (Wright et al., 1999), suggesting that heterosexual men hold higher negative attitudes towards gays and lesbians at every component of attitude (at cognitive, emotional, and behavioural levels).

While there is a significant body of research demonstrating heterosexual attitudes towards LGBTQ+ communities, there is limited research focusing on LGBTQ+ attitudes toward their own communities. The research carried out confirms the logical conclusion that the heterosexual population, in particular the heterosexual male population, has more negative attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people. These negative attitudes are mainly reflected towards gays and lesbians (Berg et al., 2015), bisexual people (Dodge et al., 2016; Eliason, 2001; Herek, 2002; Hertlein et al., 2016; Ondris et al., 2002; Herek, 2002; Mullick and Wright, 2002; Yost and Thomas, 2012; Eliason, 1997; Anselmi et al., 2015; Eliason, 1997), and transgender people (Hill and Willoughby, 2005; Morgan et al., 2020; Norton and Herek, 2012) compared to people of other sexual and gender identifications.

### Current study

Attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people are well documented. The framework has shown that the heterosexual population, especially men, show more negative attitudes towards every sexual and gender identity in the LGBTQ+ community. This shows that men show higher rates of negative cognition and more negative emotion and tend to have significantly higher negative behavioural reactions (e.g., avoidance or aggression). However, there are some research gaps:

There is a significant research gap in the mapping of attitudes in Slovakia in the context of gender–sexual identification. This research gap also offers us an opportunity to study if there are any differences in cognitive negativism, negative affect, and behavioural aggression towards LGBTQ+ people between heterosexual boys and girls and LGBTQ+ boys and girls.

At the same time, there is a significant lack of interest in exploring the area of unsubstantiated claims and myths about LGBTQ+ people in the context of the Slovak population, especially among Slovak adolescents. This research gap allows us to explore differences between heterosexual boys and girls and LGBTQ+ boys and girls in unsubstantiated claims and myths about selected sexual and gender identities.

Based on the theoretical background in the introduction and the study's aims, we asked the following research question to analyse the differences between the groups regarding unsubstantiated claims and myths about the LGBTQ+ community, and set out the subsequent twenty-eight statistical hypotheses:

RQ<sub>1</sub>: Are any differences in belief between heterosexually-identified boys and girls and LGBTQ+-identified boys and girls in unsubstantiated claims and myths about LGBTQ+?

H<sub>1</sub>: Heterosexually-identified boys will manifest greater homonegativity, binegativity, and transnegativity (HBT) than the other study groups.

H<sub>1a</sub>: Heterosexually-identified boys will manifest greater HBT compared to heterosexually-identified girls.

H<sub>1b</sub>: Heterosexually-identified boys will manifest greater HBT compared to LGBTQ+-identified boys.

H<sub>1c</sub>: Heterosexually-identified boys will manifest greater HBT compared to LGBTQ+-identified girls.

H<sub>2</sub>: Heterosexually-identified boys will manifest greater cognitive negativism of HBT compared to the other study groups.

H<sub>2a</sub>: Heterosexually-identified boys will manifest greater cognitive negativism of HBT compared to heterosexually-identified girls.

H<sub>2b</sub>: Heterosexually-identified boys will manifest greater cognitive negativism of HBT compared to LGBTQ+-identified boys.

H<sub>2c</sub>: Heterosexually-identified boys will manifest greater cognitive negativism of HBT compared to LGBTQ+-identified girls.

H<sub>3</sub>: Heterosexually-identified boys will manifest greater behavioural aggression of HBT compared to the other study groups.

H<sub>3a</sub>: Heterosexually-identified boys will manifest greater behavioural aggression of HBT compared to heterosexually-identified girls.

H<sub>3b</sub>: Heterosexually-identified boys will manifest greater behavioural aggression of HBT compared to LGBTQ+-identified boys.

H<sub>3c</sub>: Heterosexually-identified boys will manifest greater behavioural aggression of HBT compared to LGBTQ+-identified girls.

H<sub>4</sub>: Heterosexually-identified boys will manifest a greater negative affect of HBT compared to heterosexually-identified girls, LGBTQ+-identified boys, and LGBTQ+-identified girls.

H<sub>4a</sub>: Heterosexually-identified boys will manifest a greater negative affect of HBT compared to heterosexually-identified girls.

H<sub>4b</sub>: Heterosexually-identified boys will manifest a greater negative affect of HBT compared to LGBTQ+-identified boys.

H<sub>4c</sub>: Heterosexually-identified boys will manifest a greater negative affect of HBT compared to LGBTQ+-identified girls.

H<sub>5</sub>: Heterosexually-identified girls will manifest greater HBT compared to the LGBTQ+ study groups.

H<sub>5a</sub>: Heterosexually-identified girls will manifest greater HBT compared to LGBTQ+-identified girls.

H<sub>5b</sub>: Heterosexually-identified girls will manifest greater HBT compared to the population of LGBTQ+-identified boys.

H<sub>6</sub>: Heterosexually-identified girls will manifest a greater cognitive negativism of HBT compared to the LGBTQ+ study groups.

H<sub>6a</sub>: Heterosexually-identified girls will manifest a greater cognitive negativism of HBT compared to LGBTQ+-identified girls.

H<sub>6b</sub>: Heterosexually-identified girls will manifest a greater cognitive negativism of HBT compared to LGBTQ+-identified boys.

H<sub>7</sub>: Heterosexually-identified girls will manifest greater behavioural aggression of HBT compared to the LGBTQ+ study groups.

H<sub>7a</sub>: Heterosexually-identified girls will manifest greater behavioural aggression of HBT compared to LGBTQ+-identified girls.

H<sub>7b</sub>: Heterosexually-identified girls will manifest greater behavioural aggression of HBT compared to LGBTQ+-identified boys.

H<sub>8</sub>: Heterosexually-identified girls will manifest a greater negative affect of HBT compared to the LGBTQ+ study groups.

H<sub>8a</sub>: Heterosexually-identified girls will manifest a greater negative affect of HBT compared to LGBTQ+-identified girls.

H<sub>8b</sub>: Heterosexually-identified girls will manifest a greater negative affect of HBT compared to LGBTQ+-identified boys.

## Method and materials

### Research sample and methodology

The research was conducted in all regions of the Slovak Republic: 33 respondents came from the Bratislava region (15.7%); 15 respondents from the Trnava region (7.1%); 28 respondents from the Trenčín region (13.3%); 33 respondents from the Nitra region (15.7%); 15 respondents from the Žilina region (7.1%); 22 respondents from the Banská Bystrica region (10.5%); 37 respondents from the Prešov region (17.7%); and 26 respondents from the Košice region (12.4%). Due to COVID-19, the research took place as an online survey via the online platform [survio.com/sk](https://survio.com/sk). A poster for participation was shared through personal social media profiles, namely Facebook, which included basic information about the study and stratification criteria for participation. When selecting respondents, we set basic stratification criteria such as age, sexual identification (gay, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual), and gender identification (male, female, transgender). After six questionnaires were excluded from the research due to hateful speech (e.g., swastika instead of filling out sociodemographic information, etc.), our research sample comprised 209 Slovak adolescents aged 15 to 20 years. The proportion of male and female adolescents was

102:107. . The sample included 77 boys who identified as heterosexual, 25 boys who identified as LGBTQ+, 71 girls who identified as heterosexual, and 36 girls who identified as LGBTQ+. The average age of the research sample was 18.1 years (SD = 1.57).

The research study did not collect broader social or demographic variables such as education, family background, or relationship status.

## Research tools

The research used a set of questionnaires consisting of two scales: the Homonegativity, Binegativity, and Transnegativity Scale and the Unsubstantiated Claims and Myths About LGBTQ+ Scale.

### The Homonegativity, Binegativity, and Transnegativity Scale

The Homonegativity, Binegativity, and Transnegativity Scale (originally the Homophobia Scale; Wright et al., 1999) measures the rate of an individual's attitudes about selected sexual identities at the level of its three components (cognitive, emotional, and conative). To identify the rate of binegativity and transnegativity, the individual parts were translated and adapted to reliably measure these two phenomena (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.95$ ). Each measurement factor also shows high inner reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for negative affect factor = 0.912; Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for behavioural aggression factor = 0.871, and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for cognitive negativism factor = 0.893). The method comprises three factors covered in a total of 25 questions. The first factor is the negative affect, covered in 10 questions (for example: "I think that homosexual, bisexual, and/or trans people should not work with children."). The second factor is behavioural aggression, covered in 10 questions (for example: "When I meet someone, I try to find out if he/she is homosexually or bisexually oriented and/or a trans person."). The third factor is cognitive negativism, covered in 5 questions (for example: "Homosexual behaviour should not be illegal.").

Adolescents evaluated statements in the individual sub-scales on a five-point evaluation scale: (5) completely agree; (4) agree; (3) neither agree nor disagree; (2) disagree; and (1) completely disagree. The total scores ranged between 25 and 125, with a score of 25 presenting highly supportive affective, behavioural, and cognitive orientations toward gay, bisexual, and transgender people (the opposites of homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia) and a score of 125 presenting extreme homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia represented in both the affective, cognitive, and behavioural spheres.

Scores on individual subscale factors are:

1. Negative affect: scores range from 10 points (minimum) to 50 points (maximum).
2. Behavioural aggression: scores range from 10 points (minimum) to 50 points (maximum).
3. Cognitive negativism: scores range from 5 points (minimum) to 25 points (maximum).

### The unsubstantiated claims and myths about LGBTQ+ scale

The Unsubstantiated Claims and Myths about LGBTQ+ Scale (Lenghart and Verešová, 2021) measures the rate of belief in unsubstantiated statements and myths related to selected LGBTQ+ identifications (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.93$ ). The method comprises three factors covered in a total of 15 questions. The measurement shows high inner reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.933$ ). Three factors that are forming the measurement also showed acceptable values (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for unsubstantiated claims and myths about homosexuality factor  $\alpha = 0.774$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for unsubstantiated claims and myths about bisexuality factor  $\alpha = 0.849$ , and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for unsubstantiated claims and myths about trans people factor  $\alpha = 0.859$ ). The first factor involves unsubstantiated statements and myths about homosexuality, covered in 5 questions (for example: "Gays and lesbians voluntarily choose their lifestyle."). The second factor involves unsubstantiated statements and myths about bisexuality, covered in 5 questions (for example: "Bisexual people spread AIDS among gays and lesbians."). The third factor involves unsubstantiated statements and myths about trans persons, covered in 5 questions (example: "All trans persons work in the sex business."). A broader psychometric analysis of this scale was published by Lenghart and Verešová in 2021 (Lenghart and Verešová, 2021). The scale was developed through an analysis of the literature and online resources, and from these, individual statements within the LGBTQ+ community were formulated and translated (e.g., Adam, 1992; Ames, 1996; Davis, 2009; Fejes, and Petrich, 1993; Sloboda, 2016; Canadian AIDS Society, 2019). For homosexuality, myths and unsubstantiated claims were selected such as the extreme promiscuity of lesbian women and gay men, the inverse gender stereotype (effeminacy of gay men and masculinity of lesbian women), or the raising of a homosexual child by same-sex couples. For bisexuality, unsubstantiated claims and myths were chosen such as bisexuality being a mediator of HIV/AIDS infection among gay men and lesbian women or bisexuality as a trend in modern society. For transgender identities, unsubstantiated claims and myths were chosen such as that transgenderism is a matter of fetishism or that all transgender people work in the sex industry.

Adolescents evaluated statements in the individual sub-scales on a five-point evaluation scale: (5) completely agree; (4) agree; (3) neither agree nor disagree; (2)



disagree, and (1) completely disagree. The scale contains 15 statements that represent unsubstantiated claims against gay/lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people. It can be scored through a total score (min. 15 and max. 75) or scores of claims and myths against selected sexual identities separately. The lower the respondents' scores, the lower the level of belief in these unsubstantiated claims and vice versa.

Scores on the individual scale factors are:

1. Unsubstantiated claims and myths about homosexuality: scores range from 5 (minimum) to 25 points (maximum).
2. Unsubstantiated claims and myths about bisexuality: scores range from 5 points (minimum) to 25 points (maximum).
3. Unsubstantiated claims and myths about trans people: scores range from 5 points (minimum) to 25 points (maximum).

## Results

Before statistical procedures were performed, a normality test was performed. The normality test revealed an uneven distribution of data across all variables and groups studied. Based on these results, we decided to choose nonparametric statistical tests to compare the differences. Specifically, we used the Kruskal–Wallis test to compare differences and Dunn's post-hoc analysis to find specific differences between groups.

Tables 1–2 and Figures 1–2 present the Kruskal–Wallis test analysis results. We adopted the standard significance level  $\alpha < .05$ . Our comparison involved the following groups: (1) heterosexually-identified boys; (2) LGBTQ+-identified boys; (3) heterosexually-identified girls; and (4) LGBTQ+-identified girls. The means and standard deviations achieved for the groups studied are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 compares the above-defined groups concerning homonegativity, binegativity, transnegativity, and their factors. Kruskal–Wallis analysis shows that there is a significant difference between studied groups ( $H(3,209) = 69.089; p < 0.001$ ) in overall homonegativity, binegativity, and transnegativity. Dunn's post-hoc analysis showed statistically significant differences between the studied groups (Table 2). Heterosexually-identified boys showed higher homonegativity, binegativity, and transnegativity compared to LGBTQ+-identified boys ( $p < 0.001$ ), heterosexually-identified girls ( $p = 0.008$ ), and LGBTQ-identified girls ( $p < 0.001$ ). Heterosexually-identified girls showed higher homonegativity, binegativity, and transnegativity compared to LGBTQ+-identified boys ( $p < 0.001$ ) and LGBTQ+-identified girls ( $p < 0.001$ ). Differences between LGBTQ+-identified adolescents were not significant ( $p = 0.582$ ).

The second area of investigation was to investigate the individual differences in homonegativity, binegativity, and transnegativity components. Within this area, differences in negative affect, behavioural aggression, and cognitive negativity were investigated.

The Kruskal–Wallis test showed that the groups differed from each other in the component of negative affect ( $H(3,209) = 60.399; p < 0.001$ ) (Table 1). Dunn's post-hoc analysis showed statistically significant differences between the studied groups (Table 2). Heterosexually-identified boys showed negative affect compared to LGBTQ+-identified boys ( $p < 0.001$ ), heterosexually-identified girls ( $p = 0.027$ ), and LGBTQ+-identified girls ( $p < 0.001$ ). Heterosexually-identified girls showed higher negative affect compared to LGBTQ+-identified boys ( $p < 0.001$ ) and LGBTQ+-identified girls ( $p < 0.001$ ). Differences between LGBTQ+-identified adolescents were not significant ( $p = 0.669$ ).

The third area of investigation was differences in behavioural aggression. Significant differences between groups were also found in this area ( $H(3,209) = 51.289; p < 0.001$ ) (Table 1). Dunn's analysis showed that heterosexually-identified boys showed higher behavioural aggression compared to LGBTQ+-identified boys ( $p < 0.001$ ), heterosexual-identified girls ( $p < 0.001$ ), and LGBTQ+-identified girls ( $p < 0.001$ ). Heterosexually-identified girls showed higher behavioural aggression compared to LGBTQ+-identified boys ( $p < 0.038$ ) and LGBTQ+-identified girls ( $p < 0.001$ ). Differences between LGBTQ+-identified adolescents were not significant ( $p = 0.515$ ) (Table 2).

The final area of statistical hypothesis testing was identifying differences in the cognitive negativity component. The Kruskal–Wallis test showed that the groups differed from each other on the cognitive negativism component ( $H(3,209) = 74.483; p < 0.001$ ) (Table 1). Dunn's post-hoc analysis showed that heterosexually-identified boys showed higher cognitive negativism compared to LGBTQ+-identified boys ( $p < 0.001$ ) and LGBTQ+-identified girls ( $p < 0.001$ ) but not compared to heterosexually-identified girls ( $p = 0.175$ ). Heterosexually-identified girls showed higher cognitive negativism compared to LGBTQ+-identified boys ( $p < 0.038$ ) and LGBTQ+-identified girls ( $p < 0.001$ ). Differences between LGBTQ+-identified adolescents were not significant ( $p = 0.678$ ) (Table 2).

Variable	Heterosexually-identified Boys		LGBTQ+-identified Boys		Heterosexually-identified Girls		LGBTQ+-identified Girls		H
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Homonegativity, Binegativity, and Transnegativity	62.45	23.10	36.64	13.12	49.30	18.16	35.42	11.98	69.089***
Negative Affect	25.04	9.84	14.64	6.02	19.73	7.63	14.11	5.24	60.399***
Behavioural Aggression	23.62	8.37	15.32	5.16	17.92	6.52	15.00	6.37	51.289***
Cognitive Negativism	13.79	6.16	6.68	2.75	11.65	5.49	6.31	2.12	74.483***

\*\*\* p < .001

Table 1: Means, standard deviations, and Kruskal–Wallis test results for homonegativity, binegativity, and transnegativity and its components in the context of gender and sexual identification of adolescents

Homonegativity, Binegativity, and Transnegativity Scale			
Comparison	Z	p	p <sub>bonf</sub>
Heterosexually-identified boys – LGBTQ+-identified boys	5.666	<0.001	<0.001
Heterosexually-identified boys – Heterosexually-identified girls	2.638	0.008	1.000
Heterosexually-identified boys – LGBTQ+-identified girls	7.319	<0.001	<0.001
LGBTQ+-identified boys – Heterosexually-identified girls	-3.802	<0.001	<0.001
LGBTQ+-identified boys – LGBTQ+-identified girls	0.550	0.582	1.000
Heterosexually-identified girls – LGBTQ+-identified girls	5.157	<0.001	<0.001
Negative affect			
Comparison	Z	p	p <sub>bonf</sub>
Heterosexually-identified boys – LGBTQ+-identified boys	5.320	<0.001	<0.001
Heterosexually-identified boys – Heterosexually-identified girls	2.219	0.027	0.159
Heterosexually-identified boys – LGBTQ+-identified girls	6.757	<0.001	<0.001
LGBTQ+-identified boys – Heterosexually-identified girls	-3.755	<0.001	0.001
LGBTQ+-identified boys – LGBTQ+-identified girls	0.427	0.669	1.000
Heterosexually-identified girls – LGBTQ+-identified girls	4.944	<0.001	<0.001

**Behavioural aggression**

Comparison	z	p	p <sub>bonf</sub>
Heterosexually-identified boys – LGBTQ+identified boys	4.838	<0.001	<0.001
Heterosexually-identified boys – Heterosexually-identified girls	3.885	<0.001	<0.001
Heterosexually-identified boys – LGBTQ+identified girls	6.483	<0.001	<0.001
LGBTQ+identified boys – Heterosexually-identified girls	-2.074	0.038	0.228
LGBTQ+identified boys – LGBTQ+identified girls	0.651	0.515	1.000
Heterosexually-identified girls – LGBTQ+identified girls	3.268	0.001	0.006

**Cognitive negativism**

Comparison	z	p	p <sub>bonf</sub>
Heterosexually-identified boys – LGBTQ+identified boys	5.705	<0.001	<0.001
Heterosexually-identified boys – Heterosexually-identified girls	1.358	0.175	1.000
Heterosexually-identified boys – LGBTQ+identified girls	7.199	<0.001	<0.001
LGBTQ+identified boys – Heterosexually-identified girls	-4.760	<0.001	<0.001
LGBTQ+identified boys – LGBTQ+identified girls	0.422	0.673	1.000
Heterosexually-identified girls – LGBTQ+identified girls	6.111	<0.001	<0.001

Table 2: Dunn’s post-hoc between-group comparison for homonegativity, binegativity, and transnegativity and its components in the context of gender and sexual identification of adolescents

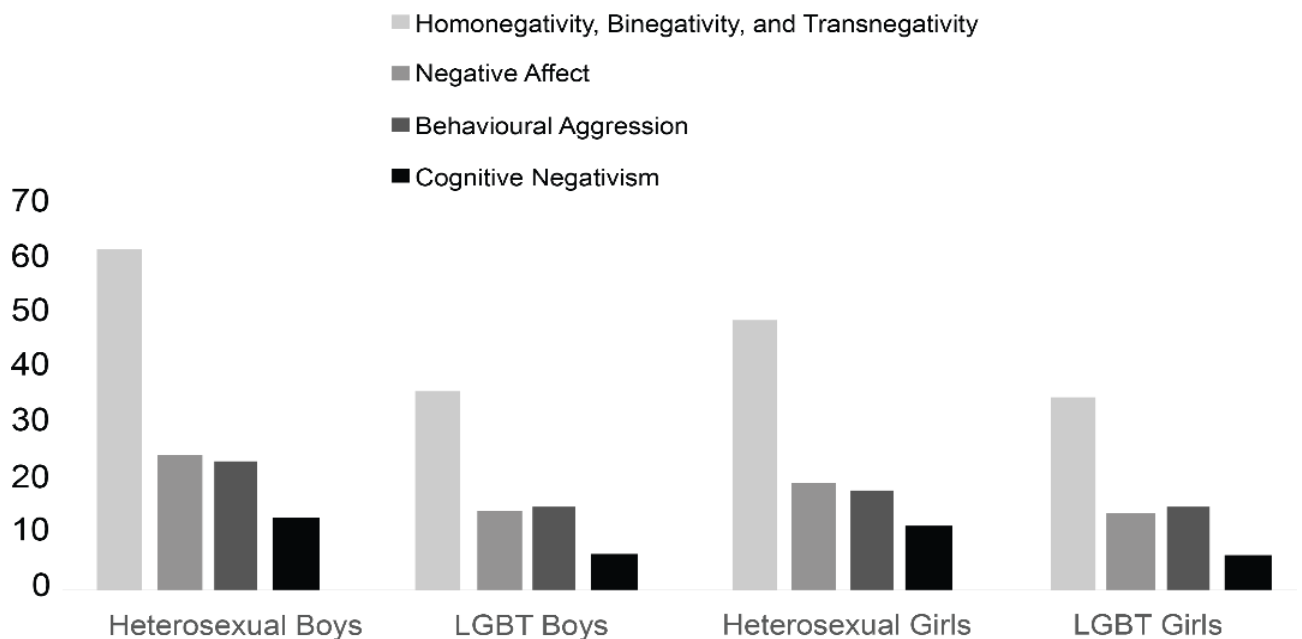


Figure 1: A comparison of homonegativity, binegativity, and transnegativity and their components in the context of gender-sexual identification of Slovak adolescents

Concerning the area of unsubstantiated claims and myths about LGBTQ+, significant differences were identified in all investigated areas. All findings were significant at the level  $\alpha < .001$  (Table 2). Mean scores, standard deviations, and results of the Kruskal–Wallis test are presented in Tables 3–4.

The results of the analysis via Dunn's post-hoc tests showed that heterosexually-identified boys showed higher levels of belief in unsubstantiated claims and myths about the LGBTQ+ community compared to LGBTQ+-identified boys ( $p < 0.001$ ) and LGBTQ+-identified girls ( $p < 0.001$ ), but not compared to heterosexually-identified girls ( $p = 0.288$ ). Heterosexually-identified girls showed higher levels of belief in unsubstantiated claims and myths about the LGBTQ+ community compared to LGBTQ+-identified boys ( $p < 0.001$ ) and LGBTQ+-identified girls ( $p < 0.001$ ). No differences were identified between LGBTQ+-identified adolescents ( $p = 0.942$ ).

Differences between groups were also identified in the context of the questionnaire's endogenous subscales. Dunn's analyses showed that heterosexually-identified boys showed higher levels of belief in unsubstantiated claims and myths about homosexuality compared to LGBTQ+-identified boys ( $p < 0.001$ ) and LGBTQ+-identified girls ( $p < 0.001$ ) but not compared to heterosexually-identified girls ( $p = 0.121$ ). Heterosexually-identified girls showed higher levels of belief in unsubstantiated claims and myths about homosexuality compared to LGBTQ+-identified boys ( $p < 0.001$ ) and LGBTQ+-identified girls ( $p < 0.001$ ). No differences were identified between LGBTQ+-identified adolescents ( $p = 0.732$ ).

The second area of inquiry was unsubstantiated claims and myths about bisexuality. Heterosexually-identified boys showed higher levels of belief in unsubstantiated claims and myths about bisexuality compared to LGBTQ+-identified boys ( $p < 0.001$ ) and LGBTQ+-identified girls ( $p < 0.001$ ), but not compared to heterosexually-identified girls ( $p = 0.700$ ). Heterosexually-identified girls showed higher levels of belief in unsubstantiated claims and myths about bisexuality compared to LGBTQ+-identified boys ( $p < 0.001$ ) and LGBTQ+-identified girls ( $p < 0.001$ ). No differences were identified between LGBTQ+-identified adolescents ( $p = 0.685$ ).

A final area of investigation was the area of unsubstantiated claims and myths about transgender people. The results of the analysis via Dunn's post-hoc tests showed that heterosexually-identified boys showed higher levels of belief in unsubstantiated claims and myths about transgender people compared to LGBTQ+-identified boys ( $p < 0.001$ ) and LGBTQ+-identified girls ( $p < 0.001$ ), but not compared to heterosexually-identified girls ( $p = 0.340$ ). Heterosexually-identified girls showed higher levels of belief in unsubstantiated claims and myths about homosexuality

compared to LGBTQ+-identified boys ( $p < 0.001$ ) and LGBTQ+-identified girls ( $p < 0.001$ ). No differences were identified between LGBTQ+-identified adolescents ( $p = 0.718$ ).

Variable	Heterosexually-identified boys		LGBTQ+-identified boys		Heterosexually-identified girls		LGBTQ+-identified girls		H
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Unsubstantiated Claims and Myths about LGBTQ+	36.47	13.37	21.76	8.79	28.39	10.56	21.14	7.97	50.834***
Unsubstantiated Claims and Myths about Homosexuality	12.04	5.02	7.00	2.70	8.99	3.70	6.61	2.47	38.976***
Unsubstantiated Claims and Myths about Bisexuality	13.00	5.22	7.64	3.61	10.75	4.35	7.50	3.16	50.420***
Unsubstantiated Claims and Myths about Trans People	11.43	4.13	7.12	3.30	8.66	3.58	7.03	3.13	43.700***

\*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 3: Comparison of unsubstantiated claims and myths about LGBTQ+ and in the context of gender and sexual identification of adolescents

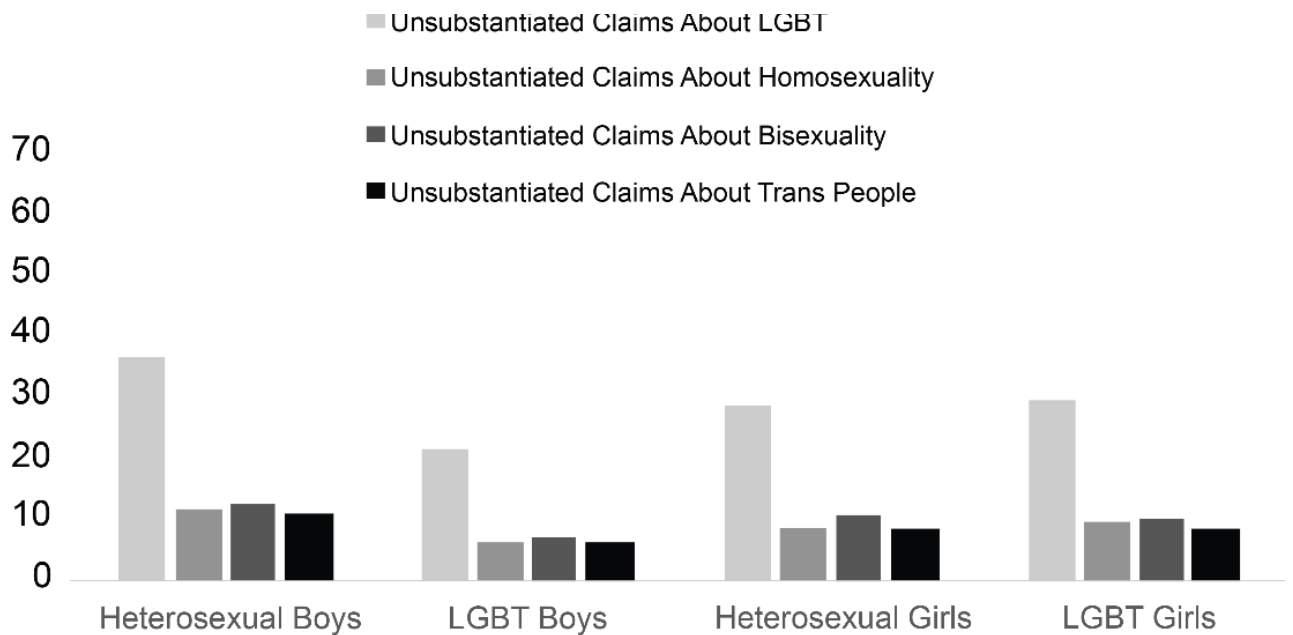


Figure 2: A comparison of unsubstantiated statements and myths about LGBTQ+ and areas they involve in the context of gender–sexual identification of adolescents

## Discussion

Previous studies have confirmed that the heterosexual population shows higher levels of discrimination against LGBTQ+ people than those in the LGBTQ+ community. However, the area of attitudes and discrimination in the context of gender–sexual identification has been neglected to a large extent. In addition, a significant and original contribution is investigating the extent to which

heterosexual and LGBTQ+ adolescents believe long-ago disproven myths and unsubstantiated claims against LGBTQ+ people. Our data have indicated significant differences between individual groups observed.

We hypothesised that the heterosexually-identified population would show higher homonegativity, binegativity, and transnegativity (Hypothesis 1 – 8c). Heterosexual adolescents, specifically heterosexually-identified boys, reached the highest score in negative attitudes compared to LGBTQ+-identified adolescents. These findings are also confirmed by conclusions of previous research projects (such as Bosson et al., 2011; Castromonte and Grijalva, 2017; DePalma and Jennett, 2010; Ondrisová et al., 2002). The heterosexual population, especially the male population, characteristically maintained a high level of discrimination towards LGBTQ+ individuals and prejudice in all three components (cognitive, emotional, and behavioural). One possible reason for the persistence of negative attitudes in the group of heterosexual people can be seen in the endorsement of traditional masculinity and femininity ideology (Krivoshchekov et al., 2021; Wade and Donis, 2007). This may be evidenced by the results of our research, where both LGBTQ+ boys and girls showed much lower rates of overall discrimination in all its components towards LGBTQ+ people (cognitive, emotional, behavioural). This can be supported by Gulvetich et al. (2021), whose research shows that heterosexual people endorse traditional masculine and feminine norms of society to a greater degree than sexual minorities, which leads to less discrimination towards LGBTQ+ from the group of LGBTQ+ people themselves. Because LGBTQ+ people come from divergent backgrounds where there are many different sexual and gender identities, they do not uphold the traditional social gender norms established by society itself. A study conducted by Anselmi et al. (2015) showed that heterosexual men may have more negative attitudes towards LGBTQ+ due to pressure on social norms from the side of society. Heterosexually-identified men/boys are more influenced by the traditional masculinity ideology, which leads to higher pressure on heterosexual men to present themselves as "masculine" and thus pushes heterosexist views, attitudes, and perceptions.

However, even LGBTQ+-identified boys and girls themselves hold some levels of discrimination towards LGBTQ+ people. This result can be supported by Smitková and Brada's (2021) findings that Slovak LGBTQ+ people hold internalised homonegativity towards themselves. One possible reason might be that sexuality-related misconceptions are entrenched in modern society. Sloboda (2016) states that it is mainly the period of adolescence when the influence of sexual norms on one's sexuality is powerful and leads adolescents to the impression that a healthy and happy life is only possible with a person of the opposite sex.

We also formulated one research question attached to gender–sexual differences in belief in unsubstantiated claims and myths toward LGBTQ+ people. Our findings have shown that heterosexual boys and girls believe in unsubstantiated claims and myths about LGBTQ+ more than LGBTQ+ boys and girls themselves. LGBTQ+ boys and girls show certain levels of belief in these types of disinformation.

One of the reasons why the heterosexual population believes myths and misinformation about LGBTQ+ people is because of the traditional gender ideology mentioned above in relation to the tendency to discriminate. Traditional gender ideology defines what attributes a socially defined man, and a defined woman should dispose of. On the other hand, this ideology goes hand in hand with the sexual norm of society, which interferes with the diversification of sexuality, therefore leading to the internalisation that everything that is not heterosexual is abnormal. This could lead to the internalisation of certain concepts of sexual norms that can lead to some types of cognitive errors, such as 1) selective abstraction and 2) unsubstantiated conclusions. Selective abstraction focuses on establishing a conclusion only from a small part of the information. It creates a judgment based on omitting an important fact so that a person confirms his/her negative attitude and biased view of the matter (Wright et al., 2008). An example of selective abstraction might be, for example, a heterosexual man seeing a gay man who exhibits a certain degree of effeminate behaviour. He then focuses only on the fact that every gay man must be effeminate and ignores the fact that another hundred gay men can be masculine and not seen to be even gay. This can lead to severe misconceptions and generalisations and can also be linked with the second cognitive error called the unsubstantiated conclusion. Unsubstantiated conclusions are established when the acquired pieces of evidence either contradict each other or the evidence is entirely missing (Wright et al., 2008). These cognitive errors may be one possible cause why, e.g., unsubstantiated, or long-ago disproved statements are still affirmed within society. However, these unsubstantiated conclusions can also be internalised through alternative media, public hate speeches of political figures, internalised religious beliefs, etc.

Even the LGBTQ+ adolescent population believes, to a certain extent, in unsubstantiated statements and myths are the consequence of the internalisation of miscommunicated concepts of sexuality. Internalisation of this kind of information and the conviction of other people leads to the development of negative perceptions and inhibited and discriminatory behaviour towards individuals not identified as heterosexual and can lead to certain levels of internalised homonegativity, binegativity, or transnegativity (Ciocca et al., 2015; Lingiardi et al., 2005). A consequence of the internalisation of such beliefs is that they transform attitudes into homonegativity, binegativity, and transnegativity (Hertlein et al., 2016).



An interesting but not surprising finding is that both the heterosexual and LGBTQ+ population of Slovak adolescents believe, to a greater extent, unsubstantiated claims and myths about bisexuality. This confirms various research findings and hypotheses (Sloboda, 2016; Tin, 2008; Mullick and Wright, 2002; Ochs, 1996) that bisexual minorities face double discrimination from heterosexual people and from LGBTQ+ people. This double discrimination may be because bisexual people disrupt the sexual binary of society, that a heterosexual person is attracted to the opposite sex and a homosexual person is attracted to the same sex. At the same time, they can take advantage of both heterosexuality and homosexuality (Tin, 2008), and a relationship with a bisexual person can be disrupted by both a woman and a man (Sloboda, 2016).

## Limitations

It should be noted that our study has several limitations. First, our research sample included few LGBTQ+-identified boys and girls compared to heterosexually-identified boys and girls. In this case, there may have been a distortion effect in sexual identification with an unevenly distributed research population, for example, in the perception of unsubstantiated claims and myths about LGBTQ+ people. Another limitation is the impossibility of generalising the results of our research as it contains an unrepresentative sample. However, the results can be used to conduct or replicate the same research on a more representative sample within which the results can be generalised. Further research in the context of the used questionnaires need to be made to generalise the results. The Homonegativity, Binegativity, and Transnegativity Scale was used for the first time in the territory, and wider psychometric and adaptation procedures need to be carried out for its further use, especially on a more representative set of respondents.

Another limitation, or maybe it can be considered a strength too, is focused on the realisation of the study itself. The primary plan was to conduct "paper-pen" research in high schools in Slovakia. Since the schools refused to cooperate, we transferred the research to the online space. The limitation of online research data collection is the impossibility of direct communication with the participants, for example, the impossibility of the participants' voicing questions about the concepts or constructed statements in the questionnaire battery. On the positive side, complete anonymity and privacy in completing the questionnaire battery can be considered, with participants having the opportunity to answer questions without being influenced by peers' opinions or the school environment.

We consider the relatively new topics of this research in the Slovak Republic to be a strength of research. The research provides original and authentic results and insight into comparing discrimination in the heterosexual adolescent population,

especially in adolescents who identify as LGBTQ+. We consider it a significant contribution to the field to have mapped the extent of belief in long-ago disproven myths and unsubstantiated claims aimed toward the LGBTQ+ community.

## Conclusion

In our study, heterosexual boys and girls showed higher rates of both discrimination towards LGBTQ+ people and also in the field of unsubstantiated claims and myths about LGBTQ+. Both heterosexual boys and girls showed higher rates of cognitive negativism, negative affect, and behavioural aggression towards the tendency to discriminate compared to LGBTQ+ boys and girls themselves.

Heterosexual boys and girls also dominated in the field of unsubstantiated claims and myths about LGBTQ+ compared to LGBTQ+ boys and girls. A not surprising finding is that heterosexual boys and girls and LGBTQ+ boys and girls show the highest rates of unsubstantiated claims and myths about bisexuality. Even when LGBTQ+ adolescents scored lower on the unsubstantiated and myths scale, there is an indicator that LGBTQ+ adolescents still believe in some disinformation and myths. The reducing effect of negative attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community can be provided by society itself and developing digital literacy, especially non-technical skills (analytic thinking, critical thinking, etc.). The effect of personal experience still plays an irreplaceable role in overcoming prejudice. It is a factor that destroys prejudice in society and offers an opportunity to transform one's negative attitude.

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