



DEVELOP HARMONY WITHIN GENDER DIVERSITY OF THE UNDERGRADUATES ON LGBTQ+ THROUGH STUDYING COMMUNICATION, GENDER & SOCIETY SUBJECT: SPECIAL REFERENCE TO COMMUNICATION STUDIES STUDENTS, TRINCOMALEE CAMPUS

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Abstract

“Gender” is a complicated term to understand. For undergraduate students, understanding gender and sexual orientation is inevitable because they are adults. There are most of the conflicts, assaults, murders and criminal activities taking place in this country due to misunderstanding regarding sexual orientations. So, creating an explicit knowledge regarding LGBTQ+ is unavoidable for undergraduates. So, the researcher selected 70 students from the degree program communication studies, Trincomalee campus, the Eastern University of Sri Lanka. They have the subject “Communication, Gender & Society” in their 2nd-year 2nd semester. So, the researcher observed the perception change of the students after studying the subjects through a survey. The researcher selected 70 students from 1st year (20 students), 2nd year (20 students), 3rd year (20 students) and 4th year (10 students). In their school life, through friends and through films, students learn about LGBTQ+. But they have got explicit knowledge regarding the term LGBTQ+ after studying of Communication, Gender & society. Most of the students had a negative perception of this community and bullied and other unwanted activities through these minority people. After this subject, they mentioned that they have their rights, need love and affection, and the society should accept LGBTQ+ people. Such type of behavioural change is fundamental for peace building and harmony. So, a clear standing regarding LGBTQ+ can avoid conflicts in the society. According to our religious perspectives, the acceptance varies. But according to humanity and the world's peace we can avoid the critical conflict conditions through the subject Communication, Gender & Society in undergraduates.

Keywords: *communication, diversity, gender, harmony, LGBTQ+*

Introduction

Definition of Gender

Gender refers to the characteristics and roles of women and men that are socially constructed. Social roles and relations are between men and women in society. It impacts all parts of our lives (social, economic, and political). It changes over time. It is what we expect men and women to do and behave. It is about how power is used and shared.



"Gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women and men, such as norms, roles, and relationships of and between groups of women and men. It varies from society to society and can be changed."

The World Health Organization (WHO)

Gender is not something we are born with and not something we have, but something we do.
(West & Zimmerman 1987)

Gender is the range of characteristics relating to, and differentiating between, masculine and feminine.

Sex

Sex is the term that refers to the biological distinctions that make us male or female. Sex chromosomes, reproductive organs, hormones, secondary characteristics. And Sex refers to physical or physiological differences between males and females, including both primary sex characteristics and secondary characteristics such as height and muscularity.

Ex: Male- Female

Gender is a term that refers to social or cultural distinctions associated with being male or female.

Ex: Masculine- Feminine

A person's sex, as determined by his or her biology, does not correspond with his or her gender. Therefore, the terms sex and gender are not interchangeable. Since we use the term "sex" which refers to biological or physical distinctions, characteristics of sex will not vary significantly between different human societies.

Ex: All persons of the female sex in general, regardless of culture, eventually menstruate and develop breasts that can lactate.

Characteristics of gender, on the other hand, may vary significantly between different societies. The dichotomous view of gender (the notion that one is either male or female) is specific to certain cultures and is not universal.

Ex: In American culture, wearing a dress or skirt is considered feminine.

In many Middle Eastern, Asian, and African cultures, dresses or skirts (often referred to as sarongs, robes, or gowns) can be considered Masculine. The Kilt worn by a Scottish male does not make him appear feminine in his culture.



Queer

Queer is an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities who are not heterosexual. Sexual Minorities – The group of people whose sexual orientation, gender identity, or sexual characteristics differ from the majority of the population.

Sexual Orientation

A component of identity includes a person's sexual and emotional attraction to another person and the behaviour that may result from this attraction. An individual's sexual orientation may be lesbian, gay, heterosexual, bisexual, queer, pansexual, or asexual.

A person may be attracted to men, women, and both, neither, genderqueer, androgynous, or have other gender identities. Sexual orientation is distinct from sex, gender identity, gender role, and gender expression.

LGBTQ+

- Lesbian: A woman whose primary romantic and sexual attraction is to other females.
- Gay: A man whose primary romantic and sexual attraction is to other males.
- Bisexual: Men and women who have a romantic and sexual attraction to both men and women.
- Transgender: A broad term describing the state of a person's gender identity which does not necessarily match his/her given gender at birth.
- Queer is no longer a term of homophobic abuse. Now a marker for LGBT. "Queer theory" a body of knowledge connected to lesbian/gay studies. Oppositional Discourses of 60s and 70s, Reject high and low culture.
- Symbolic annihilation: the invisibility of gays and lesbians in mass media. Early representations showed gays as victims or villains and reinforced demeaning stereotypes. These views are now out of date as networks are now filled with gay and lesbian characters.

Queer Theory

It revolves around sexual minorities within mass culture/ media. An intellectual extension of the Gay and Lesbian rights movement. Recognizes Queer as a disadvantaged class whose voices are obscured, misrepresented, or omitted from mainstream popular culture. Queer theory has helped to bring about an awareness of the embedded nature of messages in media texts as well as looking critically at these messages about what is "Normal". As an intellectual extension of the gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender movements, it is still seeking to improve upon the misrepresentation and lack of representation of diverse perspectives in mass culture.



The Queering of Television

In mass media, we can observe Gay and Lesbians representations. Early representations showed gays as victims or villains and reinforced demeaning stereotypes. These views are now filled with gay and lesbian characters. One-dimensional professional and attractive gay characters:

The Queering of Cinema

Ex:

- Fire
- Flying with one wing
- Frangipani
- Maya

Communication, Gender & Society subject

In Trincomalee Campus, under the course BA in communication studies, students are studying the Subject communication, Gender & society in their 2nd year 2nd Semester. This subject has been included in the syllabus with the awareness of the Gender basic with precise knowledge. It can create a clear perception regarding Gender among the Students.

1. “Popular Culture and Queer Representation: A Critical Perspective” – Diane Raymond
(4 Hours)
2. “Inventing the Cosmo Girl: Class Identity and Girl Style American Dreams” - Laurie Ouellette
(5 Hours)
3. “Who (se) Am I? The Identity and Image of Women in Hip-Hop” – Imani Perry
(5 Hours)
4. “You Have Never had a friend Like Me: Target Marketing Disney to Gay Community” – Sean Griffin
(4 Hours)
5. “Sex, Lies and Advertising” – Gloria Steinem
(5 Hours)
6. “The More You Subtract the More You Add” – Jean Kilbourne
(4 Hours)
7. “Cosmetics: A Clinique Case Study” – Pat Kirkham, Alex Weller
(4 Hours)
8. “Gendered Television: Femininity” – John Fiske
(5 Hours)
9. “No Politics Here: Age and Gender in Soap Opera- Cyber fandom” – Christine Scodari
(5 Hours)
10. “Hetro Barbie” – Mary F. Rogers
(4 Hours)



Through these contents, students are getting worldwide perspectives regarding Gender. So, the student's gender perspectives can change after studying the Subject in their 2nd year.

Problem Statement

In the current world gender diversity is a burning issue nowadays. There is no solution found for the crimes and assaults happening against gender minority people. According to that, the researcher found that creating a clear understanding regarding the gender minority will create a revolution in society.

Objectives of the study

- To study the understanding and the perception of gender and gender minority communities in undergraduates.
- To study the perception of Gender and Gender minorities after the subject Communication, Gender and Society on undergraduates.

Literature Review

Neviyarni, Netrawati, Riska and Wiwi (2019) have researched Students' Perceptions of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT). They explored that, Students' perceptions of LGBT as a whole and their cognition regards LGBT as not acceptable because they regard LGBT as a deviant behavior. Counsellors can help improve students' understanding of LGBT as a preventative effort so that students have perceptions and still consider LGBT as deviant behavior. Individuals perceive LGBT negatives because they have feelings that do not accept the LGBT phenomenon. After all, LGBT is one of the deviant behaviors.

In 2021, Pradeep Peiris reported on the Knowledge, Attitudes and Perceptions Survey Report. People with relatively low levels of education seemed to have more propensity to subscribe to social prejudices against LGBT persons. Similarly, people with graduate and post-graduate educational qualifications were less like to agree with existing social prejudices against the LGBT community. Potential of education to be a catalyst for the liberal democratic transformation of our society. Further, suppose one initiates an effective process of reform for primary and secondary education as recommended by the proposal for Comprehensive Sexuality Education¹⁶. In that case, there is a great deal of potential for changing societal attitudes toward accepting diverse gender and sexual identities from a very early age.

Wiwi, Neviyarni and Riska Ahmad (2019) have researched the Contribution of Sexual Identity towards Students' Perceptions of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender. They found that the students' perceptions of LGBT are on average very negative. It means that students view LGBT as deviant behavior. Sexual identity significantly contributes to students' perceptions of LGBT. Past experience,



knowledge, emotions/feelings, culture, and situational (expectations) are influenced by students' perceptions of LGBT.

Methodology

Research Methodology is a simple way to find out the result of a given problem on a specific matter or problem that is also referred to as a research problem. In Methodology, the researcher uses different criteria for solving/searching the given research problem. Different sources use different types of methods for solving the problem. If we think about the word “Methodology”, it is the way of searching for or solving the research problem. (Industrial Research Institute, 2010).

Survey Methodology

Social science’s methodology largely depends upon survey methods in its research endeavor as it has the advantage of having a great deal of information from a larger population. It can also be adapted to obtain personal and social facts, beliefs, and attitudes. It is also said that the survey research method is an inappropriate tool for the study of a multitude of Survey research methods. It is descriptive research used to collect data from the representative sample of the target population. (Mathiyazhagan & Deoki Nandan, 2010)

In this research, the data was collected as mentioned below:

- 20 – 1st-year Communication studies students
- 20 – 2nd-year Communication studies students
- 20 – 3rd-year Communication studies students
- 10 – 4th-year Communication studies students

The questionnaire instrument consisted of three parts, personal information of the respondents, mode of information resources, and type of information received. Non-Random sampling is a sampling technique where the samples are gathered in a process that does not give all the individuals in the population equal chances of being selected. This study was conducted with 20 students from each batch and 10 students from the final year as the number of final-year students is limited.

Results and Discussions

According to this study, 90.0% of the respondents are female students and the rest are male students. 40% of the respondents stated that “Male and female” are the genders they know, and 60% of the respondents mentioned “Male, Female, and Transgender”. Among that 60 % of respondents, 22 respondents have mentioned “homosexuality, gay, lesbian, heterosexuality, LGBTQ+” as genders even though they are sexual orientation. It states the misunderstanding of the students between gender and sexual orientation.

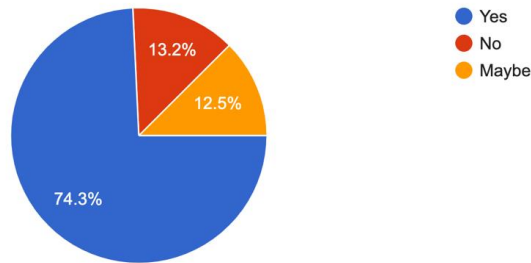


Figure 1: The students who know about LGBTQ

Among all the respondents, 74.3 % of the respondents are aware of LGBTQ+, meanwhile, 13% of the respondents are not aware of it.

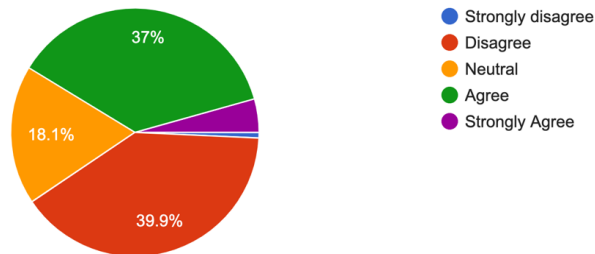


Figure 2: Gained knowledge of LGBTQ through movies

37% of the respondents stated that they have got to know about LGBTQ+ through movies and 39.9% of the respondents stated that the movies helped them to know about LGBTQ+.

The respondents further stated that they have understood about LGBTQ+ from friends – 25%, from school -18.4%, and from campus lectures – 42.7%. This clearly shows that most of the students gained knowledge regarding LGBTQ+ through the campus lectures as only 11.6 % of the respondents have mingled with LGBTQ+ people and they further stated that they are able to identify LGBTQ+ people by their appearance, their speech, and demeanour. 67% of the respondents are supporting LGBTQ+ and 12% of the respondents are not supporting rest of the respondents meanwhile are in a neutral position.

As per the survey “respecting their choices, they are also human, they are muted group in the society, they should have rights for them like others because they are also human like others. They deserve love, rights, attention, justice, equality” They are stated mainly by the students to support the LGBTQ community.

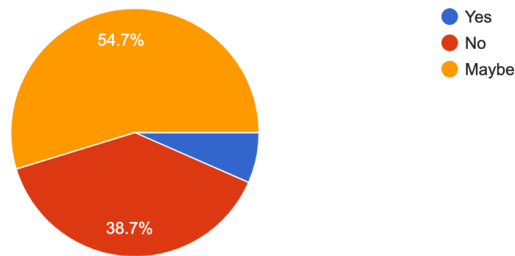


Figure 3: Does your religion talks about Homosexuality?

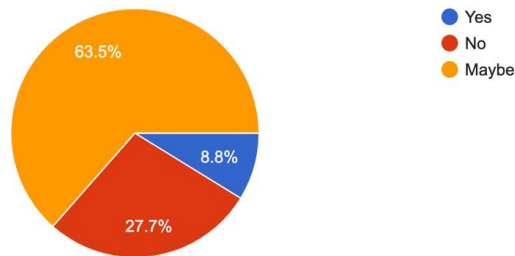


Figure 4: Does your religion support transgender?

Among all the respondents, 86% of the students believe in religion and 57.2% of the respondents stated that their religion talks about transgender and 6% of the respondents stated that their religion talks about homosexuality. 33.3% and 54.7% of the respondents were unsure that their religion talks about transgender and homosexuality. The above number clearly shows that most respondents are not clearly into their religions. Yet most of the respondents believe in their religion; most (84%) prioritise the personal point of view over the religious point of view.

The researcher finds that 42.9% of the students know that there is a subject related to gender and 42.1% of the respondents stated that there is no subject related to gender on the Trincomalee campus. Most students who stated negatively are from the first year and second year and haven't studied Communication, Gender, and society subject yet.

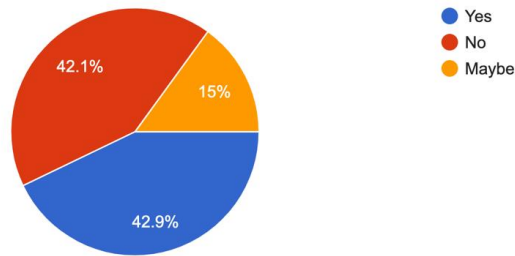


Figure 5: Are there any subjects related to Gender on Trincomalee Campus?

Among the students who have studied the subject of gender, only 66.3% have understood the subject. But most of the respondents said they like to learn about gender. Among them, most of the students are from 1st years and 2nd years.

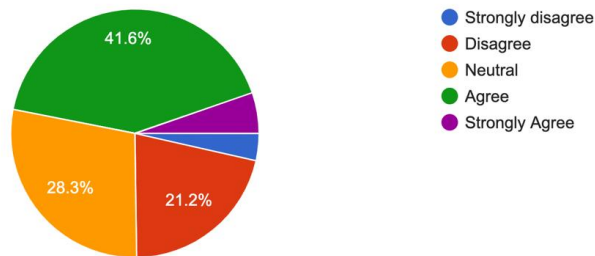


Figure 6: The students interested in subjects that teach about LGBT

Half of the respondents stated that they are interested in subjects about LGBTQ+ and 24% of the students are not.

67% of the respondents stated that they had changed their opinion regarding LGBTQ+ people after studying Communication, Gender, and Society subjects.

“Treating LGBTQ+ people equally and friendly; LGBTQ+ people are different in their emotional attraction towards other men or women, but we need to respect them and we should not consider them as a joke; selecting life partners of the different or same gender are people’s wish and we should not criticize them, I hate LGBTQ+ people earlier, but after studying about them I have realized that it is not their fault to be so and I have started to support them now” the above statements were stated by the students who have changed their opinion on LGBTQ+ after studying about them.

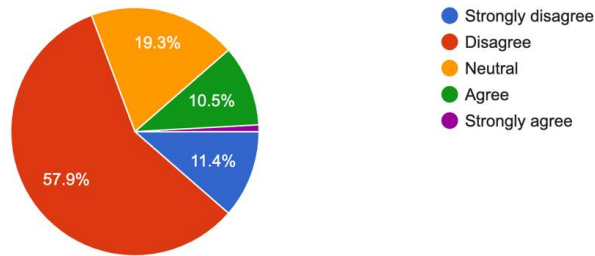


Figure 7: Positive perception towards LGBTQ after studying about it.

57.9% of the respondents stated that they have a positive perception towards the LGBTQ+ community after the study about it on the campus and 54% of the respondents stated that they are willing to study further about LGBTQ+ in the future. The study mentions that most Communication studies students learn about gender and LGBTQ+ after studying Communication, Gender, and social subject.

Conclusion

The study concludes that most communication studies undergraduate students didn't know more about gender and LGBTQ+ during their school days. And most of the students have a negative perception of the LGBTQ+ community. Rather than friends and movies, the students got to know about LGBTQ+ during the campus lectures. Communication, Gender, and society is a subjects that helped them to gain knowledge on LGBTQ+. The respondents are unclear about what their respective religions talk about transgender people and homosexuality. Few respondents stated that their religion claims homosexuality is a sin. Though most of the respondents believe in their respective religions, they prioritise their personal point of view over a religious point of view on LGBTQ+.

The respondents stated that they had negative ideology on LGBTQ+ and they used to make fun of them. But after studying about them on campus they have changed their ideologies on LGBTQ+ people. Because of the subject of Gender and LGBTQ+ now, the students are stating, "We need to treat LGBTQ+ people equally and it is their wish to live as they want". This is a positive symbol of social harmony.

So, through the subject of Communication, Gender, and society, we can change youngsters' understanding of gender diversity and it helps to peace building among youngsters and society.

As most of the students are willing to study the subjects on gender and LGBTQ+, the researcher can recommend that a subject or a lesson unit related to gender and LGBTQ+ can be included in the syllabus



and taught during the first year on the campus because this subject creates the feeling of nonviolence or harmony regarding the LGBTQ+ community.

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