Beyond the Binary

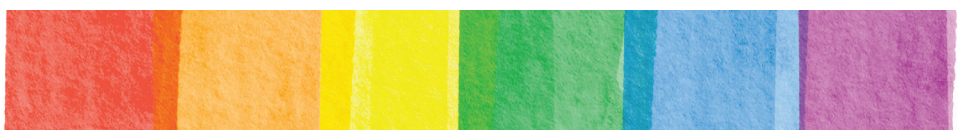
Curated resources on Queer Studies.

Introduction

Commemorated globally in June, Pride Month honours the years of struggle for civil rights and the ongoing pursuit of equal justice for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer communities. It also celebrates the accomplishments of LGBTQIA+ individuals.

The first Pride march was held on June 28, 1970, in New York City, marking the first anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising. In India, while the revocation of Section 377 has been a significant step forward, LGBTQIA+ individuals still face challenges in achieving complete societal acceptance.

We present "Beyond the Binary," our special Pride Month flipbook. This collection features research articles exploring the diverse experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community. Through these stories and research, we aim to deepen understanding and celebrate identities beyond traditional gender and sexuality norms, highlighting the richness and resilience of LGBTQIA+ lives.



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Sage Journals

From exclusion to inclusion: Empowering LGBT integration with allies, workplace strategies and family role models

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Original Article

From Exclusion to Inclusion: Empowering LGBT Integration with Allies, Workplace Strategies and Family Role Models

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Abstract

The workplace encounters challenge due to the absence of inclusive environments, resulting in potential loss of top-tier talent, diminished productivity and diminished business performance. This research endeavours to construct a comprehensive framework for the integration of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) individuals, focusing on embedding gender and sexual minorities. This study examines the relationship between diversity-friendly workplace management and LGBT integration through advocacy by allies (ABA) and family role modelling. The research framework is constructed based on the principles of sociometric, signalling and family systems theory and is undertaken within the Indian IT/ITES sector, involving 546 employees across 9 technology parks through a survey methodology. The analysis was carried out utilizing Smart PLS software, employing structural equation modelling and making predictions using partial least squares. Mediation and moderation analyses were performed. Findings demonstrate that effective management of diversity-friendly workplaces has a favourable impact on the integration of LGBT individuals in work environments. Results also suggest that ABA plays a supporting role in this relationship through complementary mediation, while the influence of family role modelling is moderated. This study contributes substantially to both theoretical understanding and managerial practices. A cross-cultural, longitudinal and a qualitative perspective could have added more insights to the study.

Keywords

LGBT, diversity-friendly workplace, inclusion, integration, allies, advocacy, policies, family role modelling

Introduction

The growing emphasis on diversity and inclusion (D&I) globally underscores the importance of integrating marginalized groups, such as the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community, into

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workplaces. Integration of LGBT individuals is crucial for fostering an inclusive culture, promoting diversity and ultimately enhancing firm performance (Arif & Ahmed, 2023). As globalization, organizational structures and workforce dynamics evolve, strategic diversity management has become indispensable, necessitating organizations to cultivate optimism regarding their diversity initiatives to yield positive outcomes from their diverse workforce. Globally, the proportion of the LGBT community ranges from approximately 3.5% to 12% of the population, with significant representation across sectors and hierarchical levels. In India, despite lacking official census data, projections indicate a substantial LGBT population, although historical criminalization and societal stigma hinder precise quantification of the workforce. Discrimination and harassment persist for LGBT individuals, impacting their well-being, job satisfaction and organizational dynamics, underscoring the ongoing need for fostering inclusive workplace environments (Santos & Reyas, 2023).

LGBT inclusion, akin to efforts for women and persons with disabilities, faces distinct challenges due to societal biases and systemic hurdles. Unlike gender and disability inclusion, LGBT inclusion requires addressing deeply entrenched cultural norms and legal frameworks that may overtly discriminate against or inadequately protect LGBT individuals (Badgett, 2022). Moreover, varying visibility and acknowledgement of LGBT identity across cultural contexts, coupled with intersecting identities, pose additional barriers to universal implementation of inclusive policies and practices. In India, comprehensive research on the dynamics of LGBT integration within workplaces and families, including the roles of allies and family support, is lacking, despite the urgent need to address societal stigma and historical criminalization of same-sex relationships. While studies in other countries have explored LGBT integration in the workplace, few have focused on India, highlighting a significant research gap (Hur, 2020; Van Leent et al., 2022). Understanding the efficacy of empowering LGBT integration through workplace allies, organizational strategies and family role models is essential for developing tailored interventions and policies to promote inclusivity and mitigate discrimination in India (Anand & Oberai, 2022; Lyndon et al., 2023).

This article aims to develop a comprehensive framework for integrating LGBT individuals, emphasizing the roles of allies and family models in fostering positive attitudes conducive to integration. Employing sociometric, signalling and family systems theories, the study offers a unique blend of conceptual and empirical scholarship in the context of the IT/ITES community in Bengaluru, India. Specifically, the research seeks to evaluate the impact of diversity-friendly workplace practices on LGBT integration and explore potential moderating effects of ally advocacy and family role modelling. Central to the study are key variables, including diversity-friendly workplace management (DWM), operationalized as organizational support for LGBT employees, and LGBT integration, focusing on the level of acceptance within the workforce (Badgett, 2022). Additionally, advocacy by allies (ABA) measures supporters' efforts against discrimination, while family role modelling assesses familial influence on career choices and work behaviour.

Theory and Hypotheses

DWM enhances organizational competitiveness by promoting the integration of diverse employees, signalled through organizational policies and work environments (Madera et al., 2013). Formal policies and practices, aligned with organizational values, signify a commitment to diversity and inclusivity, crucial for LGBT inclusion and reducing discrimination (Achyldurdyyeva et al., 2023). Implementation of diversity networks, mentoring programmes and training initiatives further supports organizational diversity objectives, fostering inclusivity and mitigating discrimination (Hill et al., 2023). A comprehensive

approach to promoting LGBT integration involves leadership commitment, policy implementation and education, fostering an inclusive workplace culture (Castelino & Shinde, 2023; Moore & Piddini, 2023). Effective leadership champions diversity, supports LGBT employees and ensures consistent implementation of anti-discrimination policies. Diversity training programmes and employee resource groups (ERGs) contribute to reducing bias, fostering empathy and creating supportive communities. Integrating LGBT employees not only enhances morale and job satisfaction but also enriches teams with diverse perspectives, promoting innovation and problem-solving (Ivanovic, 2023).

Allies play a crucial role in challenging discriminatory practices in workplaces, risking social isolation and career setbacks (Lenning et al., 2021). Their dedication contributes to fostering fairness, safety and diversity within organizations (Collins et al., 2021; Ho et al., 2023). Allyship behaviours, grounded in the socio-meter theory of self-esteem, affirm the value of LGBT individuals, promoting positive job attitudes and well-being (Thoroughgood et al., 2021). Family significantly influences individuals' attitudes and values, with family role modelling shaping behaviours and perspectives, extending to broader cultural expectations (Ran et al., 2021). Research emphasizes the pivotal role families play in career progression and workplace behaviour, shaping personal development and relationships (Ahmad, 2013; Hur, 2020). Recognizing the impact of family role modelling empowers individuals to consciously shape their identities and break cycles hindering personal growth (Huang & Chan, 2022; Singhal & Chatterjee, 2006).

Empowering LGBT Integration Through Workplace Strategies

Creating a DWM is crucial for integrating LGBT individuals into the workplace, a concept rooted in signalling theory. This theory posits that formal policies and practices convey vital information about organizational norms and expectations, fostering equality, inclusivity and employee well-being, ultimately impacting company success. Non-discriminatory policies explicitly addressing sexual orientation and gender identity, including equal opportunity and anti-harassment policies, create a safe and inclusive environment for LGBT employees (Medina-Martínez et al., 2021). Furthermore, training sessions on LGBT awareness, allyship and unconscious bias raise awareness and promote empathy, contributing to a more inclusive work culture. Diverse leadership teams serve as role models for LGBT employees, signalling the organization's commitment to diversity (Green, 2018).

Establishing ERGs or affinity groups for LGBT employees provides opportunities for connection, sharing experiences and collaborating on diversity initiatives. Mentorship programmes pairing LGBT employees with mentors within the organization offer guidance and support for career advancement (Chuang et al., 2018). Inclusive benefits, such as transgender-inclusive healthcare coverage, demonstrate a commitment to the well-being of LGBT employees. Enforcing a strict policy against discrimination and harassment, using inclusive language in communication, setting D&I goals and holding leadership accountable contribute to fostering an environment where all employees feel respected, valued and empowered to bring their authentic selves to work (Garg, 2017; Hill et al., 2023).

H_1: DWM influences the employees' behaviour towards LIT.

Role of Allies in Empowering LGBT Integration

ABA, acting as a conduit between DWM objectives and the integration of LGBT individuals, plays a pivotal role (Perales, 2022). Allies, as defined by Ho et al. (2023), are individuals who actively support

marginalized groups, fostering a safer and more inclusive environment through solidarity and acceptance. This advocacy from allies significantly enhances the relationship between DWM and LGBT integration by creating an atmosphere where individuals feel safe to express their identities without fear of discrimination or prejudice.

Moreover, based on the sociometer theory's core principles, ABA holds symbolic significance for LGBT employees, signalling their value as organizational members and potentially impacting their organization-based self-esteem (OBSE), job attitudes and well-being. Allies' advocacy contributes to a cultural shift within organizations by identifying and addressing microaggressions or subtle forms of discrimination, fostering a more respectful and inclusive workplace atmosphere (Beagan et al., 2021). Allies play a crucial role in amplifying the positive impact of diversity-friendly policies and practices, creating a workplace that not only embraces differences but actively advocates for the rights and dignity of all employees regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

H_3: ABA influences employees' behaviour towards LIT.
H_5: ABA mediates the relationship between DWM and LIT.
H_7: ABA moderates the relationship between DWM and LIT.

Family Role Modelling in Shaping LGBT Integration

Drawing from family systems theory, this conceptual framework views the family unit as a complex social system where reciprocal interactions among members influence behaviour. Understanding the family as a cohesive entity rather than focusing solely on individuals is emphasized (Clark et al., 2023). Family role modelling significantly influences the relationship between DWM and LGBT integration among non-LGBT employees (Hur, 2020). Research indicates that family attitudes towards LGBT individuals can impact non-LGBT employees' perceptions and attitudes in the workplace (Morgan, 2023; Newman et al., 2023). Positive family role modelling can enhance non-LGBT employees' engagement in inclusive behaviours and their effectiveness as allies to LGBT colleagues, fostering a supportive work environment (Webster et al., 2018). Conversely, negative family-derived attitudes among non-LGBT colleagues may pose challenges for LGBT individuals, creating a hostile environment that impedes integration (Huang & Chan, 2022).

In this context, DWM plays a crucial role in mitigating the impact of negative family role modelling and fostering acceptance (Achyldurdyyeva et al., 2023). By promoting equality and acceptance, such initiatives aim to create an inclusive environment where all employees feel valued and integrated, thereby enhancing job satisfaction and overall well-being (Chawla & Guda, 2010).

H_2: FRM influences employees' behaviour towards LIT.
H_4: FRM mediates the relationship between DWM and LIT.
H_6: FRM moderates the relationship between DWM and LIT.

By employing mediation and moderation analyses on a single variable, our aim is to gain a comprehensive understanding of its role within the model. This approach allows for a detailed investigation, revealing the mechanisms through which the variable influences relationships among factors via mediation, as well as the conditions under which this influence changes through moderation. By integrating these analyses, we deepen our comprehension of the variable's multifaceted function, thereby enriching our understanding of its impact and operational mechanisms within the model.

Figure 1 depicts the conceptual model for LGBT integration based on the formulation of the hypotheses.

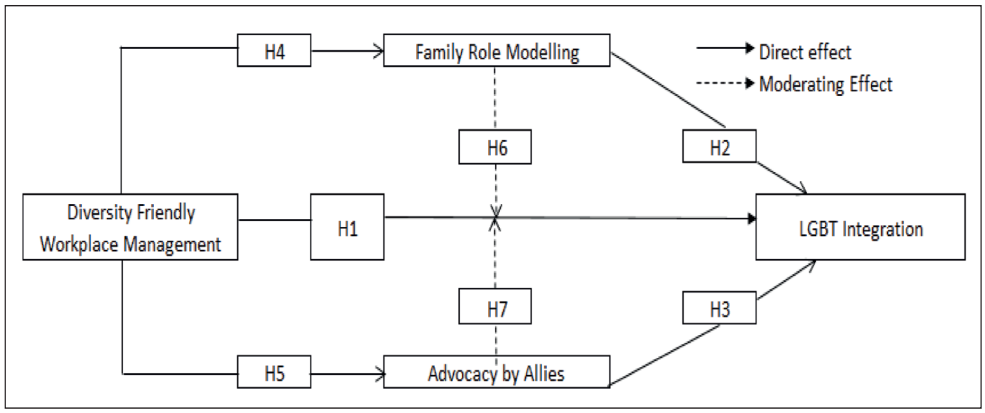

Figure 1. Conceptual Model for LGBT Integration.

Methods

Sample and Procedure

Primary data collected via questionnaire was analysed using Smart PLS software (version 4), evaluating the 'integration' framework through measurement, structural and predictive model assessments, including mediation and moderation effects. Data were collected from IT professionals in Bengaluru between July 2022 and April 2023, a significant sector contributing 25%–30% of India's white-collar workforce, with 546 suitable responses analysed from 2,000 distributed offline questionnaires. Purposive sampling targeted the top nine tech parks in Bengaluru to address logistical challenges, ensuring efficient data collection adhering to anonymity and confidentiality principles. The survey's focus on IT employees, rather than solely on the LGBT population, aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of LGBT integration in workplaces, leveraging the diverse workforce environment and assessing broader impacts on organizational culture.

The survey participants consisted of 50.7% females, 48.2% males and 1.2% individuals identifying as 'others'. Here, 'others' includes individuals who identify their gender as genderqueer, transgender, gender fluid, or any other category besides male or female. Regarding sexual orientation, 45.8% identified as heterosexual, 17.6% as homosexual, 31.3% as bisexual and 5% as 'others'. In this context, 'others' may include asexual, pansexual, or any other orientation beyond those specified.

Measures

The LGBT diversity management scale, adapted from Rao and Bagali's (2014) gender diversity management scale, consists of 10 adjusted items. For instance, one item evaluates whether the organization conducts training sessions on LGBT diversity. Similarly, the acceptance of LGBT peers, derived from Rao and Bagali's (2014) gender diversity scale, comprises nine items, assessing attitudes towards individuals irrespective of their gender identity or sexual orientation. Adjustments were made to ensure inclusivity across the LGBT spectrum, extending beyond the original focus on gender diversity pertaining to women. The FRM scale has nine items and was adapted from a scale developed by Fouad et al.

(2010). One of the items of the scale enquired if their family discussed career issues at an early stage. Ten-item ABA scale was adapted from a scale developed by Thoroughgood et al. (2021), wherein one such item from the scale enquired if the allies petitioned organizational leaders for more LGBT-inclusive policies. Participants rated these items on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Common methods bias in the study and their procedural remedies are discussed in the annexure.

Results

Assessment of Measurement Model

The model fitment was assessed through standardized root mean square residuals (SRMR) values. The values of SRMR for this study are found to be 0.08, deeming the model as a good fit (Hair et al., 2014). The measurement model examined the construct reliability and validity of the individual constructs of the study. Factor loadings of each item were observed to be greater than 0.5, which is the minimum acceptable value (Hair et al., 2014). In this study, the elimination of the items ABA9, ABA10, FRM1, FRM3, FRM4, and FRM 7 (those with factor loadings between 0.4 and 0.7) did not yield any increase in the composite reliability (CR) or average variance extracted (AVE) values; hence, they were retained.

Additionally, reliability was evaluated based on Cronbach's alpha (internal reliability), rho_a (consistent reliability) and rho_c (CR). The values for these three parameters were higher than the recommended value of 0.7, indicating good construct reliability (Henseler et al., 2016; Sarstedt et al., 2017). The average variance extracted (AVE) values were observed to be higher than the 0.5 value for each construct, which is the acceptable threshold, establishing the convergent validity of the constructs. (Table A1 represents summary of the constructs' reliability and validity.)

Discriminant validity of the constructs was obtained on the basis of the Fornell–Larcker criterion by comparing the square root of AVE with the correlations of the latent variables, wherein the former was greater than the latter. Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio method was also administered to assess discriminant validity. The values of this method lie below the threshold of 0.85, establishing the discriminant validity of constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Henseler et al., 2015). (Table A2 depicts discriminant validity through HTMT ratio and Fornell–Larcker methods.)

Evaluation of the Structural Model

The hypotheses are tested by examining the significance and values of path coefficients. Also, the variance inflation factor (VIF) is considered for testing for multi-collinearity. Table 1 displays that VIF values of all the constructs are below value 5, indicating no concerns about the multicollinearity of the model (Ringle et al., 2020). Figure 2 depicts path coefficients, *t* statistics and significance values. It is observed that the path coefficients of dependent variables LIT with DWM ($\beta = 0.241$, $t = 5.004$, $p = .00$), FRM ($\beta = 0.150$, $t = 3.665$, $p = .00$) and ABA ($\beta = 0.406$, $t = 9.048$, $p = .00$).

Coefficients of determination values (R^2) of the latent variables LIT ($\beta = 0.483$, $p = .00$), FRM ($\beta = 0.143$, $p = .00$) and ABA ($\beta = 0.334$, $p = .00$) are well within the threshold of the acceptable levels of significance and path coefficients, indicating the model to have good explanatory power. Also, the effect size (F^2) values of the latent variables FRM ($F^2 = 0.03$), ABA ($F^2 = 0.068$) and DWM ($F^2 = 0.19$) reveal a small and medium

Table 1. Mediation Analysis.

	Paths	β	T	P	VAF	Type of Mediation
Direct effect (p1)	DWM → LIT	0.241	5.004	0	Not applicable (as no mediation in direct effect)	
Total effect (p3)	DWM → LIT	0.533	16.824	0		
Hypothesized Mediation Effect of Family Role Modelling						
Specific Indirect effect (p2)	DWM → FRM → LIT	0.057	3.398	.001	0.106	No significant Mediation
Hypothesized Mediation Effect of ABA						
Specific Indirect effect (p'2)	DWM → ABA → LIT	0.235	8.132	0	0.44	Complementary Partial Mediation

Source: Primary data from the questionnaire.

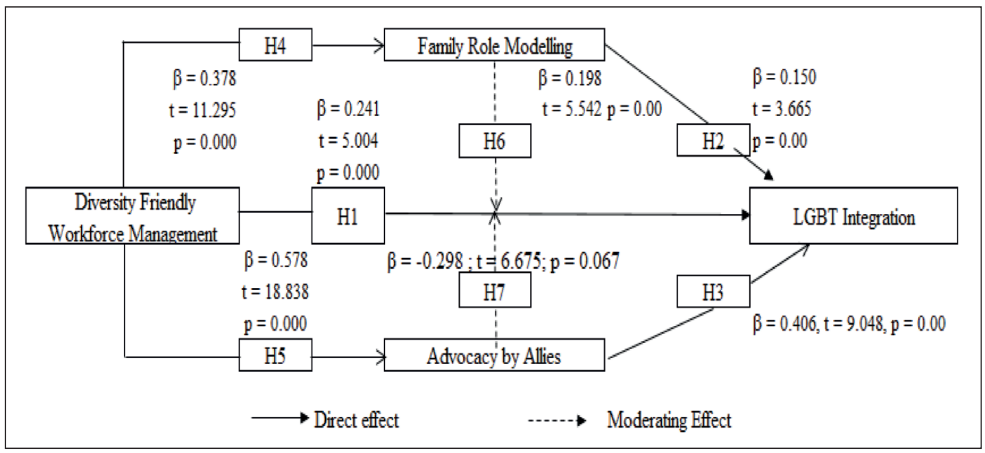

Figure 2. Conclusive Structural Model.

Source: Primary data from the questionnaire.

effect size on the dependent variable LIT, respectively (Cohen, 1988). The in-sample predictive power (predictive accuracy – Q^2) is obtained through bootstrapping and re-sampling with 5,000 re-samples. The Q^2 values for LIT (Q^2 = 0.24), FRM (Q^2 = 0.138) and ABA (Q^2 = 0.33) are all significantly greater than zero, indicating the model's medium in-sample predictive power. (Table A3 illustrates the values of explanatory power (R^2), in-sample predictive power (Q^2) and effect size (F^2).)

Assessment of Out-of-Sample Predictive Power

PLS prediction option of Smart PLS facilitated deriving the out-of-sample models' predictive power. Training and hold-out samples were utilized to obtain the desired results (Shmueli et al., 2019). Residual values of PLS-SEM are examined for normal distribution of the data points. Non-normal data were observed with a distribution that is left-tailed, indicating models' over-prediction (Danks & Ray, 2018). Hence, values of mean absolute error (MAE) are considered over the values of root mean square error (RMSE), owing to the non-symmetricity of data. These individual values of MAE are compared with the

MAE values of the linear model (LM). The majority of the MAE values of the non-symmetric data were less than the values of the LM. Additionally, values of Q^2 were greater than zero, surmising a medium predictive power in the out-of-sample model (Shmueli et al., 2019).

Also, a model comparison was conducted, considering various proposed models to identify the model with the highest predictive power. Table A4 details the models' respective RMSE, MAE and Q^2 prediction values. It is observed that model 3 has the highest Q^2 prediction values compared to the other models. Hence, we determine model 3, an ideal combination of a mediator and a moderator, to have a better fit and high predictive power.

Assessing the Mediation and Moderation Roles of FRM and ABA

First, FRM and ABA are examined for their mediating role in the DWM and LIT relationship. Table 1 depicts the mediation effect and the variance accounted for (VAF) values. The direct impact of DWM on LIT (p1: $\beta = 0.241$, $t = 5.004$, $p = .00$) and the total effect (p3: $\beta = 0.533$, $t = 16.824$, $p = .00$) are positive and significant. Also, the specific indirect effect of DWM on LIT with the hypothesized mediation of FRM (p2: $\beta = 0.057$, $t = 3.398$, $p = .00$) is deemed insignificant as the path coefficient β value is less than the minimum baseline value of 0.1 (Hair et al., 2014). Specific indirect effect of DWM on LIT with the hypothesized mediation of ABA (p'2: $\beta = 0.235$, $t = 8.132$, p = 0.00) is positive and significant. The VAF values for the mediating role of FRM are computed to be 0.106, indicating no mediation effect; also, the VAF values for the mediating part of ABA are calculated to be 0.44, indicating partial mediation, according to the acceptable threshold that VAF less than 0.2 suggests no mediation, VAF values between 0.2 and 0.8 indicate partial mediation and VAF values above 0.8 indicate complete mediation (Helm et al., 2010). Also, since p1 × p'2 × p3 result in a positive value, the mediation effect of ABA on the association between DWM and LIT is termed complementary partial mediation (Zhao et al., 2010).

FRM and ABA are assessed for their moderating role in the relationship between DWM and LIT. Table 1 displays path coefficients (β), the t statistics, significance values of individual paths and interaction effects of FRM and ABA. Figure 4 illustrates the simple slope analysis of the interacting impact at the ±1 standard deviation and mean. From Table 1 and Figures 3 and 4, FRM has a positive moderating effect. In contrast, ABA did not have any moderating effect on the association between DWM and LIT on the basis of the p values and slope analysis. Though ABA did not have any moderation effect, the direct impact of ABA on LIT is significantly high.

Figures 3 and 4 depict slope analysis of the interacting effect. Against DWM and LIT, the moderators are plotted on −1 standard deviation, +1 standard deviation and their mean. For the moderating role of FRM, it is observed from the graph that, at higher values of FRM, with the increase in DWM, there is a phenomenal increase in LIT. Also, that the values of −1, +1 standard deviation and mean of FRM converge at a point for a specific value of DWM and LIT.

From Table 1, findings corroborate with H_1 that DWM significantly influences LIT ($\beta = 0.533$, $t = 16.824$, $p = .00$); H_2 that FRM significantly affects LIT ($\beta = 0.15$, $t = 3.665$, $p = .00$); H3 that ABA significantly influences LIT ($\beta = 0.406$, $t = 9.048$, $p = .00$); H_5 that ABA significantly mediates the relationship between DWM and LIT ($\beta = 0.235$, $t = 8.132$, $p = .00$); and H_6 that FRM significantly moderates the relationship between DWM and LIT ($\beta = 0.198$, $t = 5.542$, $p = .00$). The findings also conclude the rejection of H_4 that FRM significantly mediates the relationship between DWM and LIT ($\beta = 0.057$, $t = 3.398$, $p = .00$) and H_7 that ABA significantly moderates the relationship between DWM and LIT ($\beta = -0.298$, $t = 6.657$, $p = .067$). Table 2 represents the results of hypotheses.

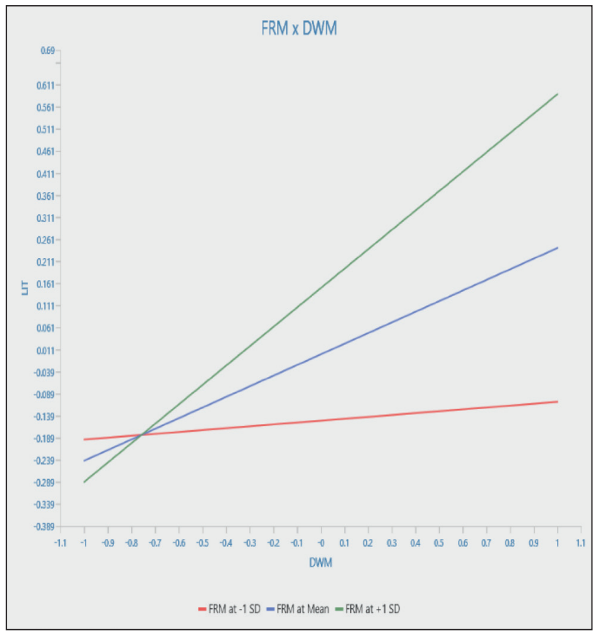

Figure 3. Slope Analysis to Check for Moderating Effect of FRM.

Source: Primary data from the questionnaire.
Note: Green, blue and red lines represent the hypothesized moderator FRM at +1 standard deviation, mean and −1 standard deviation.

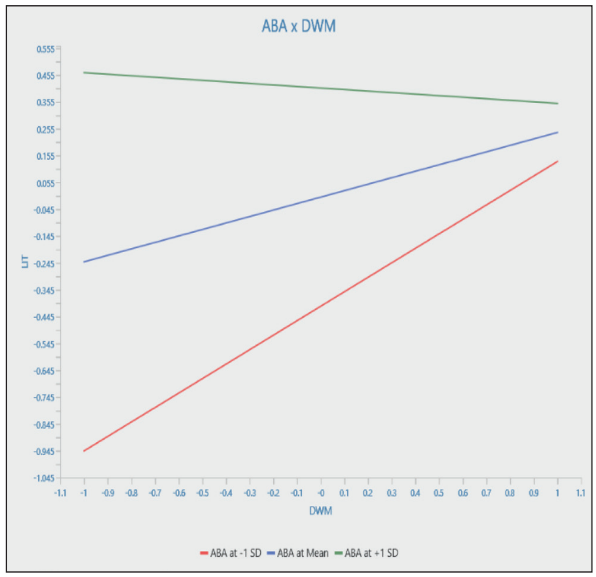

Figure 4 . Slope Analysis to Check for Moderating Effect of ABA.

Source: Primary data from the questionnaire.
Note: Green, blue and red lines represent the hypothesized moderator ABA at +1 standard deviation, mean and −1 standard deviation.

Table 2. Results of Hypotheses Testing.

Hypotheses	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	*P* Values	Hypotheses Result
DWM → LIT	0.533	0.534	0.032	16.824	0	A
FRM → LIT	0.15	0.151	0.041	3.665	0	A
ABA → LIT	0.406	0.408	0.045	9.048	0	A
Mediation						
DWM → FRM → LIT	0.057	0.058	0.017	3.398	0.001	R
DWM → ABA → LIT	0.235	0.237	0.029	8.132	0	A
Moderation						
ABA × DWM → LIT	–0.298	–0.299	0.045	6.675	0.067	R
FRM × DWM → LIT	0.198	0.198	0.036	5.542	0	A

Source: Primary data from the questionnaire.
Note: 'R' is rejection of hypothesis and 'A' is acceptance of hypothesis.

Discussion of Findings

With the theoretical underpinning of socio-metric, family and signalling theories, the researchers proposed and validated the conceptual model of LIT by evaluating the significant impact of DWM and the mediating and moderating roles of FRM and ABA on their relationship. The individual constructs exhibited excellent construct reliability, discriminant validity. Model also adhered to the model fitment aspects. The models' explanatory power was found to be highly significant. Also, the effect size ranged between low to medium for the endogenous constructs. The models' out-of-sample and in-sample predictive power also exhibited medium predictive power. The model comparison using PLS prediction found that a model comprising a mediator and a moderator displayed higher predictive power than others.

Through the structural model analysis and hypothesis testing, the researchers obtained a highly significant direct impact of DWM on LIT, comprehending that DWM positively impacts the LIT into the organization. This empirical research also identifies ABA's complementary partial mediation effect in augmenting the relationship between DWM and LIT. Additionally, the insights also signify the positive moderating role of FRM. Although ABA does not moderate the relationship, it has a significant positive direct impact on LIT. These results imply that ABA has a positive mediating role in fortifying the relationship between DWM and LIT, and correspondingly it plays a significant role in directly impacting LIT in the workplace. Family role modelling is vital in moderating the relationship between DWM and LIT. From the slope analysis, it is evident that at higher values of FRM, DWM yields more robust LIT, corroborating the literature review. Figure 5 depicts the conclusive framework derived from the findings of this research.

DWM contributes towards the integration of LGBT employees into the organization. Many renowned consulting organizations like McKinsey and Deloitte have published reports validating the argument. Studies from Thoroughgood et al. (2021) resonate with a compelling need for ABA in reinforcing the inclusion of gender and sexual minorities. Study by Sabat et al. (2013) additionally reiterate the gravity of allies in the workplace in tackling aspects of prejudice and discrimination at the workplace, fortifying the study's indications that ABA has a significantly high impact in influencing the integration of LGBT employees into workplaces.

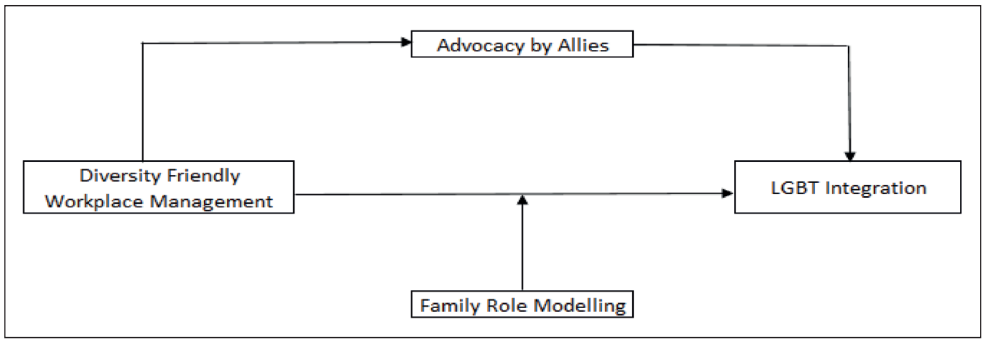

Figure 5. Conclusive Framework.

Note: From the findings of the research, family role modelling moderates and ABA mediates the relationship between DWM and LGBT integration.

Employees with supportive families are more susceptible to voicing out against transphobic and homophobic behaviours in the workplace and advocating for fairness and respect for LGBT employees. Furthermore, employees who had pleasant experiences with their families about LGBT concerns expressed higher levels of comfort in interacting with LGBT employees and firmly believed in the importance of LGBT inclusion at the workplace. Thus, our findings coherently align with the earlier seminal research works, validating this empirical research work.

Theoretical and Managerial Implications

The outcomes of this research augment the prevailing literature and have necessary implications for managers at organizations.

Theoretical Implications

This research holds several theoretical implications that contribute to the understanding of diversity, inclusion and organizational behaviour. The study adds value by aligning with and expanding upon various theories in the field. First, the study contributes to Social Identity Theory, which posits that individuals derive their self-concept from group memberships and strive for positive social identity. By examining the role of allies, workplace strategies and family role models in fostering LGBT integration, the research addresses how group dynamics and social categorizations influence inclusion within organizations. Second, the study resonates with the contact hypothesis, which suggests that positive interactions between members of different social groups can reduce prejudice and enhance intergroup relations. Through the exploration of allyship programs and interactions between LGBT individuals and their peers, the research sheds light on how contact and support mechanisms can facilitate inclusion and reduce discrimination in the workplace. Moreover, the research aligns with Organizational Support Theory, which emphasizes the importance of perceived organizational support in influencing employee attitudes, behaviours and well-being. By investigating the effectiveness of workplace strategies and

family support in fostering LGBT integration, the study contributes to understanding how organizational support systems impact employee inclusion and satisfaction. Additionally, the study intersects with the Social Learning Theory, which suggests that individuals learn behaviours and attitudes through observation, imitation and reinforcement. Through the examination of family role models and their influence on workplace behaviour, the research highlights how observational learning processes contribute to shaping organizational culture and fostering inclusive environments. The study deepens our comprehension of the mechanisms driving LGBT workplace integration, offering insights beneficial for organizations, policymakers and advocacy groups aiming to foster inclusive work environments.

Practical Implications

The research findings hold practical significance for D&I managers, offering guidance on evaluating and implementing diversity programmes to foster a supportive work environment. The study's literature review reinforces the importance of including gender and sexual minorities in the workforce, highlighting the risks of workplace exclusion. Moreover, the study emphasizes the role of allies in promoting inclusion and encourages organizations to empower employees to advocate for minority rights and address peer discrimination. By strengthening allyship and recognizing the influence of family values on workplace behaviour, organizations can create more inclusive environments. These insights benefit organizations by enhancing diversity, retention and productivity, while also informing policymakers and advocacy groups to promote inclusive practices and regulations. Ultimately, the study's findings empower stakeholders to advocate for LGBT rights and inclusion in workplaces more effectively.

Limitations and Future Lines of Research

While this research article explored numerous implications, certain viewpoints could invigorate forthcoming studies. This work adopts a cross-sectional approach, yet a longitudinal investigation could enhance the ability to measure the level of integration over time. Moreover, the study exclusively engaged respondents from Bengaluru, India; future research endeavours might expand this scope to encompass other countries, offering a global outlook. Additionally, the current study primarily relied on quantitative methods; incorporating a qualitative approach would yield more nuanced insights and a more comprehensive viewpoint.

Conclusion

The study provides substantial insights relevant to the research of LIT. This work assesses the relationship between DWM and LIT while examining the mediating and moderating functions of ABA and FRM within this relationship. The scholars put forth a conceptual framework for the integration of LGBT individuals and employed the PLS approach to empirically investigate whether inclusive workplace management enhances the integration of LGBT individuals, thus strengthening their overall inclusion within the workplace context. The study's results suggest that workplace management that fosters diversity positively influences the integration of LGBT individuals. Additionally, the study's outcomes reveal that ABA is mediating, while FRM is a moderating factor within this relationship.

The authors have concluded their deductive reasoning by promoting the significance of diversity and inclusion on an individual level to foster behaviours that support inclusion. Based on the empirical find-

ings, it can be inferred that allies exhibit a higher degree of preparedness in confronting workplace discrimination. They demonstrate more effective engagement through actions that promote diversity and support inclusive behaviours. FRM plays a constructive role in moderating the connection between an employee's perception of diversity and their pro-inclusive attitudes, thereby contributing to the establishment of enduring diversity and inclusion within organizations.

Furthermore, organizational initiatives aimed at cultivating pro-diversity work environments and addressing discrimination against gender and sexual minorities serve to diminish discriminatory conduct. Such efforts can also bolster allies in adopting behaviours conducive to inclusion. Notably, this study is a unique endeavour that theoretically and empirically investigates the integration of LGBT employees within organizations from an individual perspective.

Authors' Contribution

Sowmya conceptualized the idea and conducted research work.
Dr Sathiyaseelan thoroughly supervised the research.
Dr Basavasaj has given his valuable inputs during review of literature and culminating to the research gap.
Dr Yadav has shared key insights during data analysis phase.

Authors' Note

We declare this research has been composed solely by authors and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, to any journal. The work presented is entirely authors' own except where it is stated otherwise by reference.

Data Availability

Scholars interested in accessing the data can do so by contacting the first author upon request.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors have disclosed that they have no conflicts of interest regarding the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Ethical Statement

This study utilizes data obtained from an employee opinion survey. We affirm our commitment to upholding human rights and privacy standards. No animals were involved in any studies conducted by the authors of this article.

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Informed Consent

Consent has been acquired from individual survey participants and the relevant institution.

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Annexure A

Table A1 represents summary of the constructs' reliability and validity.

Table A1. Construct Reliability and Validity.

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Rho A	CR	AVE	VIF	Items	Factor Loadings
Acceptable Range	>0.70 and < 0.95	>0.80	>0.80	>0.05	<5		> 0.70
LGBT integration	0.909	0.911	0.925	0.579	NA	LIT1	0.772
						LIT2	0.81
						LIT3	0.737
						LIT4	0.733
						LIT5	0.823
						LIT6	0.719
						LIT7	0.785
						LIT8	0.751
						LIT9	0.708
Diversity-friendly workplace management	0.932	0.938	0.943	0.624	1.647	DWM1	0.724
						DWM2	0.727
						DWM3	0.721
						DWM4	0.865
						DWM5	0.839
						DWM6	0.843
						DWM7	0.742
						DWM8	0.835
						DWM9	0.768
						DWM10	0.816
Advocacy by allies	0.907	0.926	0.923	0.549	1.683	ABA1	0.818
						ABA2	0.713
						ABA3	0.716
						ABA4	0.811
						ABA5	0.752
						ABA6	0.765
						ABA7	0.883
						ABA8	0.763
						ABA9	0.592
						ABA10	0.529
Family role modelling	0.909	0.939	0.922	0.574	1.453	FRM1	0.673
						FRM2	0.874
						FRM3	0.675
						FRM4	0.623
						FRM5	0.796
						FRM6	0.865
						FRM7	0.555
						FRM8	0.817
						FRM9	0.864

Source: Primary data from the questionnaire.

Table A2 depicts discriminant validity through HTMT ratio and Fornell–Larcker methods.

Table A2. HTMT Ratio and Fornell–Larcker Method of Assessing Discriminant Validity.

	LIT	FRM	DWM	ABA
LIT	***0.761***	0.424	0.532	0.642
FRM	0.405	***0.757***	0.353	0.445
DWM	0.495	0.378	***0.79***	0.602
ABA	0.604	0.446	0.578	***0.741***

Source: Primary data from the questionnaire.
Note: Bold and italicized numbers represent the square root of the AVE of each constructs. Above the diagonal elements are the HTMT values. Below the diagonal elements are the correlations between the constructs' values.

Table A3 illustrates the values of explanatory power (R^2), in-sample predictive power (Q^2), and effect size (F^2).

Table A3. Explanatory Power, Effect Size and In-Sample Predictive Power.

Constructs	R^2	F^2	Q^2
LIT	0.483	NA	0.24
FRM	0.143	0.03	0.138
ABA	0.334	0.068	0.33
DWM	NA	0.19	NA

Source: Primary data from the questionnaire.
Note: 'NA' refers to not applicable.

Table A4 details the models' respective RMSE, MAE and Q^2 prediction values.

Table A4. Model Comparison with PLS Predict.

Model	Latent Variable	RMSE	MAE	Q^2_Predict
Model 1: Parallel mediation	LIT	0.874	0.713	0.24
	FRM	0.93	0.79	0.138
	ABA	0.821	0.638	0.33
Model 2: Serial mediation	LIT	0.874	0.713	0.24
	FRM	0.934	0.794	0.132
	ABA	0.818	0.638	0.333
Model 3: Combination of mediation and moderation	LIT	0.874	0.705	0.24
	FRM	0.93	0.79	0.138
	ABA	0.821	0.638	0.33
Model 4: Mediation with a combination of two moderators	LIT	0.882	0.723	0.225
	FRM	0.93	0.79	0.138
	ABA	0.821	0.638	0.33

Source: Primary data from the questionnaire.

Common Method Bias

Common method bias was controlled using procedural remedies wherein we minimized the likelihood of common method bias during data collection by ensuring respondent anonymity, using mixed-mode surveys and employing multiple data collection waves. Harman's single-factor approach was used as a part of statistical remedy wherein the process loads all the variables on one factor, and exploratory factor analysis is administered to test these results. The outcome of the Harman single-factor procedure revealed the total variation explained by a single factor as 33.92%, below the threshold cap of 50%. Multiple item scales were used as a part of design remedy. Hence, through procedural, statistical and design remedies, the current study ruled out the common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

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Gay globalization via Goa in my brother... Nikhil

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Article

Gay Globalization Via Goa in *My Brother... Nikhil*

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Abstract

'Gay Globalization via Goa in *My Brother... Nikhil*' examines the 2005 film, which was the first to have focused on homosexuality in India. Despite this claim, the film articulates gay subjectivity as emerging from a global, rights-based perspective, it is argued. Central to this analysis of the film is its setting in Goa which is employed as a site of liminality between 'traditional' India and global modernity. Goa is both cleaved to and from India as a whole by casting the former's historical regionality through a misconstrual of its religious identities, as well as through references to colonial and alleged racial difference. The film's basis for such differentiation is considered as being in large part due to Goa's longer colonization by the Portuguese in comparison to the reign of the British in most of the rest of India. Modernity and diaspora are also explored as key features of the representation of Goa in the film, especially as they tie in to issues of gay rights. Further, the essay scrutinizes the parallels between the title character and the real-life inspiration behind the film, the Goan AIDS activist Dominic D'souza. In concluding, it is made apparent that the film centres gay male subjectivity while relegating Goan identity to an ambivalent marginality.

Keywords

Gay, Goa, modernity, HIV/AIDS, Dominic D'souza

Although purportedly the first Indian film about homosexuality, *My Brother... Nikhil* (2005) relies less upon its setting in India than it does on a more globalized interpretation of gay rights as the foundation for defining the identity and struggles of its gay Indian characters. In turn, the issue of gay rights in the film, written and directed by Onir, is largely associated with being male and middle-class. Further, the internationalization of the problems facing the gay characters is predicated upon their being in Goa, which is represented as culturally and historically liminal to India. The film's title character is the son of the Kapoors, a couple in Goa who, with their daughter Anamika, relate the episodes of the deceased Nikhil's life, in retrospect, between the late 1980s and early 1990s. Although the family's ethnicity is not revealed overtly, Anamika comments on how her mother is proud of her Portuguese heritage. Navin Kapoor, the father, is perhaps as one might gather from the family name, of North Indian origin. *My Brother... Nikhil* is mainly in Hindi, with a smattering of songs in Konkani, Goa's official language. As the story develops, Nigel de Costa—Nikhil's boyfriend—is introduced as a Goan from the diaspora. Though the movie fictionalizes the real events of the life of Goa's first reported HIV-infected person, the

AIDS activist Dominic D'souza,[1] Goa is itself portrayed in an ambivalent fashion, reinforcing its otherness to the rest of India. In so doing, Goa in its marginality becomes the representational threshold between the experience of alienation faced by gay men in India and the foregrounding of their identity as emergent from a globalized, rights-based perspective.

Though Goa was a Portuguese colony for 451 years (1510–1961), inter-raciality was rare with distinct exceptions, one of which is discussed later on.[2] It is thus striking that the Kapoors are cast as a family whose Goanness is implied by coupling characters that are of North Indian and Portuguese heritage. In their ability to speak Hindi and being, at least part-North Indian, the family is expected to appear more Indian than had they been distinctly Goan, an ethnicity often rendered as anomalous to mainstream Indic culture precisely because Goa was not colonially under the purview of the former British Empire in India. The inter-ethnic and inter-racial marriage of the Kapoors is presumed to act as an explanation of the cultural hybridity that is the basis of Goanness, therein creating a binary of what is and is not Indian enough. Even as it seeks to present Goan identity as constitutive of Indian diversity, the distinction is made because the decipherability of authenticity is cathected to Nikhil's father's North-centric and Hindu Indianness, which is discussed further on. It is also the diasporic Nigel who has an 'elsewhere' to India connection, given his Non-Resident Indian status which reiterates Goanness as difference.

These ambivalent characterisations of the people in Nikhil's life extend to the site where the story takes place. For example, because the family is given a North Indian lineage, it makes it possible for Hindi to be the language of dialogue in the film, rather than any of Goa's regional languages. Again, this leaning away from the regional represents Goan culture, specifically as it is tied to language, as cognizably less Indian in comparison with the cultural mainstream which is signified through the nominally national language. Goa and Goanness are offered as a kind of inherently unstable Indianness, whereupon the diasporic and inter-racially ambiguous characterizations are the 'other' to the comparably more homogenous Indian homeland, as fallacious as such a claim might be.

In her analysis of another India-set film about homosexuality, Gayatri Gopinath (2007) refers to the location of the Malayalam language film *Sancharram* (2004), as evoking the regional through Kerala. For Gopinath (2007, p. 343), such '[r]egionality can be a useful concept through which to explore the particularities of gender and sexual logics in spaces that exist in a tangential relation to the nation, but that are simultaneously and irreducibly marked by complex national and global processes'. If in *Sancharram* Kerala is a region which, as Gopinath adduces, 'bears the traces of extensive premodern trade routes with West Asia, China and Europe, and sits at the crossroads of Islamic, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian cultural influences', then Goa in *My Brother… Nikhil* has a similar and connected history. For instance, Calicut—now Kozhikode—was the site in Kerala where in 1498 the Portuguese, guided by Vasco da Gama, first arrived in the fabled Indies (Wilford 2001, p. 70). Thereupon, the coastal region became the vantage point from which the Iberian hold grew, ultimately resulting in the conquest of Goa by Afonso de Albuquerque in 1510.[3]

Goan historian Fatima da Silva Gracias (1996) notes that after de Albuquerque defeated the ruler of Goa, among his first acts was to encourage mixed marriages between the Portuguese victors and the widows of Adil Shah's soldiers via his *Politica dos Casmentos*, or marriage policy. It appears to be this early history of miscegeny that is suggested in giving shape to Nikhil's ethnic background, particularly through his mother's Portuguese heritage, echoing Goa's colonial legacy as one that was apart from the rest of India's. Likewise, Nikhil's boyfriend Nigel is characterized by his non-Indian connection because he is a diasporic returnee. Gopinath (2007, p. 346) says of *Sancharram* that among 'the multiple registers within which the film gains meaning' because of its location are 'the local, the regional, the national, the

diasporic, and the transnational'. Similarly, in relying on the 'Indo-Portuguese' and diasporic identities of the lovers in *My Brother... Nikhil* as multiculturality, the film attaches the travails of its characters to the plight of other gay men like them in the world beyond India, which is a consideration that will be turned to shortly.

Central to the depiction of Goa in Onir's film is its nexus with Western modernity because of its longer colonial history than other parts of India. In an article on the fiftieth anniversary of its decolonization, Vivek Menezes (2011, p. 17) remarks that Goa 'had a different colonial experience from the rest of the country', which from the sixteenth century made it 'the centre piece of a truly global empire that extended from Brazil to Timor to Aden and back to Lisbon; Goans were profoundly globalized centuries before the first British merchant showed up in the subcontinent...' It is this lore that additionally allows *My Brother... Nikhil* to imply a global association between the region and the world at large, even in the contemporary moment. That colonial past is recalled through the Kapoors' inter-raciality on the one hand and advanced to the present through Nigel's diasporic existence on the other. Yet, as the foreign-returned Indian who challenges Nikhil for being in the closet, Nigel's openness is associated with him having lived abroad. His liberal nature is also linked to his financial security, evidenced by his beachfront property, no doubt owing to his employment beyond India's shores. What becomes apparent in this description of Nigel is the conflation between diasporic Goanness, middle-classness, modernity and being able to be out of the closet.

Once more, *Sancharram* assists in providing points of comparison. In it, Delilah is forced into an arranged marriage upon the discovery of her relationship with her girlfriend Kiran. Consequently, Kiran contemplates taking her own life but, instead, is seen to leave home and, imaginably, the region. It is this exit that Gopinath (2007, p. 347) aligns with 'a familiar telos of "global gayness" ... albeit with a lesbian rather than a gay male subject at its center'. Gopinath casts this moment of the character's self-making as being in the vein of 'rights-based discourses' where the '"global gay" subject' comes into view as:

> an identifiable 'lesbian' or 'gay' subject who leaves behind a space of gender/sexual oppression in order to emerge into a space of liberation and freedom; this emergence into an out, visible, public, gay or lesbian identity marks the subject's entry into modernity. In the case of *Sancharram*, the film's ending implies that Kiran leaves behind the regional, provincial, and non-metropolitan not so much in order to enter a modern *nationalist* subjectivity but rather to enter into a modern *transnational* lesbian subjectivity. (ibid., emphasis in original)

However, in *My Brother... Nikhil*, it is the reverse that occurs, because Nigel *returns* from the diaspora, as the trans-national messenger of gay rights. He is the global gay and modern subject who comes back to the homeland to edify it. Moreover, while in *Sancharram* it is Delilah, the Christian character, who is constrained by tradition—it is after all her parents who marry her off to curtail her unorthodox relationship with Kiran—the same is not true for Nigel, whose religious identity as a Christian person accents his liberated modern subjectivity by resonating Christianization in Goa as a by-product of Portuguese colonization and modernity.

Interestingly, the Kapoors' religious persuasion is left unclear, lest the prospect that they are Christian inhibit them from being seen as the average Indian family. What this negates is that though Christianity in Goa is syncretically Indian,[4] the majority of Goa's people are, in fact, Hindu.[5] Delivering some of his reminiscences about his boyfriend against the backdrop of a Church, Nigel is meant to be seen as a Christian. Because it is unclear what Nikhil's family's religious background is, Nigel's religious identity becomes all the more visibly etched through the oblique but still palpable references such as his

Portuguese surname and the presence of a Church in his native Goa. If the name 'de Costa' is meant to register as a Goan Catholic one because it is Portuguese,[6] it could be argued that the 'more' Indian name 'Kapoor' is expected to depict its carriers as Hindu. As much as the inter-racial marriage of the Kapoors invites the suggestion that their family might be secular, its rehearsal of Goanness as Eurasian hybridity hints at other possibilities.

Nigel's more discernible Christian identity as betokened by his Portuguese name reflects back onto the Kapoors whose Goanness is vaguely derived from having a claim to Portuguese origins. No less vague is the construction of a Christian identity as being the religious default of Goans because of their Portuguese past, as is evinced in the attributes given Nigel de Costa. Because the film does nothing to contextualize Goan religious identities or ethnicity, these stand in for one another and against India as the culturally Hindu landscape external to the religious oddity of Goa. While a secular democracy, India's population is one that is still a Hindu majority which is diverse in its own right. In contrast, then, communities with minority religious affiliations with geographically ethnic origins are conspicuously regional in the Indian context or, for that matter, any other context with a largely homogenous populace.[7]

In her identification of the regional, Gopinath (2007) glosses over the influence religion has in shaping designations of space and place, thereby never destabilizing the assumed Hindu essence of Indianness. Similar notions are prominent in the deployment of minority religious identity as incongruity in the making of Goa as a region of liminality in *My Brother... Nikhil*. The Kapoors' intermarriage is all the more reminiscent of Goa's otherness in this aspect because it strives to recreate a pre-colonial and pre-modern Hindu past for Goa. Nikhil's mother, Anita Kapoor, is never addressed by her maiden name Rosario, subsuming her Christianness as it is evoked through that Portuguese name, via her marriage. At the same time as the intermarriage harks at Eurasian miscegeny at the dawn of Goa's colonization in the Early Modern period, it also underscores tradition through heteropatriarchy and the taking on of the husband's Hindu name. Upon her marriage, Anita Rosario now bears the recognizably Indian name Kapoor. Her traditional marriage to an Indian man is the foil to the relationship her son shares with Nigel, the gay Goan whose subjectivity arises through the modernity that is dually communicated in his diasporic status as well as his Portuguese name. Ironically, the corrective that the inter-racial Kapoor–Rosario marriage is supposed to apply to a Goa wrested from a traditionally Hindu India by colonization and Christianization, misuses the genesis of miscegeny in Portuguese India. Though there were Hindu converts in Portuguese India, the very first converts to the Christian faith were women who were not Hindu. Adil Shah, Goa's ruler who suffered defeat at the hands of the Portuguese in 1510, happened to be Muslim, as were his soldiers whose widows were baptized and married to de Albuquerque's crew in what Arun Sinha (2002, p. 20) documents as 'a mass ceremony' in his book *Goa Indica*.

The centrality of Goa to *My Brother... Nikhil*'s investments are in dichotomizing the traditional and the modern in relation to identity. The highlighting of Goa's regional identity as it is underpinned by religious, colonial, cultural and historical differences in comparison to most of the rest of India is made tantamount to how gay men find themselves misunderstood as outsiders in the very nation they call home. This initial identification between gay and Goan identity is nevertheless transcended when the film relegates Goa to the backdrop, ceding it as the provincial space that allows for other more global affiliations in the development of gay subjectivity. The departure transpires most pointedly after Nikhil is humiliatingly arrested and then sequestered in a tuberculosis ward where he is the sole inmate. Only then does the film's protagonist discover that he has been diagnosed with HIV as disclosed through a routine blood test. It is at this juncture that the film 'owns' AIDS as a gay disease rather than a global

one. The greater risk of contracting HIV through homosexuality becomes symbolic of the trauma of being a middle-class, Indian, gay man. It is synonymously the trauma of middle-class, gay men anywhere in the world, but not the trauma of those of other subjectivities. Already having had to deal with the incarceration of his HIV-infected lover, Nigel returns home one day to see the word 'faggot' spray-painted on the walls of his house. Forgoing Hindi, which the film had to this moment used as its mode of expression, the slur in English communicates local knowledge of homophobia from the world beyond. Literally, the writing is on the wall as small-town Goa becomes no different than the rest of the planet in its treatment of gay men because of AIDS.

Although the film does well to identify prejudice and the need to address it, HIV-related discrimination becomes the driving force for instituting a gay identity that separates itself from ethnicity while conjoining with more global iterations of gay rights that are largely male and middle-class focused. This agenda concurrently overshadows Goa and the issue of AIDS in the world at large. It is true that AIDS cannot be separated from the history of the gay rights movement in the decades since the disease's advent in the 1980s. Despite this, it has never been an affliction that only befalls men who are homosexual. In his review of *We Were Here* (2011), Andrew Pulver of *The Guardian* applauds David Weismann and Bill Weber's documentary about 'the ravages of the AIDS virus ... on early 1980s San Francisco, where thousands of gay men died ... before prevention education and community activism helped slow the devastation'(Pulver 2011). But Pulver also notes that 'the ongoing disaster in Africa gets barely a mention' (2011).

Indeed, this omission occurs because *We Were Here* spotlights the experiences of white gay men, which are meant to stand in for those of all HIV/AIDS victims in 1980s America. Among the film's main interviewees, only one is an African American. Though gay men were at the forefront of AIDS activism in the 1980s, the film notes that lesbians also looked out for the community, but little is said about how the disease affected people of different socio-economic and racial backgrounds, many of whom participated in the movement too. That these AIDS-related issues in the United States are themselves connected to access to healthcare across the globe is additionally occluded by the documentary's myopia. In effect, AIDS is seen to have become a rallying call for activism in the film, but *We Were Here* limits the understanding of that activism as having been only about the rights of gay men. It is in this respect that *My Brother... Nikhil* diverges little in culling out AIDS-activism as the focalization of gay rights, and those alone, as they are defined in a global consensus of what constitutes gay subjectivity.

In parlaying Dominic D'souza's legacy into an insular form of activism, it denies the greater activist potential of the queer movement. In the movie, Nikhil establishes an organization called People Positive, mirroring D'souza's own work in creating a non-profit called Positive People, which was the first Goan organization of its kind and one that still exists since its inception in 1992.[8] D'souza was to succumb to AIDS a year later, but the organization he began continues to be of service. Though Positive People may not be an explicitly gay organization or one that advocates for the rights of sexual minorities and those of non-normative gender—all being distinct and important causes—its establishment advances a general but inclusive approach to AIDS activism and awareness that does not hinge upon access to care based on identity-specific rights as privilege. Like Nikhil, D'souza was also apprehended and sequestered upon the discovery of his HIV status. Nowhere in the film is D'souza mentioned as having been the real-life inspiration for its story. *My Brother... Nikhil* fails to connect fiction and reality, separating the impact of a Goan activist on AIDS law and the rights of HIV victims in India. Rather, the film chooses to use D'souza's story as an entree for demarcating and establishing a sexual minority identity as it emanates globally, and as a consequence serves to misrepresent and further marginalize an ethnic minority and their regional homeland.

Notes

1. Lawyers Collective notes that the organization began dealing with HIV/AIDS law during 'the late 1980's [sic] when it handled the first HIV case in India. This case saw the incarceration of the HIV+ activist Dominic D'Souza [sic] under the Goa Public Health (Amendment) Act, 1986'. See http://www.lawyerscollective.org/hivaids-unit.
2. See, for example, Maria Eugénia Mata (2007). In studying the period nearer the end of the Portuguese colonial experience, Mata refers to the historically social trends in Luso-India where entrenched notions of 'race and lineage' restricted miscegeny (p. 18).
3. For more on this history, see H. Morse Stephens (2000).
4. For more on this subject, see Robert S. Newman (2001).
5. See Arun Sinha (2002). Sinha records that from 1961, the year of Goa's liberation from the Portuguese, to '1971, the Hindu population ... rose from 384,378 to 496,389, by over 100,000, while the Christian population rose from 227,202 to 270,126, or by only 43,000. As a result the percentage of Christian population fell from 38 to 34 per cent in the ten years after Liberation. (In 1900, the Hindus and Christians equally shared Goa's population).' The author goes on to demonstrate that subsequent censuses illustrate the continued decline in numbers of Goan Christians (p. 134).
6. Stella Mascarenhas-Keyes (2011, p. 88) chronicles the prevalence of Portuguese names in Goa as a result of conversion to Catholicism, dating back to 'the 16th and 17th centuries, [when] Goans had to relinquish their Hindu names and take on first names derived from the Bible or Catholic saints, as well as Portuguese surnames, the surname usually being that of the ecclesiastic who baptized them.'
7. My thoughts here follow the arguments made by Fredrik Barth (1969, p. 9), who comments on the persistence of ethnic 'boundaries … despite the flow of personnel across them', implying that in the context of a multi-ethnic national society difference persists through comparative cleavages even as affiliations occur within a diverse group.
8. See <http://www.positivepeople.in/> [accessed 12 January 2013].

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Sage Journals

Factors affecting the role of IMC on LGBT Communities' intention to recommend technology products

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Research Article

Factors Affecting the Role of IMC on LGBT Communities' Intention to Recommend Technology Products

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Abstract

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) increases the efficacy and efficiency of marketing endeavours by consistently communicating with consumers via a variety of channels. In light of these black-box and complicated issues, this research proceeds with a unifying review of the IMC literature and tries to turn it in the direction of how the LGBT community has been portrayed in it and as an audience how they have been impacted. The purpose of this research is to understand and analyse the factors which play a major role in the potential customers of the LBGT community's intention to recommend any technology products. We have developed eight hypotheses based on the UTAUT-extended model. The data were collected from 450 self-proclaimed LGBT community members from five major cities in India. The samples were collected using purposive and snowball techniques. The findings demonstrate that factors such as behavioural intention, user behaviour, consumer technology adoption, intention to recommend and IMC play a major role in motivating and influencing the community to adopt and recommend technology products.

Key Words

Technology Product, IMC, LGBT, Intention to Recommend

Introduction

Customers find traditional advertising to be overused and generally obnoxious (Shourangiz et al., 2021). Likewise, curiosity about alternative media has lately started to grow among researchers (Dong et al., 2021) to support their businesses, marketers must carefully choose the optimal mix of media among the numerous, various and alternative possibilities accessible (Voorveld et al., 2010). The 1980s witnessed the introduction of the idea of integrated marketing communication (IMC) (Schultz, 2003) and has subsequently altered how marketers and communicators work together and operate a business. "'Industry marketing planning' is the process of ensuring that every contact a consumer or prospect has with a brand, service, or organization is important and relevant to individual and consistent across time" as per American Marketing. Although IMC is a useful strategy, it is often understood differently, and its theoretical position—including its definition, conceptual foundation and methods of measurement—tends to be ambiguous and imprecise (Dağli, 2021; Luck & Moffatt, 2009). An organization's marketing communications include all messages, media, as well as actions it uses not only to get in touch with the market but also to persuade targeted customers to accept its message and take the required action. An IMC strategy incorporates traditional and digital marketing channels into a single marketing campaign, utilizing numerous ways of communication. IMC increases the efficacy and efficiency of this marketing endeavour by consistently communicating with consumers via a variety of channels. In light of these unresolved and complicated issues, this research proceeds with a unifying review of the IMC literature and tries to turn it in the direction of how the LGBT community has been portrayed in it and as an audience how they have been impacted.

Numerous studies published on marketing to the gay and lesbian market 20 years ago investigated how these populations reacted to advertising messages. Contributors recognized advertising as a crucial facilitator for assimilating this underrepresented community (Bowes, 1996). The LGBT movement has undoubtedly made great progress over the past 20 years. Marketers became more aware of a sizeable gay and lesbian population after the Stonewall riots which happened in 1969 (Peñaloza, 1996), the consequence of it was that businesses started using niche

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marketing techniques to reach out to what considered as 'dream market' of early adopters and trendsetters (Rocha & Dil, 2022). Advertising professionals immediately saw the potential of the LGBT market in the 1990s, which led to over $120 million in yearly advertisement spending on publications with homosexual audiences (Nicholson, 1999). In the 1980s, advertising analysts began asserting that the LGBT market is the most affluent and under-tapped demographic. In mainstream media, homosexuality is not featured as it relates to more than half of the LGBT population, which makes it hard for companies to reach out to LGBT consumers (Goodman, 2022). Advertisers came up with 'gay window advertising' as a coping mechanism to encrypt homosexual visuals with context that only LGBT consumers could understand (Dines & Humez, 1995). Peñaloza (1996) observed that gay customers frequently interpret ads that target them as a gesture of approval and strive to uphold the position of desirable customers. However, few works revealed that commercials including homosexual imagery continued to result in negative brand assessments (Li, 2021). The necessity to investigate effective means of including the LGBT community in mainstream advertising becomes increasingly important as society becomes more accepting of homosexuality while harbouring some residual prejudice.

To retain high profitability in the current business environment, companies frequently need to continuously produce innovative products or services that meet previously unfulfilled demands. Demands are particularly relevant for businesses that concentrate on goods with rapid innovation speeds, or the rate at which product technology is upgraded in the market (Fisher, 1997). Due to the frequent introduction of novel products into the market, the likelihood of consumers repurchasing innovative products is low. Consequently, enterprises with innovative products try to timely adapt to market shifts through fresh product development and effective product dispersion rather than focusing on maintaining product sales (Larina, 2017; Li, 2021).

Particularly concerning consumer technology products, where revenues tend to peak during their brief boom phase before rapidly declining subsequently (An et al., 2021), businesses will not have much time to respond and put measures into place if lifecycle forecasting is only done at the very end. So, we believe it is significant to study the behaviour of the LGBT community in respect of the adoption of technology products. We apply our research to consumer technology products such as e-commerce (Tseng et al., 2003), e-learning (Henry, 2001), mobile banking/e-banking (Machogu & L, 2015), social media (Bullini Orlandi et al., 2020), voice assistants (Fernandes & Oliveira, 2021), chatbots (Zumstein & Hundertmark, 2017), speech recognition (Schultz & Waibel, 2001), navigation technology (Henfridsson et al., 2014), weather prediction technology (Kussul et al., 2009) and image recognition technology (Agrawal et al., 2017).

The early adopter segment, which is described as customers who counter their purchasing decisions on whether or not a technology product or service is technologically advanced and has a high-performance potential, is specifically examined with a concentrate on LGBT consumers because they are seen as trendsetters for other customers (Vandecasteele & Geuens, 2008). Although LGBT consumers are drawn in by technology brand messages and can influence other customers, advertising to them is a strategy that technology firms can follow (Fejes & Lennon, 2000a). These individuals are, therefore, the trendsetters and early adopters who like more expensive goods and services (Pinho et al., 2012; Venter, 2014). One of the main theories in the study of technology adoption is the technology acceptance model (TAM) (Davis, 1989). The 'denial of the potential of impact from institutional, social, and human control elements' is a significant theoretical flaw in TAM (Elliot & Loebbecke, 2000). To overcome the limitations of TAM, the researcher tried to study the technology adoption with the help of the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) extended model (Widodo et al., 2019). In order to develop a comprehensive approach to users' acceptance of the framework of information technology, the first iteration of the UTAUT was suggested in 2003 (Venkatesh et al., 2003). The UTAUT model must increase its conceptual range and operational capabilities to accommodate modern technologies even after 20 years of its discovery and the swift evolution of information system technology.

The current examination contributes in varied ways to the existing literature on technology products, the LGBT community and the role of IMC to predict intention to recommend by addressing the existing research gaps. Not only is IMC beneficial for the companies, but it also plays a major role in normalizing the LGBT community by generating awareness in the audience about the LGBT community, which leads to the betterment of society. Researchers have come across that in the contemporary era, the use of technological products has been booming. Not only that, according to a report published by Newsd, when India continued to exclude the LGBTQIA+ minority, it may also have been squandering more than $26 billion every year, which indicates how lucrative and unexplored this market avenue is. The model used in this study aims to determine what kind of behaviour the LGBT community in India will exhibit regarding technology products since the mere acceptance of technology does not guarantee its continuous use and its recommendation. Further, this study has included the prominent role of intentions to recommend alongside eminent constructs, to be the specific behavioural intention (BI), user behaviour and consumer technology adoption to predict the role of IMC in recommending the technology products in the upcoming times. This study also adds a new dimension to socio-psychological groups and their impact on the acceptance of any technology products. The results of the study ought to give rich bits of knowledge of considering the effect of socio-psychology while introducing a technology product to the world to improve its success rate and

operational efficiency. The immense potential IMC offers for companies operating in the space of technological products is undeniably humongous. Our research tried to study the factors affecting the role of IMC on the decision of this community regarding the intention to recommend a technology product that is hardly being looked after in existing literature. This research includes factors that have never been investigated previously using the UTAUT-extended model especially for studying the influence of a socio-psychological group like the LGBT community. As a result, this study manages to come up with some significant findings while contributing to IMC, LGBT, technology products, UTAUT 2 models and intention to recommend which could give new faces to its elements. This study reveals strong interrelationships between elements contributing to the intention to recommend within the UTAUT 2 framework for a technological product in India.

Literature Review

The UTAUT 2 model has been thoroughly evaluated using measurement theory. The UTAUT 2 model has been investigated in the field of online learning, mobile applications and social network sites (Faqih & Jaradat, 2021; Herrero et al., 2017; Yu et al., 2021). Therefore, keeping the base of the previous model, Venkatesh et al. (2012) advocated the creation of UTAUT2, an augmentation of UTAUT, to thoroughly investigate consumer perceptions of technology adoption and use in the framework of digital technology. As a result, the researchers propose to expand UTAUT2 (Figure 1) with IMC (Eagle et al., 1999), user behaviour (Al-Mamary, 2022), consumer technology adoption (Hanif et al., 2022), intention to recommend (Octavius & Antonio, 2021) and LGBT community (Fejes & Lennon, 2000b). Also, with this research, we pinpoint that the UTAUT model was limited to 'psychological gender'. So, this study is trying to focus on and closely examine the importance of sexual orientation and explore the socio-psychosocial basics of gender which is now a significant part of society. As a result, the current research used a comprehensive examination of the reflective measurement paradigm (relations between indicators and their corresponding latent constructs).

Behavioural Intention

The extent to which a person is deliberately plotting his or her prospective behaviour is referred to as BI (Ramírez-Correa et al., 2019). BI is a term used to describe a person's propensity to engage in a certain behavioural (Chen et al., 2022). It is considered a useful technique for predicting people's future behaviour to measure their BI. BI can be interpreted as a marketing strategy's result (Abdullah et al., 2022). BI is the crucial element that influences a system's success (Dindar et al., 2021). Studies (Makanyeza, 2014; Wang et al., 2020) assert that customer stance impacts their BI. Ameen and Willis (2019) showed substantially distinct effects of gender on BI, contradicting the findings of Osei et al. (2022). This research looks at BI to use, which is a key factor in the technology adoption process (Davis et al., 1989). We thoroughly examine the existing literature and develop a taxonomy based on empirical findings, but the literature stays silent on the relationship between socio-psychological groups and BI. Subsequently, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H_1: There is no significant relationship between IMC and BI.
H_5: There is no significant relationship between the LGBT community and BI.

User Behaviour

The factors 'intent to use' and 'user behaviour' are substitutable when it comes to technology adoption research. In different words, BI and user behaviour can be considered synonymous, whereas the real adoption process is centred on the assumption of an individual's willingness to adopt a new technological innovation anticipates their usage patterns (Al-Mamary, 2022). In this sense, use behaviour refers to an individual's routine or habit when using technology (Agudo-Peregrina et al., 2014). In this study, the researcher refers to the LGBT community's use of technology as a behaviour because they have the desire and interest to do so and because there is equipment and infrastructure in place to facilitate their desire. The volume and/or regularity of consumers' use of information technology constitutes their information technology usage behaviour. Triandis (1979) stated that a person's behaviour in expressing their wishes or interests is influenced by social variables, sentiments and anticipated consequences. The way people use information technology is heavily influenced by how well or poorly the system is perceived by its users.

H_2: There is no significant relationship between IMC and user behaviour.
H_6: There is no significant relationship between the LGBT community and user behaviour.

Consumer Technology Adoption

Contemporary developments in information and communication technologies and their ubiquitous accessibility have sparked a surge in awareness of consumer technology adoption (Baron et al., 2006; Hall & Khan, 2003). In contrast to general concepts presented in past years, this research concentrates on particular dimensional segments, necessitating the identification of appropriate predicting indicators and structures of how the LGBT community would adopt new technologies with the help of IMC. In addition, notwithstanding the anticipation and potential, even the most cutting-edge, technically advanced technologies are meaningless if people do not accept them

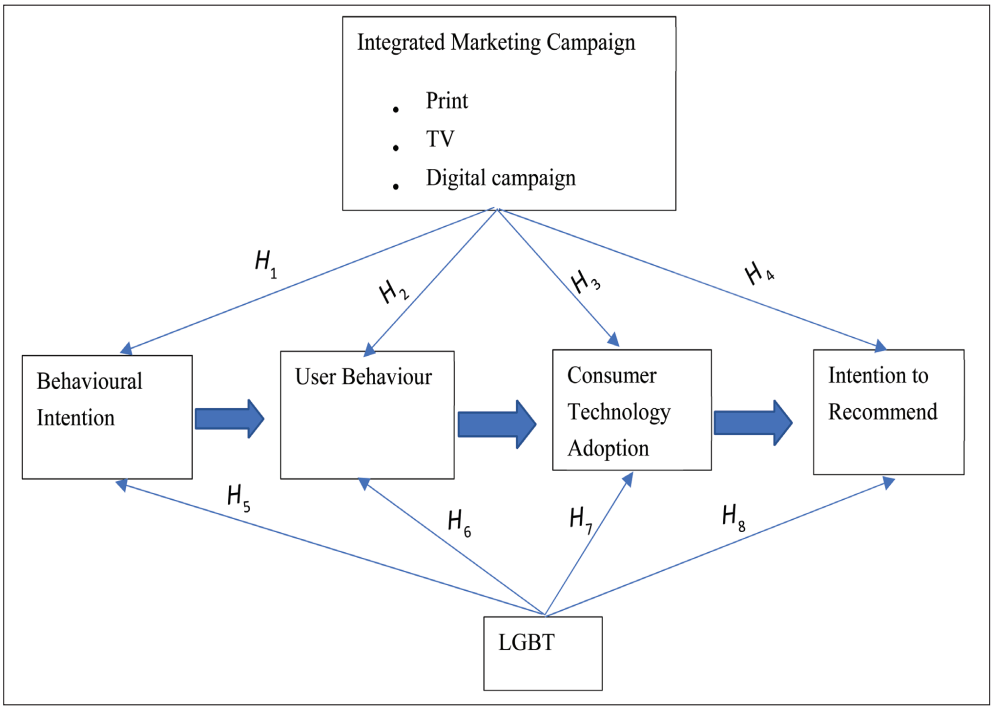

Figure 1. Conceptual Model.

(Mathieson, 1991; Mohamed et al., 2021). Due to this, a number of fields have explored and researched the problems with consumer technology adoption. The purpose of this research is to explore the adoption of technological products by the LGBT community.

H_3: There is no significant relationship between IMC and consumer technology adoption.
H_7: There is no significant relationship between the LGBT community and consumer technology adoption.

Intention to Recommend

In order to evaluate the adoption of technology products within the LGBT community and fill a gap in the literature on this subject, which can be of enormous commercial importance (Moe & Schweidel, 2011). Notwithstanding, due to the inordinate emphasis on technology usage, scholars have neglected the factor of intention to recommend (Tavares et al., 2017). It can be understood as a criterion to assess how strongly an individual seeks to recommend a technology to others (Tavares & Oliveira, 2018). To our knowledge, this is the first time that the intention to recommend is being researched in the context of technology product adoption by the LGBT community. Technology acceptance is no more merely an individual preference. Social media and other digital sites have created new avenues for influencing and transmitting attitudes and behaviours. As a result, the intention to recommend is considered a key variable (Octavius & Antonio, 2021), and to further recommend it to others (Lancelot Miltgen et al., 2013). Regarding the customer's intention to recommend, the results of the various studies support the recommendation to include it in social marketing campaigns (Oliveira et al., 2016). The intention to recommend is essential to involve in this research because it provides understanding into the developers on what must be modified or retained to strengthen their performance and reach. Hence, we pose the following hypotheses:

H_4: There is no significant relationship between IMC and intention to recommend.
H_8: There is no significant relationship between the LGBT community and intention to recommend.

Research Methodology

The researcher applied the established model to corroborate the ideation scenario to find the best latent variables that explain the IMC on LGBT communities' intention to recommend technology products. We developed a questionnaire as a tool for gathering the necessary data.

operational efficiency. The immense potential IMC offers for companies operating in the space of technological products is undeniably humongous. Our research tried to study the factors affecting the role of IMC on the decision of this community regarding the intention to recommend a technology product that is hardly being looked after in existing literature. This research includes factors that have never been investigated previously using the UTAUT-extended model especially for studying the influence of a socio-psychological group like the LGBT community. As a result, this study manages to come up with some significant findings while contributing to IMC, LGBT, technology products, UTAUT 2 models and intention to recommend which could give new faces to its elements. This study reveals strong interrelationships between elements contributing to the intention to recommend within the UTAUT 2 framework for a technological product in India.

Literature Review

The UTAUT 2 model has been thoroughly evaluated using measurement theory. The UTAUT 2 model has been investigated in the field of online learning, mobile applications and social network sites (Faqih & Jaradat, 2021; Herrero et al., 2017; Yu et al., 2021). Therefore, keeping the base of the previous model, Venkatesh et al. (2012) advocated the creation of UTAUT2, an augmentation of UTAUT, to thoroughly investigate consumer perceptions of technology adoption and use in the framework of digital technology. As a result, the researchers propose to expand UTAUT2 (Figure 1) with IMC (Eagle et al., 1999), user behaviour (Al-Mamary, 2022), consumer technology adoption (Hanif et al., 2022), intention to recommend (Octavius & Antonio, 2021) and LGBT community (Fejes & Lennon, 2000b). Also, with this research, we pinpoint that the UTAUT model was limited to 'psychological gender'. So, this study is trying to focus on and closely examine the importance of sexual orientation and explore the socio-psychosocial basics of gender which is now a significant part of society. As a result, the current research used a comprehensive examination of the reflective measurement paradigm (relations between indicators and their corresponding latent constructs).

Behavioural Intention

The extent to which a person is deliberately plotting his or her prospective behaviour is referred to as BI (Ramírez-Correa et al., 2019). BI is a term used to describe a person's propensity to engage in a certain behavioural (Chen et al., 2022). It is considered a useful technique for predicting people's future behaviour to measure their BI. BI can be interpreted as a marketing strategy's result (Abdullah et al., 2022). BI is the crucial element that influences a system's success (Dindar et al., 2021). Studies (Makanyeza, 2014; Wang et al., 2020) assert that customer stance impacts their BI. Ameen and Willis (2019) showed substantially distinct effects of gender on BI, contradicting the findings of Osei et al. (2022). This research looks at BI to use, which is a key factor in the technology adoption process (Davis et al., 1989). We thoroughly examine the existing literature and develop a taxonomy based on empirical findings, but the literature stays silent on the relationship between socio-psychological groups and BI. Subsequently, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H_1: There is no significant relationship between IMC and BI.
H_5: There is no significant relationship between the LGBT community and BI.

User Behaviour

The factors 'intent to use' and 'user behaviour' are substitutable when it comes to technology adoption research. In different words, BI and user behaviour can be considered synonymous, whereas the real adoption process is centred on the assumption of an individual's willingness to adopt a new technological innovation anticipates their usage patterns (Al-Mamary, 2022). In this sense, use behaviour refers to an individual's routine or habit when using technology (Agudo-Peregrina et al., 2014). In this study, the researcher refers to the LGBT community's use of technology as a behaviour because they have the desire and interest to do so and because there is equipment and infrastructure in place to facilitate their desire. The volume and/or regularity of consumers' use of information technology constitutes their information technology usage behaviour. Triandis (1979) stated that a person's behaviour in expressing their wishes or interests is influenced by social variables, sentiments and anticipated consequences. The way people use information technology is heavily influenced by how well or poorly the system is perceived by its users.

H_2: There is no significant relationship between IMC and user behaviour.
H_6: There is no significant relationship between the LGBT community and user behaviour.

Consumer Technology Adoption

Contemporary developments in information and communication technologies and their ubiquitous accessibility have sparked a surge in awareness of consumer technology adoption (Baron et al., 2006; Hall & Khan, 2003). In contrast to general concepts presented in past years, this research concentrates on particular dimensional segments, necessitating the identification of appropriate predicting indicators and structures of how the LGBT community would adopt new technologies with the help of IMC. In addition, notwithstanding the anticipation and potential, even the most cutting-edge, technically advanced technologies are meaningless if people do not accept them

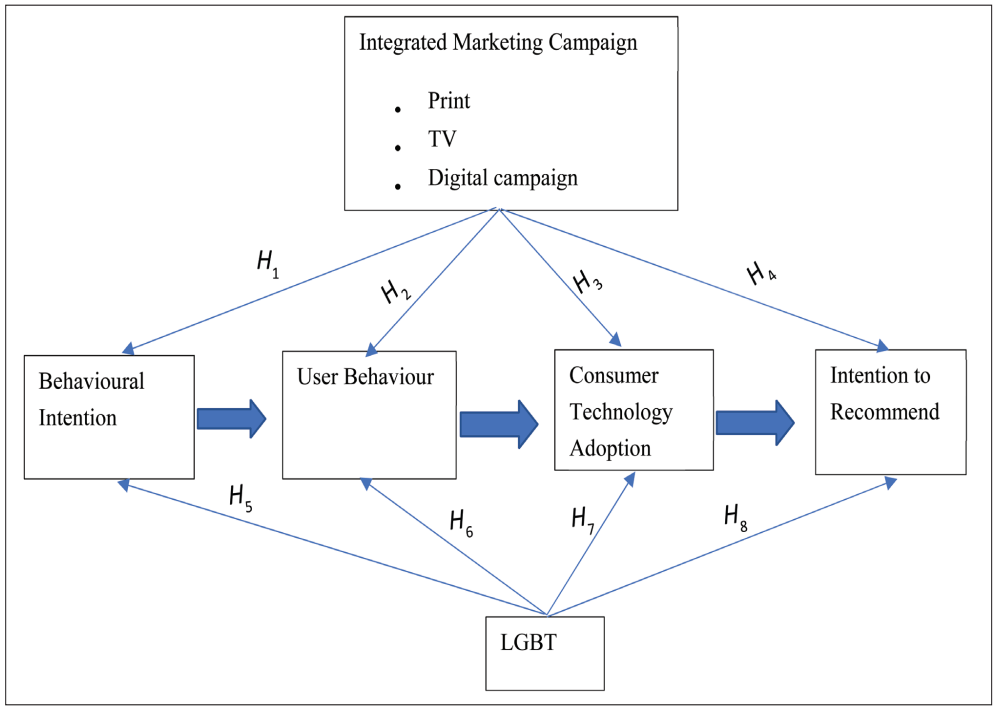

Figure 1. Conceptual Model.

(Mathieson, 1991; Mohamed et al., 2021). Due to this, a number of fields have explored and researched the problems with consumer technology adoption. The purpose of this research is to explore the adoption of technological products by the LGBT community.

H_3: There is no significant relationship between IMC and consumer technology adoption.
H_7: There is no significant relationship between the LGBT community and consumer technology adoption.

Intention to Recommend

In order to evaluate the adoption of technology products within the LGBT community and fill a gap in the literature on this subject, which can be of enormous commercial importance (Moe & Schweidel, 2011). Notwithstanding, due to the inordinate emphasis on technology usage, scholars have neglected the factor of intention to recommend (Tavares et al., 2017). It can be understood as a criterion to assess how strongly an individual seeks to recommend a technology to others (Tavares & Oliveira, 2018). To our knowledge, this is the first time that the intention to recommend is being researched in the context of technology product adoption by the LGBT community. Technology acceptance is no more merely an individual preference. Social media and other digital sites have created new avenues for influencing and transmitting attitudes and behaviours. As a result, the intention to recommend is considered a key variable (Octavius & Antonio, 2021), and to further recommend it to others (Lancelot Miltgen et al., 2013). Regarding the customer's intention to recommend, the results of the various studies support the recommendation to include it in social marketing campaigns (Oliveira et al., 2016). The intention to recommend is essential to involve in this research because it provides understanding into the developers on what must be modified or retained to strengthen their performance and reach. Hence, we pose the following hypotheses:

H_4: There is no significant relationship between IMC and intention to recommend.
H_8: There is no significant relationship between the LGBT community and intention to recommend.

Research Methodology

The researcher applied the established model to corroborate the ideation scenario to find the best latent variables that explain the IMC on LGBT communities' intention to recommend technology products. We developed a questionnaire as a tool for gathering the necessary data.

There were two sections to the questionnaire. The participants' demographic information background is questioned in the first section. The second segment includes questions that are provided in Table 1 and asks about the measured 6 variables projected with a total of 41 indicators.

The measured elements have used a 5-Likert scale ranging from '1, strongly disagree to 5, strongly agree.' We implemented a 4-step factor extraction method to find the right set of parameters, the four-step exploratory factor analysis (EFA) model was carried out in the IBM SPSS 26 software.

Step 1: Sample size, collection of data, missing values and data reliability.

Step 2: Analysing EFA data readiness.

Step 3: Confirmation of the eigenvalue rule criteria for the initial factors set *x*.

Step 4: Rotating maximum likelihood factors for factor extraction.

Subjects and procedures: The respondents of this research were self-proclaimed members of the LGBT community from five major cities of India: Bangalore, Chandigarh, Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai. The reason behind selecting these cities was that Kolkata was the first city in India to celebrate the pride parade followed by Delhi and Chandigarh. Talking about Mumbai, it came up with first magazine related to the LGBT community entitled 'Bombay Dost'. Bangalore was the fourth city to celebrate the pride parade and most of the population in Kolkata pride parade were from Bangalore.

Instrumentation: The questionnaire is comprised of two portions. Part 1 concentrates on collecting demographic details of members of the LGBT community and part 2 consists of 5 items on a 5-point Likert scale, where

Table 1. List of Questions and Elements Projected.

Variables	Construct Definition/Item in the Questionnaire	Variables	Construct Definition/Item in the Questionnaire
SO	Which group are you self-identified with?	IMC6	Advertisements in LGBT+ print and media had a greater impact than advertisements in non-LGBT+ print and media.
City	City	IMC7	When reading LGBT news stories, I trust LGBT sources more than I trust reporting in the general media.
Awareness	How aware are you of digital technology?	IMC8	I boycott brands that take anti-LGBTQ political or social stands.
CTA1	I consider the favourable risk/benefit analysis while choosing a digital technology.	BI1	I have access to digital technology; I intend to use them.
CTA2	Using digital technology makes it easy to find the content I need.	BI2	I intend to increase my use of Digital technology in the future.
CTA3	It is easy to become skilful while using digital technology.	BI3	I spend more time than I had planned on Digital technologies.
CTA4	Learning to operate digital technology is easy for me.	BI4	I am willing to spend more money than had planned on the digital technology.
CTA5	I easily find the information I'm looking for using the digital technology.	BI5	I usually recommend digital technology to my friends.
CTA6	I do not need assistance in using digital technology.	BI6	I intended to continue to buy products and services via mobile devices in the near future.
UB1	I find the system easy to use (user-friendly).	BI7	I believe my interest in m-shopping/e-shopping will increase in future.
UB2	I have bought a product or service after seeing it advertised on social media or reading about it on a blog.	BI8	I recommend others to use mobile shopping/e-shopping.
UB3	I get influenced to buy a product or service after hearing about it from friends or family.	BI9	I'm confident about my ability to use digital technology.
UB4	Reading or hearing a NEGATIVE/POSITIVE customer responses about a product influence my buying decision.	BI10	I prefer purchasing products and services using digital technology.
UB5	I share about the products and services I have bought with people.	BI11	My relatives/friends think it is useful for me to use digital technology so I intend to continue using it in future.
UB6	I discuss the new digital technology within my group to spread awareness.	IoR1	I would likely recommend various mediums to gain more information about the latest digital products to friends and families.

(Table 1 continued)

(Table 1 continued)

Variables	Construct Definition/Item in the Questionnaire	Variables	Construct Definition/Item in the Questionnaire
UB7	Interacting with digital technology requires a lot of mental effort.	IoR2	If friends or families were to search for digital technology, I would likely recommend the one offered by the firm that hosts its online community.
IMC1	I take a keen interest in LGBT-themed advertisements.	IoR3	Based on my experience I'm very likely to recommend digital technology to my friends and families.
IMC2	The LGBTQ-themed display advertisements drove stronger brand recall than the generic advertising.	IoR4	I'm more likely to recommend products and services of an LGBT-friendly company than to its competitor.
IMC3	With the help of advertisements, I learn about new digital technology.	IoR5	I usually prefer to make a purchase from companies that believe in gender-neutral advertisements.
IMC4	Advertising in the LGBTQ media is more impactful to LGBTQ consumers than advertising in the general population media.	IoR6	If I have a good experience with digital technology, then I will recommend their use to my friends.
IMC5	I think brands that use LGBT-themed ads are progressive compared to brands that use generic-themed ads.		

1 represents 'strongly disagree' and 5 represents 'strongly agree'. These variables were considered from several published sources (Agudo-Peregrina et al., 2014; Eagle et al., 1999; Fejes & Lennon, 2000b; Hall & Khan, 2003; Moe & Schweidel, 2011). Table 1 shows how items are composed in our measurement scale. As is customary, we examine the fit, covariance, reliability and validity indices before verifying the constructed hypotheses.

The trustworthiness of the data, sample size, data collection, missing values and EFA factor analysis began in the initial 1900s with Charles Spearman's expansion of the two-factor theory, which sparked further research into its theoretical underpinnings and mathematical concepts (Ekstrom et al., 1976). Factor analysis uses mathematical methods that repeat to simplify the associated measures and creates structures as variables from massive data sets (Child, 2006). Any attempt to identify the most straightforward technique of variable interpretation is referred to as prudence in the language of factor analysis. In today's modern big data analytics, EFA is frequently utilized in fields including market research, consumer evaluation, epidemic modelling, behavioural science, social sciences, medicine, economics and geography.

Sample size: The evaluation of the sample size is the next crucial stage in this process. The number of factors to be extracted and the ratio of elements to factors are the two parameters that determine this. Over 300 instances are typically thought to be sufficient for analysis (Field, 2013). This must be taken into account as it may have a significant impact on how reliable the extracted components are. A high sample size is necessary for factor analysis. According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2001), 50 instances are considered very poor, 100 are considered poor, 200 are fair and 300 are good.

Data collection: Keeping the UTAUT2 model as a base, data were collected in a six-month period and the researcher distributed a total number of 450 questionnaires to self-proclaimed LGBT community members of 5 cities in India. Around 24% of the questionnaires were distributed and collected online, and 76% were collected in person. Before undertaking the survey, the respondents were provided with thorough instructions and information about the objectives of the research. The questionnaire went through the phase of face validation and received advice and suggestions from 12 academic and industrial experts and was considered valid. Table 2 illustrates a detailed explanation of the sample as well as its descriptive information.

Data reliability: Internal consistency, or how strongly connected a group of elements are to one another, is measured by Cronbach's alpha. It is regarded as a gauge of scale reliability. Cronbach's alpha was examined to determine the data's reliability. All value indicators listed in Table 3 were exceptional and far above the required 0.7. Indicator correlations suggest that Cronbach's alpha values should be higher than 0.7 (Henseler et al., 2009).

Analysing EFA data readiness: Various tests should be conducted to evaluate the adequacy of the respondent data for factor analysis before the factors are extracted (Williams et al., 2012). Additionally, the sample size, adequacy test, missing values, consistency and errors in the gathered data are all checked in this step. The tests that evaluate whether data are appropriate for factor analysis involve Bartlett's test of sphericity and the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (Wu et al., 2012, 2013). The KMO index ranges between 0 and 1, with 0.50 being deemed adequate for factor analysis. To use factor analysis, Bartlett's test of sphericity must be significant ($p = 0.05$)

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis of Collected Data.

		Sexual Identity (SI)	City	Awareness	
N	Valid	450	450	450	
	Missing	0	0	0	
Mean		2.78	3.01	2.11	
Median		3.00	3.00	2.00	
Mode		4	4	1	
Std. Deviation		1.229	1.416	1.239	
		Sexual Identity (SI)			
		Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Lesbian (L)	100	22.2	22.2	22.2
	Gay (G)	100	22.2	22.2	44.4
	Bisexual (B)	50	11.1	11.1	55.6
	Transgender (T)	200	44.4	44.4	100
	Total	450	100	100	
		City			
		Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Bangalore	90	20	20	19.8
	Chandigarh	90	20	20	39.6
	Delhi	90	20	20	59.6
	Kolkata	90	20	20	79.8
	Mumbai	90	20	20	100
	Total	450	100	100	
		Awareness			
		Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Totally aware	188	41.8	41.8	41.8
	Somewhat aware	128	28.4	28.4	70.2
	Neutral	63	14.0	14.0	84.2
	Not really aware	39	8.7	8.7	92.9
	Totally unaware	32	7.1	7.1	100
	Total	450	100	100	

Table 3. Reliability Measurement of Reflective Variables (n = 450).

Variables	Code	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha
Behaviour intention	BI	3.74	1.168	0.948
User behaviour	UB	3.64	1.148	0.733
Consumer technology adoption	CTA	3.63	1.211	0.925
Intention to recommend	IoR	3.83	1.137	0.924
Integrated marketing campaign	IMC	3.77	1.186	0.902

(Yu, 2012). According to Table 4, both test findings for this study were within the required ranges to be considered adequate in terms of sample size and adequacy.

Confirmation of the eigenvalue rule criteria for the initial factors set. The third step of EFA confirms the extracted set factors conferring empirically to the eigenvalue rule along with the Scree plot cross-graphical confirmation. The data collected displayed a 67% cumulative percentage of variance explained by a total of 5 components (factors) having an eigenvalue > 1 (Table 5). According to (Kaiser, 1960) the requirement that the eigenvalue is greater than 1 was followed, and the factor load lower cut-off point was set at 0.50 for each item, as also suggested by Hair et al. (2012 and Williams et al. (2012), the graphical interpretation using the Scree plot determines the number of factors extracted by drawing a straight line through the smaller eigenvalues where a departure from this line occurs as shown in Figure 2. Debris or breaks are highlighted here.

Table 4. KMO and Bartlett's Test.

KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.975
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-square	14,633.931
	Df	703
	Sig.	0.000

Table 5. Total Variance Explained.

	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
Component	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	21.776	53.113	53.113	21.776	53.113	53.113	8.717	21.262	21.262
2	1.806	4.405	57.518	1.806	4.405	57.518	8.624	21.035	42.296
3	1.539	3.753	61.271	1.539	3.753	61.271	4.511	11.003	53.300
4	1.310	3.196	64.468	1.310	3.196	64.468	4.506	10.990	64.289
5	1.076	2.626	67.093	1.076	2.626	**67.093**	1.150	2.804	67.093
6	0.988	2.410	69.503						
7	0.967	2.357	71.861						
8	0.770	1.878	73.738						
9	0.650	1.585	75.323						
10	0.636	1.551	76.874						
11	0.615	1.501	78.375						
12	0.598	1.458	79.833						
13	0.557	1.358	81.190						
14	0.513	1.251	82.441						
15	0.489	1.193	83.634						
16	0.454	1.108	84.742						
17	0.435	1.061	85.803						
18	0.428	1.045	86.848						
19	0.418	1.019	87.867						
20	0.404	0.986	88.853						
21	0.378	0.923	89.776						
22	0.374	0.912	90.688						
23	0.331	0.808	91.496						
24	0.318	0.775	92.271						
25	0.303	0.740	93.011						
26	0.289	0.705	93.716						
27	0.266	0.649	94.365						
28	0.258	0.630	94.995						
29	0.250	0.610	95.605						
30	0.238	0.581	96.185						
31	0.227	0.554	96.739						
32	0.214	0.523	97.262						
33	0.205	0.501	97.763						
34	0.194	0.473	98.235						
35	0.180	0.439	98.674						
36	0.167	0.407	99.081						
37	0.158	0.386	99.467						
38	0.141	0.344	99.811						
39	0.076	0.185	99.996						
40	0.002	0.004	100.000						
41	4.664E−17	1.137E−16	100.000						

In the example below (see Figure 2), an inspection of the Scree plot and eigenvalues produced a parting line from linearity coinciding with a 5-factor result. Therefore, this 'Scree test' indicates that the data should be analysed for five factors. The mean values of all the items ranged from 3.63 to 3.83. Standard deviations ranged from 1.211 to 1.86, respectively.

Rotating maximum likelihood factors for factor extraction: Using the maximum likelihood factor rotation approach to extract factors, this data extraction step's goal is to simplify a big number of variables into a small number of elements. This approach of factor extraction combined the Promax rotation technique with the maximum likelihood rotation method. During this step, elements that load whose variables are lower than 0.40 or which are loaded on multiple factors will be primarily eliminated. Five constructs of the UTAUT2 model loaded only on one factor each. Hence, these five-factor sets can be used to assess for confirmatory factor analysis.

In this research study, an example is given of the use of factor analysis to access the factor which impacts the role of IMC in a socio-psychological category, that is, the LGBT community's intention to adopt any technological

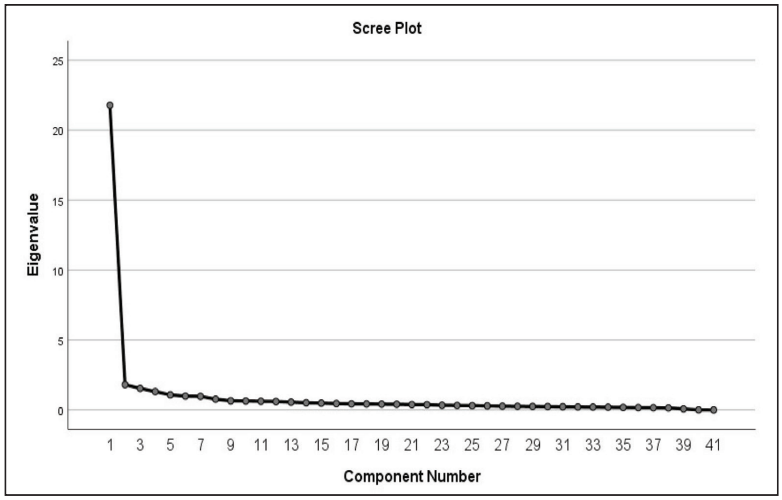

Figure 2. Scree Plot Displaying the Eigenvalues Associated with Five Factors Above Value 1.0.

products. All the extracted latent factors' best set of items are again tested for their reliability and the results indicate high alpha values. This proves that all the EFA extracted items are highly reliable and dependable and are expected to yield superior results if used for hypothesis testing, multivariate regression or structural equation modelling path analysis.

As explained earlier, the methodology adopted in the exploratory factor extraction using maximum likelihood has been carried out with the Promax rotation method. This resulted in extracting seven factors that explicate more than 60% of the variance explained. EFA can be a complex exercise, and many researchers in this course often adopt the rule of thumb or heuristics in their approach to extracting factors. But these do not render precise results. Using the EFA should involve a sequence of well-constructed steps and a multivariate approach.

The steps cited in this research to conduct EFA are intricate statistical procedures involving many sequential steps. As stated earlier, the main aim of this research was to extract the best set of factors that best represent the factors affecting the role of IMC in the acceptance of technology products for the LGBT community.

Naming the Factors Identified

Table 6 shows the loadings of 35 variables on five factors through the component matrix. The cells with regular font in the Table 7 show the loadings that are less than 0.5 as put in SPSS before the application of the test. As the per table, loading values above 0.5 show that individual factors contribute more to variables. Factors in loadings values less than 0.5 do not contribute that well to variables.

Managerial Implication

The study provides several managerial implications to the business practitioners involved in the sector of technology products. These implications enable practitioners or marketers to judge the significant drivers in developing and successfully diffusion of technology products in India. Suppose there is a way that consumers have a higher BI to continue their use and to recommend technology products by implementing it in lifestyles. Therefore, this forms a crucial part of the suppliers' communication efforts. Customer judgement is limited to what he is able to perceive. Our results indicate that consumer technology adoption, user behaviour, IMC, BI and intention to recommend represent a crucial role in the intention to recommend technology products concentrating on the LGBT community. We can say that the service providers must set a standard in communication as well as in product development of technology products at the end of the value chain to create a noticeable benefit. More specifically, products must help customers get things done faster, increase productivity and help them achieve things they care about.

Societal Implication

Speaking about sexual orientation is still an issue of matter and in some places, it is even considered taboo so as the LGBT community too, this study will try to normalize the topic of LGBT as well as provide a glimpse of light to explore the less explored lucrative LGBT market in India. This study showed a concrete result of how important the LGBT community is to its supporters. The providers need to keep in their mind that marketing is challenged in a special way to ask the LGBT customer about its usefulness.

Table 6. Final Pattern Matrix.

Component	1	2	3	4	5
It is easy to become skilful while using digital technology.	0.743				
I easily find the information I'm looking for using the digital technology.	0.736				
I'm more likely to recommend products and services of an LGBT-friendly company than to its competitor.	0.732				
I usually prefer to make a purchase from companies that believe in gender-neutral advertisements.	0.729				
If friends or families were to search for digital technology, I would likely recommend the one offered by the firm that hosts its online community.	0.721				
Learning to operate digital technology is easy for me.	0.708				
Using digital technology makes it easy to find the content I need.	0.693				
Based on my experience I'm very likely to recommend digital technology to my friends and families.	0.675				
I usually recommend digital technology to my friends.		0.731			
I am willing to spend more money than had planned on the digital technology.		0.717			
Reading or hearing a NEGATIVE/POSITIVE customer responses about a product influence my buying decision.		0.709			
I intend to increase my use of digital technology in the future.		0.664			
I spend more time than I had planned on digital technologies		0.664			
I recommend others to use m-shopping/e-shopping.		0.663			
I do not need assistance in using digital technology.		0.632			
I'm confident about my ability to use digital technology.		0.626			
I boycott brands that take anti-LGBTQ political or social stands.		0.623			
I intended to continue to buy products and services via mobile devices in the near future.		0.620			
I believe my interest in m-shopping/e-shopping will increase in the future.		0.612			
I have access to digital technology; I intend to use them.		0.609			
I prefer purchasing products and services using digital technology.		0.579			
I have bought a product or service after seeing it advertised on social media or reading about it on a blog.			0.708		
I discuss the new digital technology within my group to spread awareness.			0.657		
I share about the products and services I have bought with people.			0.648		
I get influenced to buy a product or service after hearing about it from friends or family.			0.546		
If I have a good experience with digital technology, then I will recommend their use to my friends.			0.495		
My relatives/friends think it is useful for me to use digital technology so I intend to continue using it in the future.			0.482		
How aware are you of digital technology?			0.444		
I think brands that use LGBT-themed ads are progressive compared to brands that use generic-themed ads.				0.793	
With the help of advertisements, I learn about new digital technology.				0.748	
Advertisements in LGBT+ print and media had a greater impact than advertisements in non-LGBT+ print and media.				0.730	
I take a keen interest in LGBT-themed advertisements.				0.611	
Advertising in the LGBTQ media is more impactful to LGBTQ consumers than advertising in the general population media.				0.535	
When reading LGBT news stories, I trust LGBT sources more than I trust reporting in the general media.				0.480	
I find the system easy to use (user-friendly).					0.912

Extraction method: principal component analysis.
Rotation method: varimax with kaiser normalization.
a. Rotation converged in six iterations.

Table 7. Factor Matrix.

Factor No.	Factor	Total	Percentage of Variance	Items	Item Loading
1	Consumer technology adoption	21.776	53.113	Using digital technology makes it easy to find the content I need.	0.693
				It is easy to become skilful while using digital technology.	0.743
				Learning to operate digital technology is easy for me.	0.708
				I easily find the information I'm looking for using the digital technology.	0.736
				I do not need assistance in using digital technology.	0.632
2	User behaviour	1.806	4.405	I find the system easy to use (user-friendly).	0.912
				I have bought a product or service after seeing it advertised on social media or reading about it on a blog.	0.708
				I get influenced to buy a product or service after hearing about it from friends or family.	0.546
				Reading or hearing a NEGATIVE/POSITIVE customer response about a product influences my buying decision.	0.709
				I share about the products and services I have bought with people.	0.648
				I discuss the new digital technology within my group to spread awareness.	0.657
3	Integrated marketing campaign	1.539	3.753	I take a keen interest in LGBT-themed advertisements.	0.611
				With the help of advertisements, I learn about new digital technology.	0.748
				Advertising in the LGBTQ media is more impactful to LGBTQ consumers than advertising in the general population media.	0.535
				I think brands that use LGBT-themed ads are progressive compared to brands that use generic-themed ads.	0.793
				Advertisements in LGBT+ print and media had a greater impact than advertisements in non-LGBT+ print and media.	0.730
				I boycott brands that take anti-LGBTQ political or social stands.	0.623
4	Behavioural intention	1.310	3.196	I have access to digital technology; I intend to use them.	0.609
				I intend to increase my use of Digital technology in the future.	0.664
				I am willing to spend more money than had planned on the digital technology.	0.717
				I usually recommend digital technology to my friends.	0.731
				I intended to continue to buy products and services via mobile devices in the near future.	0.620
				I believe my interest in m-shopping/e-shopping will increase in future.	0.612
				I recommend others to use m-shopping/e-shopping.	0.663
				I'm confident about my ability to use digital technology.	0.626
				I prefer purchasing products and services using digital technology.	0.579
5	Intention to recommend	1.076	2.626	If friends or families were to search for digital technology, I would likely recommend the one offered by the firm that hosts its online community.	0.721
				Based on my experience I'm very likely to recommend digital technology to my friends and families.	0.675
				I'm more likely to recommend products and services of an LGBT-friendly company than to its competitor.	0.732
				I usually prefer to make a purchase from companies who believe in gender-neutral advertisements.	0.729
Total		**16.777**	**40.926**		

Our results even showed that the IMC has the greatest impact on the BI of technology products. In all cases, LGBT customers should be proactively made aware of the benefits of technology products along with how the company is beneficial to their societal world. Only in this way can the fear of failure can be reduced over time. Our study makes an important contribution to explaining the BI and use behaviour of technology products work in continuous intention and recommendation in socio-psychological communities such as the LGBT community.

Discussion and Conclusion

UTAUT is considered a fundamental model by previous studies; however, several studies have added various other factors to the UTAUT-extended model and added it to the vast literature of this conceptual base model yet the socio-psychological factor has been ignored. To fill this gap, the present study investigated all the factors which could positively affect the role of IMC on LGBT communities' intention to recommend technology products using the UTAUT-extended model by proposing eight hypotheses and concludes that all eight null hypotheses have been rejected as the value of significant is less than 0.5 and the correlation exists in the data. The finding of this study shows that out of six factors five factors, IMC, BI, UB, CTA and IoR play a major role in the LGBT community when it comes to their continuous intention to recommend technology products. The finding even relayed the impact of socio-psychological on UTAUT 2 from the perceptive of IMC and technology products. In practice, companies should consider the effect of socio-psychological when introducing a technology product to the world to improve its success rate and operational efficiency. This study has some limitations too. First, the finding of this study is limited to the Indian context. In other words, whether the findings are applicable to other contexts, particularly the developed nation context is not known. In addition, the present research only investigated the direct effect of the socio-psychological community on UTATU 2 while its moderating role of it is still unknown. Hence, future studies can examine the impact of socio-psychologic communities on UTAUT2 in developed and remaining oriental regions. They can also test the moderating effects of socio-psychological elements further when integrating them into the UTAUT2. Future studies can also combine the UTAUT2 with other theories, such as innovation diffusion theory, for more accurate implications. The other limitation of this study was that it was limited to the four parts of the community that is lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. However, studies have found that the other groups of the community are equally powerful to bring major changes in the findings. Future researchers can consider the Q+ groups of the communities, to add to the literature and establish the findings in a much more practical manner. The study will even help in analysing how the advertisers can utilize and portray the LGBT community in the campaign so they can be able to capture a major portion of the market.

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‘Let us hold hands’: Lived practices of intimacy among gay youth in urban india

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Original Article

‘Let Us Hold Hands’: Lived Practices of Intimacy Among Gay Youth in Urban India

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Abstract

This article contributes to the growing literature on youth sexualities and intimacy, by centring the lived experiences of self-identified gay youth in the eastern Indian city of Kolkata. It draws on interview narratives of thirteen gay youth between the ages of 19 and 26, living in Kolkata, to unpack two inter-locking ways in which these sexual minority youth co-construct intimacy within the urban space: (a) intimacy as verbal and non-verbal disclosure and (b) embodied intimacy. The findings underline how studying gay youth’s practices of intimacy offer a unique window into sexual politics and urban life in twenty-first-century India.

Keywords

India, gay youth, intimacy, queer studies, critical sexuality studies, semi-structured interviews, lived experience of queer youth

Introduction

This article contributes to the growing literature on youth sexualities and intimacy by centring the lived experiences of young gay men in the eastern Indian city of Kolkata. While sociological scholarship on Indian youth has expanded significantly in recent decades (for an overview, see Bhadra, 2014; Jayaram, 2009; Jeffrey, 2011; Kumar, 2019a), questions around sexuality are largely absent from these writings. Indeed, sexual, erotic, and embodied aspects of social life have been peripheral to

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Indian sociology, and calls have therefore been made for 'queering Indian sociology' (Kumar, 2014), which extends to sociological studies of youth in India as well. This article heeds this call by unpacking the way young gay men in Kolkata 'do' intimacy beyond the private sphere. We draw on their lived experiences to analyse the way their practices of intimacy play out against the backdrop of structural heteronormativity, neoliberalism, and deep-seated social and spatial inequalities.

Till date, there has been little dialogue between critical sexuality studies and youth sociology in India. Barring a few notable exceptions (Boyce & Dasgupta, 2019; Horton, 2020; Kumar, 2022b; Mishra, 2020; Tonini, 2018), the concerns of sexual minority youth and issues of sexual citizenship in India have remained peripheral to Indian sociology, and consequently, theoretical work concerning structures of heteronormativity and sexual governance in India has been thin on the ground (John, 2008b; Kumar, 2020, 2014). Some argue that a broader 'conspiracy of silence' concerning sexuality is at play in India, encompassing the spheres of politics, social movements, and academic scholarship, which has led scholars away from the material sites in which sexuality has for long been embedded and contested (John & Nair, 1998; also see Srivastava 2004). Although academic writing on sexuality in India has witnessed incremental growth in recent years, the field remains marginal within Indian academia, and an 'unspoken academic taboo on the subject' continues to prevail (Kumar, 2022a, p. 1). This article intervenes in this wider landscape and pushes youth sociology in India into new directions by foregrounding intimacy as a generative sociological lens to think about youth sexualities in India. Further, the original empirical data we present here offer important correctives to the dominant theoretical frameworks vis-a-vis the study of heteronormativity, masculinity, and same-sex intimacy developed in the global north.

This article is divided into five sections. In the first section, we present a sociological framework for understanding intimacy, and it is followed by a section on existing research on sexual minority youth in India. Next, we outline the context and methodology of our study of gay youth in Kolkata. The subsequent sections present our findings. The article concludes with our reflection on what gay youths' practices of intimacy in the city of Kolkata reveal about sexual politics and urban life in twenty-first-century India and beyond.

Understanding Intimacy

In recent decades, sociological scholarship on sexuality has drawn attention to the social production of sexual identities, the discourses that seek to categorize and regulate sexual practices, and the ways in which contemporary developments in digital technology and neoliberal capitalism shape sexual lives (Menon, 2012; Plummer, 2012). Retrospectively labelled critical sexualities studies (CSS) (Plummer, 2012), these conceptual developments have had, and continue to foster, close-knit ties with emancipatory politics including the dismantling of 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Rich, 1980). Seen through the CSS prism, sexuality entails a wide range of meanings that encompass erotic desires, practices, identities, subjectivities, and representations (John & Nair, 1998; Scott & Jackson, 1996). In other words, sexuality is not confined to sex acts alone but encompasses sexual feelings and relationships and the ways in which one is or is not defined as sexual by others as well as by themselves (Scott &

Jackson, 1996). Sexuality, therefore, emerges as a site for fundamental political struggles and a medium of emancipation (Giddens, 2008).

Encased within this broader sociological approach to the study of sexualities, 'intimacy' as a concept has come to the fore as a useful means for understanding interpersonal relationships in the contemporary world. Broadly speaking, intimacy has come to signify everyday, embodied, and affective interactions and mutual self-disclosures (Giddens, 2008; Jamieson, 2011, 2002). It refers to the 'quality of close connection between people and the process of building this quality' (Jamieson, 2011). Consequently, 'practices of intimacy' have been defined as 'practices which enable, generate and sustain a subjective sense of closeness and being attuned and special to each other' (Jamieson, 2011). It is intricately linked with sexuality and draws upon the interdependent relationships between the public and the personal (Gabb, 2008). Relatedly, Seidman (2013, p. 13) defines intimacy as 'an historically unique kind of emotional and social closeness featuring the depthful sharing of inner lives, negotiating the conditions and dynamics of the social bond, and aspirations to sustain a sense of personal authenticity in an emotionally thick experience of solidarity'. Feminist and queer approaches to the study of intimacy have contested the way the intimate is placed within the private realm and shown how intimacy serves as 'a primary domain of the microphysics of power in modern societies' wherein 'all forms of close affective encounters are as much matters of state as they are matters of the heart' (Oswin & Olund, 2010, p. 62). Queer perspectives on intimacy further point to the way heteronormative discourses construct certain hierarchies of intimacy where heterosexual, marital, monogamous, and reproductive sexual practices are privileged and valued as 'normal', 'natural', and 'good' while forms of intimate ties and sexual expressions that fall outside the 'charmed circle' of the sexual hierarchy are labelled as 'abnormal', 'unnatural', and 'bad' (Rubin, 2011). Queer scholars have, therefore, challenged the normative conceptions of human intimacy that govern practices of intimacy and their study (Hammack et al., 2019). Building on these critiques, we view intimacy as a window into the interconnections among sexual governance, processes of social recognition, constructions of normative hierarchies of sexuality, and subjective experiences of 'closeness'.

Queer Youth in India

In recent years, India's youth population has received much scholarly attention, especially since two-thirds of the country's population is below the age of 35, making India one of the 'youngest' countries in the world in terms of demographics (Kumar, 2019b). Although data about sexual identity is not collated in the Indian census and no national-level data set exists on sexual identities of the Indian population, Kealy-Bateman (2018) estimates that around 45.4 million people out of India's total population of 1.21 billion are gender and sexual minorities. Nonetheless, sexual minority subjects in India have remained largely invisible within the academic literature, including that of youth studies. To address this gap in the scholarship, in this article, we focus on the narratives of one sexual minority group in India: gay men. Needless to say, the lived experiences of gay men are in no way representative of all sexual minorities in India, but their accounts of everyday life and practices of same-sex intimacy offer a crucial window into the structures of sexual governance

and gender regimes in urban India—social processes which remain underexplored in the extant sociological literature. To understand young gay men's practices of intimacy in Kolkata, in what follows, we situate their lives in the wider historical, socio-legal, and cultural context.

Non-normative sexual identities and expressions have been documented in Indian literary and cultural texts for centuries, and over the years, a plethora of localized categories have been deployed across Indian languages to denote non-heterosexual intimate ties (see Vanita, 2002; Vanita & Kidwai, 2008). However, the reference point for contemporary debates around queer lives in India is a colonial-era anti-sodomy law inscribed in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) which criminalized same-sex acts. Introduced in 1860, this law imposed a Victorian discourse on sodomy in a country where homosocial/homoerotic relations have always existed and even received recognition (see Vanita, 2002). Section 377 of the IPC *did not* proclaim homosexuality to be illegal per se but criminalized carnal intercourse *against the order of nature* which includes any sexual act outside the heterosexual, procreative norm. It draws on the Buggery Act of 1533, which Henry VIII introduced in England. In a landmark judgement on 2 July 2009, the Delhi High Court read down Section 377 and decriminalized same-sex acts between consenting adults, but within a few years, the Supreme Court of India reversed Delhi High Court's 2009 verdict, and on 11 December 2013, it 're-criminalized' carnal intercourse *against the order of nature*. After years of protests and mobilization by LGBTQ+ groups, on 6th September 2018, the Supreme Court of India finally struck down Section 377 and deemed it unconstitutional. Inside the courtroom, Justice Indu Malhotra accepted that '[h]istory owes an apology to the members of this [LGBTQ+] community and their families, for the delay in providing redress for the ignominy and ostracism that they have suffered through the centuries' on account of this law (qtd in Majumdar, 2018). Indeed, Section 377 has been abused time and again by the police and members of the public to intimidate, harass, and even blackmail LGBTQ+ people across the country (Dore, 2015).

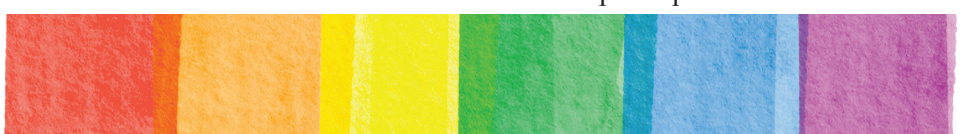
A singular engagement with law's flashpoints, like these landmark judgements, has been criticized for producing a truncated history of queer lives in India (Sircar, 2017; Sircar & Jain, 2012). Nonetheless, these legal crossroads remain particularly significant—as Bose (2014) reminds us—in fixing a timeline for the history of LGBTQ+ intimate practices and political struggles in India. At the same time, legal reforms alone have not dramatically changed the everyday lives of queer youth in India (Kumar, 2020). As a queer participant in Moitra et al.'s (2021) study put it, despite 'celebrating [the reading down of] 377, we are not free, our desires are still compartmentalized'. Queer activists in India continue to report how 'the spirit of 377 still looms' large in the everyday lives of LGBTQ+ youth in the country (Shahani, 2020, p. 91). Those advocating for LGBTQ+ rights in India point out that the repealing of the anti-sodomy law only brought 'momentary happiness' (Sappho for Equality, 2019, p. 3) without structural changes. In other words, this emergent post-2018 literature point to broad continuities in the everyday experiences of and social attitude towards queer people in India who continue to face discrimination, everyday violence, and exclusion on the basis of their gender expression, sexual identity and practices. These injustices and structural inequalities co-exist alongside the steady growth in queer-themed literary works in India and yearly pride marches

across Indian cities, a trend which started in Kolkata in 1999 (Singh, 2022). While pride parades and queer representation in cultural texts offer sporadic avenues of visibility, they have not translated into large-scale structural changes in social attitudes and public policy.

Homophobia and heteronormativity are deeply embedded across social institutions in India, which structure social attitude towards sexual minorities and mediate everyday lives of LGBTQ+ youth in the country. However, Vanita and Kidwai (2008) argue that it was only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century colonial India that dissipated strands of pre-colonial homophobia were transformed into virulent proportions, and these colonial-era discourses on sexuality continue to organize social relations in India today. The widespread prevalence of homophobia in contemporary India is reflected in the few public attitude surveys done on this topic. The 2016 Youth Survey, conducted by Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) in partnership with Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS), among 15–34 olds (n = 6122) found that 61% considered same-sex relationships to be 'wrong', while only 14% considered it 'right' (CSDS-KAS, 2017). A more recent survey of 24,092 respondents in 12 Indian states again found that the majority of respondents strongly disagreed with the idea that 'sexual relationship between two men or two women should be accepted in society', and only 10% accepted same-sex couples (Centre for Regional Political Economy, 2019). These survey results paint a grim picture and drive home the fact that non-normative sexual identities and relationships continue to be stigmatized and marginalized in India, and the lives of queer youth are still negatively impacted. Against this backdrop, there is little in the way of empirical studies that document the ways in which sexual minority youth in India establish and sustain intimate relations as they continue to negotiate and challenge heteronormative discourse and institutions that actively de-legitimize and pathologize their sexualities. Sexual minority youth, as Driver (2008, p. 1) points out, 'challenge us to rethink the very status of gender, generation, sexuality, and culture, and they push us to become nuanced in the ways we read, watch, and listen to young people telling their own stories and envisioning their futures'. We, therefore, set out to address the gaps in the extant literature by engaging with the lived experiences of young gay men in Kolkata, and we do so in critical dialogue with the conceptual framework of intimacy, which we believe can be expanded and further developed to capture the lived realities of gay youth in urban India.

The Study: Methods and Context

In this article, we draw on a qualitative study with young gay men in the Indian city of Kolkata. For this project, we adopted a participatory and informal approach that others working with queer youth in India have found useful (Patnaik, 2014; Sharma, 2006). At the time, both authors lived in the city. Initially, we reached out to self-identifying gay youth above the age of eighteen through our personal networks and informed them about the study. We made sure that prospective participants were fully aware of the remit of the project, and we answered any queries they had about it. Those interested in the project self-selected and contacted us to take part in interviews. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before interviews



were conducted. At the time of recruiting participants, same-sex sexual acts were still criminalized in India, and given the wider social stigma around non-normative sexualities, tapping into our own social networks for locating potential participants was the most appropriate way of recruiting this hard-to-reach and marginalized group of youth (Edwards, 2004). While recruiting participants from personal networks, we ensured that prospective participants were fully informed about their right not to answer any question or to terminate their participation at any point without having to give a reason. Besides, we also recruited participants through snowballing. Rather than adopting structured interview schedules, we chose to let informal conversations and semi-structured interviews be the mainstay of our methods. Participants were interviewed individually to ensure that their participation in the study remained confidential. During the course of our data collection, we also understood that many of our participants do not publicly proclaim their sexuality, and thus, our participatory recruitment method helped in strengthening trust and in gaining in-depth data. The participants' names have been anonymized to protect their identity. Overall, our methodological approach and data collection were guided by the code of ethics issued by the Indian Sociological Society.

The empirical materials presented in this article are drawn from two sets of field-work conducted between the summers of 2015 and 2016. A total of 13 gay youth between ages of 19 and 26 participated in interviews. All of them, except one, were either current university students or recent graduates. Reflecting the ethnic diversity of the city, the sample included those who identify their ethnicity as Bengali (6), Gorkha (2), Bhutia (2), Tamang (1), Lepcha (1) and Mizo (1). All of them have either grown up in and around the city of Kolkata or have made their home in the city for education or work. Most importantly for the study, they have had same-sex intimate partners while living in the city for quite a few years. They were all English-educated, and the interviews were conducted primarily in English with occasional usage of Bangla or Nepali in a few cases. All interviews were transcribed verbatim by the authors—who carried out translation in relevant cases—and the data was interpreted using a thematic analysis framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to discern patterns across participants' narratives and construct themes around their practices of intimacy.

Intimacy in the Everyday Lives of Gay Youth in Kolkata

Adopting a participatory approach, we asked our participants about their subjective understanding of the term 'intimacy' and how it relates to their own experiences. It bears noting that at the time of the interview, all participants were either in a same-sex relationship or had been in one in the recent past. Each one of them spoke about a range of practices and activities that they counted as 'intimate'. We were particularly interested in their practices of intimacy in spaces outside the 'private' realm. The repertoire which emerged in that public context covered a wider ground which included not only bodily and sexual contact but also a whole tapestry of emotional, cognitive, and culturally-inflected ways of 'doing' intimacy. Thematic analysis of participants' narratives revealed two broad themes which will be elaborated in the rest of this article, namely (a) intimacy as verbal and non-verbal disclosure and (b) embodied intimacy. The themes are not self-contained but inform each other in different ways.

Intimacy as Verbal and Non-verbal Disclosure

> We went together in public, in a restaurant. He [the partner] called me to come to the restaurant. He waited for me, just like he did all the bookings […] Then I come. We talked, while holding our hands, not more than that… [But] the verbal, *the verbal is different*.

Remsanga is 24 years old and has been living in Kolkata for more than six years. Having grown up in a Mizo-Christian family, he now works in an administrative capacity in the healthcare industry. In the above excerpt, he describes his experiences of going out to a restaurant with his same-sex partner. His recalling ties together the two themes we have identified, that is, the embodiment of intimate practice and intimacy as mutual disclosure. His invocation of 'holding' hands and nothing 'more than that' reflects how embodied practices of intimacy are negotiated in the (semi) public places of Kolkata by young gay men, which we will discuss at length in the next section. The concluding part of his excerpt brings into sharp relief an important dimension of 'doing' intimacy, which he describes as 'verbal' intimacy. Remsanga is not only a sexual minority youth in the city but also a visibly marked ethnic minority. He went on to clarify that despite these factors, he is not afraid of what others say or comment upon; he simply does not feel comfortable in establishing any form of tactile intimacy with his partner in a public setting except a discrete moment of holding each other's hands in a restaurant. At the same time, he creates greater room for practising intimacy through 'the verbal': by talking to his partner, sharing each other's stories, and in doing so, nurturing their intimate bond. They become special and important in each other's lives not only through bodily or sexual contacts but also importantly through affective and communicative self-disclosures in non-private settings.

Giddens' (2008) argument around the 'transformation of intimacy' in the late modern world pivots on this idea of mutual self-disclosure of individuals as reflexive subjects. This form of intimacy of the self, rather than intimacy of the body, relies on *close association* with and *privileged knowledge* of each other and is one of the crucial practices that can help create and sustain intimacy (Jamieson, 2002, 2011). However, as Jamieson (2011) correctly points out, 'disclosing intimacy' is by no means the only type of intimate practice that can generate and sustain the subjective experience of closeness.

Surjo's account lends another layer of complexity to these questions. He is 26 years old and has grown up in a middle-class Bengali household in southern Kolkata. After passing a state-wide entrance examination, he secured admission in a dental college. It was there that he met his current boyfriend Tamal. During our interview with Surjo, he described how they started dating and how their relationship grew:

> We used to text each other all the time. In those days, we had black and white Nokia mobiles. That was how we mostly shared our feelings. In fact, our close circle of friends came to know about us when someone had accidentally read one of our SMS-es

Even when hanging out with their friends, Surjo went on to tell us that they would text each other if they wanted to share something privately with each other. His face was teeming with nostalgia and pride, as he sat down to talk to us about himself and Tamal. For him, those text messages and the old mobile phones not only served as a

vehicle for affective exchanges but also constituted material components enmeshed in their shared history of constructing their intimate relationship. When in public spaces, they often made use of encoded sign languages that only the two of them understood. Such signs were not only a way of communicating their desires and affections in circumstances when they felt 'silenced' by spatial heteronormativity but also constituted a pool of shared and privilege body of knowledge that only they, and no one else, had a key to. These are indeed forms of non-verbal, non-tactile practices of intimacy in action which reinforce the special quality of close connection, of being attuned to each other, that theorists of intimacy often refer to.

We also came across several other forms of non-bodily or non-verbal intimate practices. Jonathan is a 21-year-old student, who had grown up in the northern part of the state of West Bengal and has been living in Kolkata for four years. He described a weekly ritual that he and his boyfriend Sunil have developed: writing poems to each other. He explained that one of them would elect a theme or a topic and would compose a piece of poetry, and the other would then write a poem in reply to it. He shared a snippet of his poetry with us:

> My heart attempts to escape from its discreet cage;
> its been awakened from its cold tomb like Juliet.
> But I look not for blade or arsenic or even lust.
> It's something else; that compels us to lie in each others'
> bosoms like tender lip-petals of a flower that has just bloomed.
> That sways and rocks forth in a wind that may die out anytime.

Jonathan's poem, which he is happy for us to share, speaks to the ways in which he and Sunil construct their own narratives of closeness and being special to each other. The act of writing itself serves as a practice of 'doing' intimacy, an intimacy of the self as distinct from tactile intimacy. However, the articulation of close feelings has the potential, as Gabb (2008) notes, to elicit physical sensations in one's intimate partner. We do not have the reaction of the recipient of this poem to draw such an analytic link here, but we do know from Jonathan's account that no one else, not even their close friends, have access to these texts—produced, exchanged, and stored on a weekly basis as an archive of their growing relationship. Moreover, this act of self-disclosure, of sharing thoughts and feeling, metaphorically writes the body of the non-normative sexual subject into it. In disclosing himself to the other in the intimate dyad, Jonathan is re-discovering himself and indeed celebrating his embodied sexuality, which remains stigmatized and marginalized within the public sphere in Kolkata. It is a contestation and self-assertion outside the codes of political activism, engendered through an inwardly pursued practice of intimacy with his partner. This is where a transformative political potential is encased in the 'doing' of intimacy.

Taken in isolation, none of these practices in themselves are sufficient in producing intimacy, but the above instances have shown that the various demonstrations and declarations of affection operate in concert with these and many other practices of intimacy. As Jamieson (2011) has noted, intimacy is often built by practices which are not exclusively about doing intimacy, and especially in the case of non-normative sexual subjects reeling under censure and institutionalized homophobia, the 'doing' of intimacy through such practices carries emancipatory possibilities.

Embodied Intimacy

A key theme that emerged from our data centred around tactile dimensions of intimacy. During our conversations, the gay youth in our study reflected upon the way they negotiated public spaces in the city to construct non-verbal, bodily intimacy. The following is an excerpt from our interview with John, a 21-year-old student:

> Interviewer: What kind of bodily intimacy have you shared with your partner in a public or semi-public space?
> John: Holding hands; anything more draws attention.
> Interviewer: Can you give me an example?
> John: I think usually, we are still frightened to come out. So, we usually don't show it [bodily intimacy]. And if you are not that feminine or distinctive in your characteristics, then you can actually blend in and look like brothers and look like friends, very close friends.

John's practices of bodily intimacy with his partner brings the question of masculinity to the forefront of the debate. As long as one can 'blend in', one can unequivocally appear as 'close friends' who are culturally sanctioned to be physically close and even hold hands. Effeminacy, thereby, emerges as a potent public marker that aligns male bodies with non-normative, so-called 'unnatural', sexuality and gives one away, but John is not alone in policing his corporeal mannerisms to 'blend in' or 'pass' as straight. He uses the cultural acceptance of homosocial tactility among 'close friends' as a protection against homophobic abuses, including name-calling, that he has experienced in the city on multiple occasions.

Surjo (26) had a similar experience. He told us during the interview that: 'We never hugged or held hands in public. But then when we did, we found no one cares! We can just pass off as friends. So, we were like: "let's hold hands!"'

Both John's and Surjo's narratives offer a unique window into the public cultures of homosociality in urban India and the opportunities they create for same-sex tacitly among gay couples. There are two divergent strands that engender practices of same-sex tactile intimacy in the public spaces of Indian cities. As far as legal frameworks are concerned, Section 294 of the IPC outlaws 'obscene acts' in public spaces. Although this Section does not clearly define what constitutes 'obscenity', its provision continues to be used by the local police to intimidate, harass, and even arrest heterosexual couples found physically intimate or kissing in public parks, and it can very well be used to arrest non-heterosexual couples, but the instances are very rare. At the same time, Chatterjee (2014) has argued that in contemporary India, there exists a broad prevalence amongst majority of 'non-English educated' men, especially those in 'blue-collar professions', to freely participate in acts of homosocial tactility such as holding hands or embracing in public which they construe as 'brotherly', 'friendly', and thus unequivocally asexual. For instance, the historian Arthur Dudney (2015), while writing about contemporary Delhi, talks about two young men—presumably in their late teens or early twenties—whom he encountered in the metro:

> They were smartly dressed but evidence of their profession, painting, was spattered in their hair and caked in their fingernails… What was notable but also perfectly mundane was that their hands were clasped around the same hold.

> In an Anglo-American context, the only explanation for this intimacy would be that the two men were lovers. In India, it does not signal that at all. First-time visitors to Delhi from the West often declare to me wide-eyed that 'India is really liberal when it comes to homosexuality'. They have this impression because male friendship, especially the further away from wealth and English-medium education one looks, tends to be much more physical in India than in the West… For all anyone knows, the two men on the train might have been lovers, their secret protected by the very fact that no one would have suspected it.

What Chatterjee (2014) and Dudley (2015) imply is not only the fact that male friendship is much more publicly tactile amongst a large section of Indians but also they bring home the point that the English-medium educated and the white-collar professionals in Indian cities have come to attach, through mediatized consumption, distinctive connotations to same-sex bodily intimacy, be it holding hands or embracing in the public. Evidently, the image of same-sex individuals holding hands has been pivotal to queer rights movements globally with campaigns such as #HoldTight emerging around Auckland Pride or in the Netherlands where, in the wake of a homophobic attack, hundreds of Dutch men including government ministers walked the streets holding hands as a mark of solidarity. The fact that Surjo, an English-medium educated middle-class man, initially hesitated was squarely on account of his own learned cultural reflexes of what such an act signifies, but when he did hold hands with his partner, the impression that no one 'cared' gestures towards a different set of connotations attached to the same act in the public eye which absolves them from being 'suspected' in a country where even the youth continue to foster deep-seated homophobia (CSDS-KAS, 2017). In other words, homosocial tactility is, more often than not, read in the public places of India as expressions of friendship and brotherhood without any links being drawn to sexuality. This prevalent cultural script affords these young gay men with, what de Certeau (1984) calls, 'tactics' through which they gain synchronic access to public spaces via a politics of agency-within-constraints, where opportunities provided by the space itself are subversively utilized. The relief and the freedom gained through such access and the realization that they can indeed 'hold hands' underpin a crescendo in their own non-normative sexual politics. This finding also reveals the limits of prevalent sociological theories about masculinity, homophobia, and intimacy among men that have been developed in the global north. One of the widely-used theories in this field, the inclusive masculinity theory, is founded on the claim that masculinities in the global north are becoming less hierarchical and more inclusive with men displaying more tactile behaviour among themselves because they no longer fear that such practices will raise suspicion of homosexuality (Anderson, 2013). The decline in homohysteria, that is 'the fear of being socially perceived as gay' (Andersona & McCormack, 2018, p. 548), is held responsible for the increasing prevalence of peer tactility among men including heterosexual men. However, our findings show that in contemporary urban India, there is a great deal of acceptability and widespread practice of tactility among men in public, while at the same time, homohysteria and homophobia remain rampant as demonstrated by the social attitude surveys discussed earlier in the article.

Furthermore, the scenario presented by Surjo feeds into a widening gulf between what English-educated urban young gay men like him aspire for, in the wake of major changes in other parts of the world as far as queer rights are concerned, and the materiality of their present circumstances. Surjo went on to tell us about his, and

his partner's, future plans. They were planning to pursue postgraduate studies abroad and were particularly exploring the options and scholarships available for them in Ireland. On being asked why they were so keen on Ireland, he referred to the advancement in their subject area in that country and laid stress on the constitutional referendum in Ireland which legalized same-sex marriage by a popular vote in May 2015. The interview took place in June 2015 just after a month of that referendum which, Surjo repeated, made Ireland a very attractive choice for them.

At the same time, boundaries are constantly being redrawn around intimate behaviours in response to both the public/private distinction and the internal dynamics of intimate relationships. When it comes to bodily intimacy, Abhishek (23) explains:

> I don't like to kiss and all in public places. I think it should be a little more private, between you and your partner […]. Like see, holding hands is natural and cool; I don't mind. But kissing in a park, I would mind that cuz I don't want to do that.

Construction of embodied intimacy in the public sphere also involves internal negotiations within the dyad, as 25 years-old student Rajib told us: 'Sometimes, my partner was not comfortable. But I have always been very carefree about displaying affection in public'.

There are diverse ways in which these young urban gay men 'do' non-verbal, bodily intimacy. These practices of bodily intimacy outside the private sphere are in turn informed by these youth's consumption of transnational media and news which present them with aspirations for the future and lend newer meanings to their intimate practices which can be at odds with the understanding of public homosocial tactility that many Indians harbour. These forms of international media and news outlets became more accessible to middle-class Indians since the liberalization of the Indian economy in the 1990s and has now become extremely commonplace in the era of mobile technologies and the internet.

The two main themes perused in our analyses—intimacy as self-disclosure and as embodied practice—feed off one another because as Jamieson (2002) argues, if there is a completeness of the intimacy of the self then it is only taken forward by bodily intimacy. The two are interlocked. Indeed, the body, in itself, becomes a mobile space that passes through the cartographies of law, religion, culture, and politics to emerge as a multivalent site that locates itself both within and beyond the public/private divide to chart novel epistemic maps. This epistemic reimagining of the non-normative body is the effective prelude in tracing back these questions of intimate practices and looking afresh at how to sociologically engage with these micro-politics of youth lives. This can consequently have direct implications in the way emancipatory politics around these questions are formulated.

Conclusion

In this article, we deployed the conceptual framework of 'intimacy' to bring into relief the practices through which self-identified gay youth in Kolkata foster the quality of close connection with their intimate partners despite the heteronormative structures that actively seek to de-legitimize, pathologize, and even criminalize their sexualities and personal relationships. The range of intimate practice—embodied or

otherwise that we identified 'cumulatively and in combination enable, create and sustain a sense of a close and special quality of a relationship between people' (Jamieson, 2011). In turn, these practices of intimacy serve as building blocks of 'tactical' interventions into the social imaginary that has the potential to trigger contestations at the micro-institutional and personal levels. Though they may not necessarily conjoin the major strands of activism, these practices of intimacy, as forms of personal 'projects', can in themselves be of consequence in effecting change and transforming lives in the everyday setting.

Nevertheless, there are limits to what we can infer from our data and analyses. For the gay youth in our study, intimate relationships do stand for 'personal relationships that are subjectively experienced', but unlike Jamieson's (2011) formulation, they lack social recognition with an entire gamut of social, religious, cultural and political institutions, rendering these 'personal relationships' as 'unnatural' and 'sinful'. It is within these macrostructural constraints that these young people creatively use the prevalent codes of homosocial tactility to their advantage. Indeed, this lack of social recognition can and does facilitate the construction of newer forms of social interventions. Campaigns and protests are afoot and support networks are being built by dedicated activists to bolster the cause of sexual minorities in Kolkata and the rest of the country. The Kolkata Rainbow Pride Walk has become the longest-running event of its kind in South Asia, bringing these debates to the heart of the city. For future studies, some of the themes broached in our analysis, such as the complex relationship between masculinity and homophobia in India, warrant further attention. Moreover, our sample too had its own biases. The economic and cultural capital at the disposal of our participants play an important role in their understanding and negotiation of intimacy within the city. Those young gay men outside the city, or those belonging to disadvantaged economic groups, are still largely absent from existing body of research.

Our findings, therefore, highlight some of the areas of youth lives that have categorically been under-researched in India. We attempted to pay attention to the fragments and the voices that otherwise slip under the radar. In doing so, we concur with Back (2007) that the task of sociology is to admit these voices and pay them their coveted attention, thereby giving a hearing to those who are not listened to. By bringing questions of intimacy and sexuality to the forefront, we not only wanted to contribute to the 'queering' of Indian sociology (Kumar, 2014) but also sought to wrest the agenda of youth research in India away from the 'twin tracks' of life-transition and sub-culture (see Bhadra 2014) and re-orient the transformative engagements of contemporary youth lives, thus gesturing towards the 'queering' of youth studies itself as Driver (2008) would put it. Our findings offer crucial correctives to dominant theories about masculinity and homophobia that have been developed in the global north such as the inclusive masculinity theory which argues that tactility among men has become more publicly acceptable and widespread because of decline in homohysteria (Anderson, 2013). On the contrary, we have shown in this article how tacticity among men is widely practiced in the public spaces of India while homophobia remains high and non-normative sexual identities continue to be stigmatized. More research on sexual minority youth and their practices of intimacy in the global south is needed to further develop these lines of sociological enquiry.

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Am I too straight for the gay people, am I too gay for the straight people

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Original Article

'Am I Too Straight for the Gay People, Am I Too Gay for the Straight People?': A Qualitative Analysis of How Young Bisexual Women Navigate Self-presentation on Dating Apps

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Abstract

Many young people with marginalized sexual identities still experience discrimination and discomfort when searching for relationships on digital networks. Young bisexual women who are searching for/confirming their identities consistently face 'binegativity', typified by marginalization, hypersexualization, and erasure, despite some positive affordances of online connecting. Based on a small-scale qualitative study with young women aged 18–24, this article considers the ways in which young bisexual women construct and navigate their online dating profiles. Drawing on Goffman's ideas of self-presentation and an examination of how visual clues are supported by verbal statements, this article argues that bisexual young women's engagement with dating apps requires identity modulation and produces ambivalent affective formations. Their experiences of digital networked spaces are simultaneously shaped by a search for identity, agency, pleasures as well as frustrations and hateful messaging.

Keywords

Affect management, ambivalence, attention economy, bi gaze, bi-negativity, bisexuality, managing the self, nonmonosexuality, reflexivity

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Introduction

Contemporary young people's subjectivity and sociality has many ties to digital culture industries, and the socio-technological affordances by dating apps are now firmly enmeshed in young people's everyday lives in various ways (Buckingham, 2007; boyd, 2014; Hart, 2015). For heterosexuals, the internet as a social intermediary in the search for partners and/or hookups started to surpass the traditional locations for meeting partners such as work or family connections in the 1990s. Worldwide people aged 18–29 and 30–44 are now the largest user segments of dating apps (Bandinelli & Gandini, 2022), and whilst user penetration varies between countries the UK, the location of this study, has been in the top five for a number of years (Statista, 2022). The impact on non-heterosexuals has been particularly significant, with a reported 60% of same-sex couples meeting online since 2008 and rising (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012).

Dating apps have firmly displaced both internet dating and bars/the LGBTQ+ scene as key sites for same-sex dating, and many nonmonosexual people enter digital spaces assuming that they are conducive to finding sexual partners. Nevertheless, despite the promise of algorithmically fixed partner searches recent research attests that digital platforms reproduce, rather than solve, the uncertainty of contemporary romance for young people (Bandinelli & Gandini, 2022). Despite the optimization and the efficiency promised by digital technologies, young people, who are navigating their still (emerging) sexual identities, are confronted with the (im)possibility of evaluating the self-branded profiles in time frames that are both extended and contracted (Hobbs et al., 2016) and judge moral character (Olivera-La Rosa et al., 2019). In addition, if meeting a sexual partner is the goal of using dating apps leaving the online imaginary and meeting a person still remains another hurdle to overcome. Digitally networked intimacy is, of course, not necessarily about finding (long term) partner(s) but also about flirting, courtship and ongoing search for love and fulfilment (Hobbs et al., 2016), being entertained by the gamified practices of 'relation-shopping' (Heino et al., 2010) and the search for connections with 'queer communities' (Pym et al., 2021).

Due to its prominence and user penetration, *Tinder* has received a considerable amount of attention (see, for example, Ferris & Duguay, 2020; Hobbs et al., 2016) but has been argued to shape women's experiences, both heterosexual and bi women, through heteronormative and gendered discourses and power structures (Young & Roberts, 2021), and as 'not queer friendly' (Pond & Farvid, 2017). This is even more the case for young women for whom claiming identity is fluid, complicated and a complex process that is mapped against situating themselves against popular feminine ideals, and negotiating the world of online narratives of the self (Morrison, 2016). 'Networked publics' (boyd, 2014) are challenging teens and young adults' experimentations with processes of developing sexual identities in that they present specific, normative forms of gendered and sexualized self-presentation which underpin constructions of digital sexual subjectivities (Ringrose, 2013). For many young bisexual women, apps like *HER* or *Bumble* appear as more women-friendly, inclusive of gender-diverse individuals and people of marginalized sexualities, but for many users, they simply do not have enough members to offer a wide choice of prospective partners (Pond & Farvid, 2017).

Other popular dating apps such as *Grindr*, *Hinge*, *Bumble* and *PlentyOfFish* offer a larger number of possible partners with whom to interact for young bisexual women. Although none of these apps were designed to be specifically inclusive of

marginalized identities, many have expanded the options offered to users for self-presentation (although possible driven by a drive to increase revenue). In 2019 *Tinder* introduced 50 new, inclusive gender options (replacing its previous options of 'man' or 'woman), and 9 sexual orientations. Meanwhile, in a bid to change power dynamics *Bumble's* does not allow men to message women first (Young & Roberts, 2021) and *Hinge* uses prompts to encourage discussion through the app, rather than using a picture-based formula to avoid the superficiality of aesthetic self-presentation. Thus, online dating apps are changing, and appear to be becoming more inclusive of gender diverse individuals, people of marginalized sexualities, and invested in making the navigation of online dating less daunting for women. However, changing the software of an app may not fundamentally change some of the discriminatory and stigmatizing experiences faced by queer people in their use of online dating apps (Nelson, 2020a,b; Pond & Farvid, 2017; Pym et al., 2021).

Furthering the discomfort felt by many queer people who use dating apps, many women face harassment and unwanted attention online. They have to deal with online sexual shaming and the misogynistic behaviour subjected to while using dating apps, from 'attacks on appearance', 'sexualized and gendered slurs' and 'sexual harassment and violence' (Thompson, 2018, p. 73). Indeed, networked landscapes require affective management as they work with and through sexual shaming which is not just restricted to online activist feminist campaigns such as *#MeToo* (Paasonen, 2021; Sundén & Paasonen, 2020). Networked dating apps also require women to use management of affect, or 'identity modulation', with nonmonosexual women particularly having to balance self-disclosure and emphasis on queer identities alongside excluding information that would identify them (Ferris & Duguay, 2020).

The article proceeds with setting out a discussion of youth, women and bisexuality and a conceptual framework for investigating self-presentation on dating apps drawing on Goffman's (1959) ideas of dramaturgical metaphors and front stage performances. A methodological section will provide the context of the research before presenting an analysis of young women's ambivalent networked formations on dating apps.

Conceptualizing Bisexuality

Following other research, and in order to garner a large enough sample, this research follows a tradition of using bisexuality as an umbrella approach, rather than distinguishing it from other nonmonosexual identities, such as fluid sexuality, pansexuality, plurisexuality, omnisexuality or other terms that are emerging (Flanders et al., 2017; Hayfield, 2021). Bisexuality can be found to be defined in a multitude of ways—and as a behaviour, as a self-identity, and as a binary or nonbinary identity—although it is also argued that identity and behaviour should not be treated as interchangeable (see, for instance, Gerodetti, 2004). Sexual identity label choice has also been shown to be dependent on age, class, or race and it has been suggested that younger generation diverge from previous generations' identity labels (Flanders et al., 2017). Furthermore, if research on bisexuality has been relatively scarce, researcher on young bisexual women has been scarcer (Flanders et al., 2017). For definitional purposes of the paper we follow Ochs's (2014, cited in Hayfield 2021, p. 7) definition of bisexuality which is: 'the potential to be attracted, romantically

and/or sexually, to people of more than one sex and/or gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree'.

In many areas of public debate, such as sexualities scholarship, the media as well as sexual minority politics bisexuality often remains marginalized, erased or minimally included, thereby consolidating the invisibility of bisexual identities and subjectivities (Lahti, 2020; Maliepaard & Baumgartner, 2020; Monro et al., 2017). It has been argued bisexuals face erasure or invisibility through a multiplicity of stereotypes, microaggressions or 'binegativity' (Israel, 2018; Hayfield, 2020; Lahti, 2020). Key to this is 'the monosexual assumption', which purports that people can only be attracted to people of one gender, leading to the perception of bisexuals in mixed-gender relationships as straight, and bisexuals in same-gender relationships as lesbian or gay (Israel, 2018). The 'monosexual assumption'—or mononormativity—is also perpetuated by the view of bisexuality as a 'phase' or form of experimentation, either in a bid for attention, or a 'stop on the way to lesbian or gay identity' (Hayfield, 2020; Lahti, 2020).

Early research has contended that bisexual people face a 'double discrimination' in relation to both homophobia and biphobia (Ochs, 1996) and for being neither 'insiders' or 'outsiders' of gay communities. More recently researchers prefer to acknowledge multiple or intersectional aspects of marginalization, discrimination and stigmatization (Lahti, 2020). Exploring biphobia beyond marginalization and erasure, Israel and Mohr's (2004) found that many bisexual people face judgement as hyper-sexual, 'obsessed with sex', and unable to be loyal and monogamous. Much of the negative stigma faced by bisexual people can be seen as rooted in a conflation of bisexuality and polygamy, which 'conjures images of sexual betrayal' (Garber, 2000, p. 370). This stereotype of hyper-sexuality when using dating apps has been documented by Pond and Farvid (2017) where many bisexual women were approached online by couples 'seeking women for a threesome'. Other stereotypes of bisexuals include being 'fence-sitters' with 'wishy-washy' or 'AC-DC' sexual orientations (Garber, 2000). These stigmatizing notions also produce a view of bisexuals as greedy, with a desire to 'have it both ways', or as 'having [their] cake and eating it, too' (Garber, 2000, p. 38).

There has been a tradition of exploring bisexuality through recurring cultural conceptions, attitudes and stereotypes by researchers who want to emphasize wider context and harmful attitudes (Lahti, 2020). But theorizing bisexualities also needs to pay attention to pleasure and agency, rather than merely through 'binegativity' which runs the 'risk of universalizing and oversimplifying bisexual experiences and creating a polished version of it' (Lahti, 2020, p. 123). This is perhaps especially relevant for considering the emerging affective landscapes for young bisexual women with and through networked intimacy.

Performing the Self

Research on bisexual visibility has noted a lack of a 'distinct bisexual visual identity' (Nelson, 2020a,b; Hayfield, 2020; 2021), making it important to understand how young bisexual women may attempt to construct online identities which are successfully read as bisexual. Goffman's (1959) ideas on *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* provides a useful starting point here as he considers everyday interactions with

others as well-designed performances, enacted to 'convey an impression to others which it is in his*[/her/their]* interests to convey' (Goffman, 1959, p. 16). The dramaturgical metaphor conceptualizes the ways in which strategies of impression management are used within social milieu and lead to 'performances' that are enacted by an individual as a 'front'; that is, it 'define[s] the situation' for the 'audience' who witnesses it (Goffman, 1959). In changing the performance based upon the characteristics and reactions of the audience, a performer can, in theory, manipulate the impression they present, thereby managing impressions.

Goffman's 'front' also refers to the physical props which allow a performance to be viewed as authentic, which includes 'setting', 'scenery' and 'stage props' (Goffman, 1959, pp. 32–33). These must all be part of a coherent performance and consistent with the performer's personal appearance and manner. The term 'personal front' is used to describe the characteristics of individuals, including 'clothing; sex, age, and racial characteristics; size and looks; posture; speech patterns' (Goffman, 1959, p. 34). These props are deployed in the construction of online dating profiles, and impression management may take the form of restructuring the profile if the user does not get enough 'matches', or is matched with the wrong people. By changing the content of their online dating profiles in the hopes of appealing to a different demographic audience, these ideas of impression management are key to understanding the reflexive nature of the self-presentation of bisexual women on dating apps.

Goffman (1959, p. 141) considered that a performance can be undermined through the accidental revelation of 'destructive information', which could 'discredit, disrupt, or make useless the impression that the performance fosters'. These facts are often revealed in a 'back region' or 'backstage' (Goffman, 1959, p. 114), which stands in direct contrast to the performed 'front'. For bisexual women, sexual orientation may act as 'destructive information' in the construction of an online dating profiles given the mononormative social context of the cultural context (admittedly the Global North in this study). Bisexual women have to navigate the risk of being disregarded by LGBTQ+ identifying connections as a result of their attraction to men, while navigating and managing men's attention in the light of disclosed same-sex interest. Thus, some choose to not reveal their sexuality in online dating profiles (Pond & Farvid, 2017).

Displaying sexual identity and appropriate femininity is doubly fraught for bisexual women: on the one hand they are faced with the dynamic of straight male sexual entitlement which is vulnerable to challenge, rejection or lack of response speed shifting to hostility in the form of body shaming (Sundén & Paasonen, 2020, p. 77). On the other hand, it is difficult to display 'bisexuality' because sexual identity is (currently) normatively conceptualized in binary terms (Miller in Daly et al., 2018). Thus, the creation of profiles on dating apps—both visual displays and verbal support statements (Hayfield et al., 2013)—involves making decisions about feminine aesthetics. These have to navigate recognizable gender performances and avoid 'exaggerated femininity' and 'butch lesbian masculinity', as discernibly feminine may be read as heterosexual, whereas more masculine bisexual women may be considered lesbians. Despite the pluralized ways in which lesbian and queer identities are currently performed (Nelson, 2020a,b), dating apps do not afford the same set of props as other spaces and temporalities. Bisexual women thus face the double jeopardy of adhering to societal expectations of 'femininity', as well as demarcating themselves as bisexual, rather than straight or gay.

Ideas of display' and self-presentation are further useful when considering that people use dating apps to find 'casual sexual encounters', or 'hook-ups', without assumptions of commitment or further interaction and thus as a form of entertainment (Hobbs et al., 2016). These digital transformations of intimacy have been viewed as both following the logic of consumption and corrosive to 'real intimacy' (see, for instance, Giddens, 1992; Bauman, 2003). Some highlight the emotional work needed with branding the self in this environment of 'choice' and 'control' (Bandinelli & Gandini, 2022) as well as the physical work involved in 'self-commodification' and 'self-branding' to increase desirability online (Hobbs et al., 2016). In the pursuit of being noticed in the attention economy, a different regime of attractiveness appears to emerge the presentation of a 'fun-loving' personality being more frequently displayed than the desire to marry or have children.

Pond and Farvid (2017, p. 16) begin to touch on self-presentation and a carefully curated online self, which presents an idealized persona in the hope of attracting more matches. It is this part of their research upon which this article significantly expands. Despite *Tinder*'s noticeably heteronormative reputation and defaults (Pond & Farvid, 2017), many non-heterosexual people are drawn to *Tinder*, with its high number of users, and thus higher number of potential matches. This heteronormative environment, however, often fosters hostile attitudes towards bisexual women, who often to find themselves hypersexualized, approached to participate in threesomes, and assumed to be straight (Pond & Farvid, 2017).

Method

This research was designed to explore in depth the practices and experiences of self-presentation on dating apps of young, self-identified bisexual women. This is a significant user group of online dating apps but whilst there is an increasing amount of research into young people's use of social media, women's use of dating apps (e.g., Young & Roberts, 2021) or queer app engagement (Pym et al., 2021), not much work specifically investigates young bisexual people's practices and identity formation using digital networks during young adulthood.

Ethical approval for this study was granted by Leeds Beckett University, UK, and involved the recruitment of self-identifying bisexual women who use dating apps, aged between 18 and 24. Participants were recruited via LGBT+ societies at Leeds based universities which were initially sent recruitment emails. Further to this, interested participants were provided with informed consent sheets outlining the intentions of the research and their rights as participants. The sampling strategy of the research was both purposive and using a snowball sample (Mason, 2017) whereby one researcher could access her own networks and LGBT+ student societies from several universities in a northern UK city. All women self-identified as 'bisexual' at least in some way as they responded to the call for participants but some also used additional terms to describe themselves (such as queer or pansexual).

The sampling frame resulted in eight participants who were interviewed by one of the authors who identifies herself as bisexual (the other author identifies as lesbian/queer) with interviews lasting between 30 to 60 minutes. All of the interviews were conducted in person using a semi-structured interview schedule able to engage the participants in 'user-led walkthroughs' (Light et al., 2018, p. 896), were recorded (with the participants' permission) and consequently transcribed using pseudonyms.

At the time of interview, two women were in relationships and no longer using dating apps; two were single and no longer used dating apps, and four were single and still using dating apps. Each of the eight women had used, or still used *Tinder*; six had used, or still use *Hinge*; five had used or still used *Bumble*; three had used or still use *OkCupid*; two had used or still use *Her*; and one used or still uses *Feeld*. They were aged between 19 and 24 years of age, a group that is usually underrepresented in research on dating app use. On the other hand, they share an urban, largely but not exclusively middle-class background that is often found in dating app research (Young & Roberts, 2021).

Separate thematic analysis was used (Braun & Clarke, 2006) by both authors to highlight recurring themes as well as differences most common across the sample. This produced a set of initial codes and themes. In a second step the authors compared and discussed their sets of codes before re-coding the interviews and drawing out themes for analysis. Two overarching themes were constructed based on the analysis of the data, both of which concerned bisexual identity and divergent ways of self-presentation through visual clues and narrative engagement.

Results and Discussion

This section is split into two sub-sections: (a) Coding and de-coding digital bisexual identity which deals with aspects of bisexual (in)visibility and recognition and (b) Calling out and managing responses which examines the narrative reflexive ways in which young women use apps.

Coding and De-coding Digital Bisexual Identity: 'If You Know, You Know'

Online profiles are fundamentally linked to reflexive, iterative impression management in order to convey a desired version of oneself to an audience. This includes making choices about clothing, facial expressions, bodily gestures, posture, disclosure of age, racial characteristics, gender presentation as well as speech patterns and more. Given the difficulties of a bisexual aesthetic of the person (Hayfield, 2020), signposting bisexual identity on dating apps may involve the inclusion of photographs taken in queer spaces to act as 'scenery', the use of music by queer artists through *Tinder*'s *'Spotify Anthem'* feature as 'stage props' (Goffman, 1959) or deploying culturally recognizable clues.

Both Alex and Ruby included pictures of themselves in 'queer-coded' spaces on their dating app profiles to signal non-heterosexuality, both to their female and their male audience:

> I have a picture of me out [*queer space in Leeds*]. So it's like: if you know, you know!' (Alex)

Despite being relatively new to the social field of the 'dating app scene' participants were quick to read the strengths and weaknesses of respective apps. As part of an attention economy which creates an imperative of visibility (Baret-Weiser in Sundén & Paasonen, 2020, p. 2)—and further communication dependent on a 'match'—the visual is recognized as central by participants:

> I think that, almost cynically, the photos are the most important thing […] especially with *Tinder*, because it's literally just photos. Nobody reads your bio. (Jemima)

This enforced emphasis on the visual was met with different strategies: some responded with playful approaches, worked with friends to curate their profiles, or changed their profiles frequently. Whilst some valued the opportunity of writing bios, others preferred the visual mode feeling enabled to portray their queerness better in images and background. Regardless of preference over words or pictures, the young women felt a pressure to 'look queer', particularly when using dating apps specifically aimed at queer people. They also referred to an absence of a specific 'bisexual aesthetics':

> being a bisexual woman you've got to make yourself look queerer to some extent because it's quite hard to get matches on [queer dating apps] if people think you're 'bicurious', […] you're being a fake bisexual, fake lesbian, because you look more feminine. (Daisy)

Anticipating how her femininity would be read, Daisy was manging the impressions of her audience through the reflexive construction and reconstruction of performances in order to 'define the situation' for her (here female) audience. Daisy feared social punishment as a result of enacting the 'wrong' gender performance as a bisexual woman. In aligning her fear of looking too 'feminine' (and therefore, too straight) with the fear of being labelled a 'fake bisexual', Daisy highlighted 'binegativity' and the exclusion from LGBTQ+ communities and spaces. The perceived dilemma of belonging to queer communities, and being neither an 'insider' nor an 'outsider', was also expressed by Alex:

> It's like, am I too straight for the gay people, am I too gay for the straight people, where do I fit in?' (Alex)

The strategy to present as 'more queer' can thus be seen as deeply rooted in desire for acceptance into the lesbian community, even though it might not be a completely authentic presentation of who she is. Other participants further discussed what aesthetic practices they employed as bisexual woman which they considered to make them look more queer, more bisexual, and more attractive to other women:

> The more glittery items of clothing I'm wearing in my photos, the more likes I get from girls' (Florence)
>
> Maybe when I had bright pink hair, I looked a bit more queer? I think I definitely matched with more queer people when I had pink hair. (Gloria)

Florence and Gloria both reflected on the ways in which they performed queerness, or have been read as most 'queer' by other people (Goffman, 1959), quantifying success through the proportion of likes garnered from women rather than men. This was an example of how the embodiment of 'certain cultural and historical possibilities' and the 'appropriation' of practices and aesthetics, allowed young women to perform gender, and therefore sexuality, in a socially temporal way, rather than as social realities (Butler, 1988, p. 520). Here, Florence and Gloria both considered their use of practices as 'queer' which was an enactment of bisexual identities both to themselves (and the friends who helped curate profiles) as well as a digital audience.

At the time of interview, two women were in relationships and no longer using dating apps; two were single and no longer used dating apps, and four were single and still using dating apps. Each of the eight women had used, or still used *Tinder*; six had used, or still use *Hinge*; five had used or still used *Bumble*; three had used or still use *OkCupid*; two had used or still use *Her*; and one used or still uses *Feeld*. They were aged between 19 and 24 years of age, a group that is usually underrepresented in research on dating app use. On the other hand, they share an urban, largely but not exclusively middle-class background that is often found in dating app research (Young & Roberts, 2021).

Separate thematic analysis was used (Braun & Clarke, 2006) by both authors to highlight recurring themes as well as differences most common across the sample. This produced a set of initial codes and themes. In a second step the authors compared and discussed their sets of codes before re-coding the interviews and drawing out themes for analysis. Two overarching themes were constructed based on the analysis of the data, both of which concerned bisexual identity and divergent ways of self-presentation through visual clues and narrative engagement.

Results and Discussion

This section is split into two sub-sections: (a) Coding and de-coding digital bisexual identity which deals with aspects of bisexual (in)visibility and recognition and (b) Calling out and managing responses which examines the narrative reflexive ways in which young women use apps.

Coding and De-coding Digital Bisexual Identity: 'If You Know, You Know'

Online profiles are fundamentally linked to reflexive, iterative impression management in order to convey a desired version of oneself to an audience. This includes making choices about clothing, facial expressions, bodily gestures, posture, disclosure of age, racial characteristics, gender presentation as well as speech patterns and more. Given the difficulties of a bisexual aesthetic of the person (Hayfield, 2020), signposting bisexual identity on dating apps may involve the inclusion of photographs taken in queer spaces to act as 'scenery', the use of music by queer artists through *Tinder*'s *'Spotify Anthem'* feature as 'stage props' (Goffman, 1959) or deploying culturally recognizable clues.

Both Alex and Ruby included pictures of themselves in 'queer-coded' spaces on their dating app profiles to signal non-heterosexuality, both to their female and their male audience:

> I have a picture of me out [*queer space in Leeds*]. So it's like: if you know, you know!' (Alex)

Despite being relatively new to the social field of the 'dating app scene' participants were quick to read the strengths and weaknesses of respective apps. As part of an attention economy which creates an imperative of visibility (Baret-Weiser in Sundén & Paasonen, 2020, p. 2)—and further communication dependent on a 'match'—the visual is recognized as central by participants:

> I think that, almost cynically, the photos are the most important thing […] especially with *Tinder*, because it's literally just photos. Nobody reads your bio. (Jemima)

This enforced emphasis on the visual was met with different strategies: some responded with playful approaches, worked with friends to curate their profiles, or changed their profiles frequently. Whilst some valued the opportunity of writing bios, others preferred the visual mode feeling enabled to portray their queerness better in images and background. Regardless of preference over words or pictures, the young women felt a pressure to 'look queer', particularly when using dating apps specifically aimed at queer people. They also referred to an absence of a specific 'bisexual aesthetics':

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Anticipating how her femininity would be read, Daisy was manging the impressions of her audience through the reflexive construction and reconstruction of performances in order to 'define the situation' for her (here female) audience. Daisy feared social punishment as a result of enacting the 'wrong' gender performance as a bisexual woman. In aligning her fear of looking too 'feminine' (and therefore, too straight) with the fear of being labelled a 'fake bisexual', Daisy highlighted 'binegativity' and the exclusion from LGBTQ+ communities and spaces. The perceived dilemma of belonging to queer communities, and being neither an 'insider' nor an 'outsider', was also expressed by Alex:

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The strategy to present as 'more queer' can thus be seen as deeply rooted in desire for acceptance into the lesbian community, even though it might not be a completely authentic presentation of who she is. Other participants further discussed what aesthetic practices they employed as bisexual woman which they considered to make them look more queer, more bisexual, and more attractive to other women:

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As all women (had) used different apps they reflected on using different visual and narrative self-presentation strategies in different apps, which was driven both by looking for different gender audiences based on the perceived remits of the apps themselves:

> I used *Tinder* for a little bit, didn't like it, and I've now moved onto Hinge, which is very exciting. It feels like a step-up on the grown-up level of dating apps. *Tinder* just felt too, I don't know, it was really hard to kind of condense yourself into little picture and to be funny in a little box. Also, I was finding that all the men on *Tinder* were just like, rugby lads, like, ugly. I was just really struggling, swiping and swiping and swiping, and not matching any girls, and I think *Tinder*, I didn't get the vibe *Tinder* was that much a space of girls looking for girls, it was mainly boys looking for a quick something. (Alex)

This is also testimony that self-presentation and use of apps is a responsive strategy to both app exigencies and audience reactions (Goffman, 1959). The selection of photos was not only driven by presenting the desired sexual identity but how they read the purpose of any particular app and what they wanted to achieve when using it:

> I was more concerned about looking pretty on *Tinder* because I was kind of aware that it was just for sex, and I was cool with that. I would've stayed on *Tinder* if I wasn't getting fed up with the genre of people on there. But I was definitely presenting myself as like, cool, fun, here I am, pretty pretty, but on Hinge I'm more like, I'm an intellectual who makes jokes. There was a bit of a difference going on there. (Alex)

Overall, the young women narrated frustrations with the limits or the reduced affordances that photo cues bestow, although some appreciate other cues of non-verbal communication, specifically the messages given through (favourite) music choices, such as references to television shows, or the use of *Spotify* integration to share music by queer artists. What emerged as significant in divergent attempts to disclose (or avoid disclosure) of bi identity were the different strategies used in different apps as well as the involvement and advice of friends in the curation of profiles.

Calling Out and Manging Responses: 'Hola Chicas' and 'Shitty Men'

Declaring a bisexual identity in the writing of bios, description and resulting communications upon matching was fraught for all participants, battling different stereotypes with women and men. For some the declaration of a bisexual identity was quickly decentred in favour of emphasizing personality traits such as being funny, being cool or declaring their politics, in order to attract a more desirable audience. But for others explicitly referencing sexual orientation was an efficient way of making potential partners aware of their bi identity, by drawing, for instance, on a gendered language:

> I do a bit of Spanish and I put my bio as 'hola chicas' which means 'hello girls', instead of […] 'hola chicos' [which] could be for guys and girls […] I know a part of me just wanted to put out there that I'm not straight, [that] I'm talking to the girls. (Jemima)

In order to avoid being coded as straight, or someone who is 'just looking', particularly as she believed that she did not 'look very gay', Jemima explicitly mentioned a

desire for interaction with women. She transgressed bi-invisibility by saying 'hello' to the ladies and acknowledged her interest in same-sex relationships, while men could still see her profile and interact with her.

Another way of indicating queerness used by the young women was through the symbolic use on word cues, flags or emojis:

> I had a little gay flag in my *Tinder* bio at one point [whilst] on *HER*, I wasn't listed as bisexual, I was listed as queer. (Daisy)

As noted by Pond and Farvid (2017), aside simply writing 'Bi' or 'Bisexual' as part of a profile or choosing 'Bisexual' from a list of given sexual orientations, many marginalized groups have taken to the use of emojis to make clear their sexuality. Bisexual women often use the emoji of two women holding hands [👭] (sometimes beside the emoji of a man and woman holding hands [👫]), or the more general LGBTQ+ flag (🏳️‍🌈) or rainbow emoji (🌈), to express their orientation. Daisy simply used a 'gay flag' in her *Tinder* bio to express that she was not straight, but also did not directly reference her bisexuality. It could be argued that, in the context of a queer app like *HER,* the attraction to men implicit in bisexuality could act as 'destructive information' in Daisy's construction of self. Particularly for bisexual women in queer spaces, who often feel a need to 'prove' that they are authentically attracted to women, their attraction to men could be seen to undermine their performance as a woman who is attracted to women, and thus becomes 'destructive information' in a Goffmanian sense.

Self-presentation for young bi women is complex in multiple ways, not least because the remit of personality characteristics appears to be gendered for many:

> I look for completely different things in women and men and I think part of it is that things I look for in men are quite feminine anyway. With women I'm looking for someone who's funny, someone who's sexy or any of these different things, and those are the same for men, but primarily I'm looking for someone who's kind, someone who's thoughtful, someone who makes me feel good, which is a lot harder to find in men. (Daisy)

Different experiences with and expectations of men are reflected in this statement and the effort to construct an appropriate bi-gaze is also divided, to some extent, into constructing attraction from women, and managing men's responses and the unwanted male gaze:

> I'd never outwardly put the rainbow emoji or that I'm bi […] because I feel like boys especially romanticize and sexualize bi girls, like, 'have you kissed a girl, can I watch?'. That's the kind of interactions I'd get if I put that I was bi on my profile, because that's what I'd get from shitty men'. (Ivy)
>
> I don't have my sexuality on there because I think, it is that thing of men seeing it and being like, I'm worried they're going to be a creep about it. (Ruby)

Here, the young women navigate the stereotype of men 'enjoying the sight of girls making out', a behaviour which is often viewed through the 'male gaze' (Rupp & Taylor, 2010). Female same-sex sexual behaviour is often viewed as 'sexy', particularly by heterosexual men, thus leading to the fetishization of such behaviour (Yost & Thomas, 2012). This fetishization is not exclusive to bisexual women, and ultimately stems from the eroticization of lesbianism. However, bisexuality signals a possibility

to men that 'sex between two women' may end up becoming 'a threesome with a male partner' (Yost & Thomas, 2012), because bi-women are not exclusively homosexual. A line can be drawn then between the fetishization of lesbianism ('can I watch?') and the fetishization of bisexuality ('can I join?').

Yet the decision whom to make a profile visible to—a decision unique to those identifying as bi—is also framed by the 'monosexual assumption' which leads to the questioning of the authenticity of bisexuality, with many stereotypes considering it to be a phase, a form of experimentation or an invitation to threesomes (Israel, 2018). The monosexual assumption (that people can only be attracted to people of one gender) on the one hand exacerbates issues of bisexual invisibility and erasure, whilst, on the other, also fetishizes bisexual women by straight men.

Ruby and Ivy's assertions that they avoid explicitly referencing their sexual orientations can be seen as rooted in avoidance of fetishization by (heterosexual) men, who see bisexual women as exciting sexual conquests. By not explicitly referencing their sexual orientations, they avoid uncomfortable interactions or harassment online. Yet another problem emerges in attracting male sexual partners as bad experiences with boys are a common problem.

The young women report that some male opening lines to communications were unwanted, inappropriate, overly sexual and/or objectifying:

> I was talking to this boy and he was like 'your tits look fire', and I was like 'I really don't like that you just said that to me'. Bye! Blocked! (Ivy)

Navigating a playful and funny persona is equally fraught with having to deal with negative male responses such as Alex who, in meaning to be funny and putting 'keeping my shoes on during sex', laments that all male matches then immediately use sexualized talking. Female sexuality remains, it seems, codified as more passive and using sexual banter can become fraught. Others use a declaration of sexual preferences (real or in gest) to attract male partners who are embracing but sexualizing their identity by listing sexual practices, such as pegging, which they assume would not attract sexually dominant young men:

> My bio was like 'Turn ons include: pink hair dye, pastries and pegging'. Turn offs was 'SWERFs and TERFs'. All the messages I got were like 'so you're into pegging?'. I was like, first of all, I didn't know there were this many straight guys who were into pegging, and second of all, I was kind of joking! (Gloria)

A final aspect unique to male responses on dating apps concerns the unleashing of toxic and vilifying comments known to affect women on social media (Sundén & Paasonen, 2020). As an asynchronous form of communication dating apps are nevertheless imbued with differing expectations of what constitutes a 'timely response' and not meeting this can result in abusive messages:

> Someone will message you like 'hey' and then you won't respond and they'll be like 'you're a fat slag; I hate you; I hope you kill yourself' and it's just like, alright, fuck me! (Daisy)

Rather depressingly Daisy and others report such reactions as commonplace encounters when engaging with online networks and 'a price to pay' for using dating apps, ultimately because aspects of self-validation override these negative aspects.

Some of the young women who participated in this research considered that they reflexively change their profiles in order to gain the attention, attraction, and validation of certain groups of people. Heidi, Daisy and Florence all demonstrated recognition of the ways in which changing their online profile changed the attention that they garnered.

> I try and express myself in a way that I think would attract those people, because they're the type that I'm attracted to. (Heidi)

> I changed my pictures around so I can make myself seem like this really wholesome person, and then you get all these quieter, booky types, coming towards you. Or you can make yourself seem like you're just so fucking…, and then all these rah fuckboys come at you as well. You can change yourself to seem a certain way. (Florence)

Florence specifically highlights how different methods of self-presentation would attract different types of people to her, with 'booky types' being attracted to wholesomeness, and 'rah fuckboys'[1] approaching her after she engaged in student aesthetics considered trendy. It could perhaps be argued that for bisexual women, particularly in light of Hayfield's (2020) arguments on bisexual aesthetics, that this lack of a 'distinct bisexual visual identity' has led to a need for bisexual women to engage in reflexive practices of self-presentation, in lieu of an identifiable aesthetic.

However, more cynically, it could be suggested that this reflexive self-presentation is in fact motivated by the desire for approval and validation through gaining matches on dating apps. For many, the quantification of perceived attractiveness in the form of a number of 'matches' served to improve self-esteem and validate their construction of self.

> My relationship to dating was closely related to self-approval and how I felt about myself, and because *Tinder* was the easiest to get matches on; I was constantly swiping on it. (Daisy)

> I do it for, like, the validation. It's an ego boost. (Ruby)

A plethora of research considers the use of online dating apps as a means of gaining validation, including Hobbs et al.'s (2016) work regarding the impact of the internet on the transformation of intimacy. They consider the function of online dating not merely in terms of seeking relationships, and but also in terms of validation and a quantification of desirability. Furthermore, dating apps present gamified ways of identity formation and/or a form of passing time. As Ruby says: 'I just use it when I'm bored' whilst Daisy says:

> I was mostly looking, like, just someone to chat to every now and then. I've met people on *Tinder* and I've had, like, things with them. But the majority of my relationships have been with people I've met in different ways.

Using dating apps has become a normalized practice over the last decade which enables young women's developments of sexual identities:

> I feel like I'm at the point in my life where I need to go on more dates and see what I want and figure that out. I definitely don't want a relationship, I don't need a relationship, but I want to do fun things with fun people and have nice conversations with people I haven't met before.

But dating apps also offer up space for counter-normative practices to relationship seeking by being used as social and entertaining space. Thus, the search for intimacy is coupled with a search for identity which many young bisexual women enter having navigated some forms of relationships with men first before realizing and articulating any form of bi identity. Online spaces have the affordances some seek though clearly downsides have to be contended with leading to an overall perception of ambivalence.

Conclusion

The use of and experiences on dating apps for bisexual young women was an ambivalent affective journey; sometimes empowering, sometimes frustrating. It is clear that the initial construction of a bisexual identity on dating apps and the consequent navigation of responses can be fraught with (perceived or experienced) negative responses and stereotypes. But it is also marked by the creative use of props, co-curation of profiles with friends and explorations and reflections upon new experiences. The self-presentations of young bisexual women on dating apps is thus an iterative and reflexive process as they develop their profiles or move to different apps, and they modulate self-presentation using a variety of tools, coded artefacts and strategies available to them.

It has been argued bisexual women themselves struggle to identify a 'distinct bisexual visual identity' (Hayfield, 2021) and the women in this study were confronted with having to think and decide whether, and how, to deploy bisexual aesthetics. This lack of a distinct visual image through which sexual identity is expressed and communicated is paramount to understanding the divergent and creative cultural signs young bisexual women do use when constructing identity, and why this differs between individuals. Without seemingly clear appearance norms or visual scripts that can make a bisexual identity visible and legible to others, young bisexual women face a challenging task of constructing a self-presentation through signs and props that support their endeavour of being 'read' as bisexual by male and female users on dating apps.

Young women who explore their emerging nonmonosexual identities through dating apps, do this both for self-validation and to make social connections and /or seek sexual relationships. Goffman's ideas have been useful in this analysis as participants also considered their use of queer space and queer culture to create 'front stage' personas which could actively construct 'looking sufficiently queer' to female audiences but also desirable to a (decent) interested male audience. What has transpired is that 'impression management' manifests differently to female audiences than it does to male audience thereby putting in question a fixed permanent construction of the self.

Dealing with aspects of 'binegativity' in reactions and responses was a continuous experience for the young women here and framed, at times, the reasons whether or not, or how, to disclose sexual identity online. Emphasizing queerness or attempting to 'pass' as straight was also framed by different app use and/or different audiences. Whether bisexual women are using photos of themselves in queer spaces, referencing gay anthems in their *Hinge* bios, or leaving their sexuality out of their dating app profiles entirely, a strong motivation was a desire to find intimate connections, while facing minimal biphobia.

This article has explored the use of construction of self by bisexual women, through their dating app profiles, first by considering the primacy of photographs for a majority of the women studied. It has been considered that the use of photographs in self-presentation is so pertinent to the participants as a result of the sexual nature of dating apps, as well as their perceived superficiality. Much of the superficiality and hypersexuality of dating apps is not exclusive to them, but has been considered by others as a key example of late modern intimacy: relationships are now based upon 'pure sex' and 'plastic sexuality', rather than on 'til-death-do-us-part' marriage conventions (see for instance, Hobbs et al., 2016). Many challenges are faced by young people across sexual identities in 'networked publics' (boyd, 2014) but for young bisexual women they present specific, normative forms of gendered and sexualized self-presentation with regards to both other women as well as men.

The women in this study were all aged between 18 and 24, and each shared their own experiences of 'binegativity': whether that be the erasure and invisibility discussed in their fear of being read as straight; the hypersexualization of bisexual women, primarily by men; or the view that bisexuality is invalid, and that one day each of these women will finally 'choose' what they really desire. The young women here experienced forms of bisexual erasure in various forms, such as being assumed to be lesbian but in denial, or as bicurious, that is, heterosexual and seeking attention. However, 'binegativity' as a framework is limited (Lahti, 2020) and obscures the potential for the assemblages, entanglements and sometimes messiness of experiences (Paasonen, 2021).

The frustrations of dating apps are juxtaposed, however, by pleasures and gains which are important to retain in any frame of analysis and the affective formations encountered on dating apps are processual and productive. Thus, young women's engagement with, their self-presentation on and their experiences of dating apps are multiple things at once (Paasonen, 2021). What makes this ambivalence in the constructions of digital sexual subjectivities particularly pertinent, however, is that young bisexual women are still attempting to establish and feel secure in their emerging sexual identities.

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Note

1. Although 'fuckboy' refers to a man who has 'many casual sex partners', often seen to mistreat and/or disrespect women (Oxford University Press, 2019), 'Rah' is the satirical and pejorative term for 'the pashmina-wearing, point-missing upper-middle-class idiot' who is 'known for their ostentatiously unkempt hair, expensive clothes and tediously drawn-out vowels' and is an 'indigenous residents of older universities and public schools' (Meltzer, 2010).

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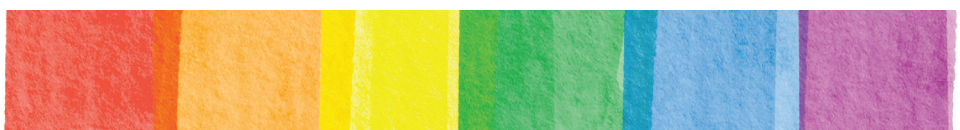
Natalia Gerodetti is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Leeds Beckett University, Leeds, UK, where she has worked for a number of years. Her publications on gender and sexuality include publications on sexuality, reproduction and biopolitics as well as discursive constructions of gender and sexuality in Switzerland.



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Attitudes and opinions of the teaching faculty toward the LGBT community

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Original Article

Attitudes and Opinions of the Teaching Faculty Toward the LGBT Community

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Abstract

Studies have shown physician homophobia as a barrier to health care, with LGBTQIA+ patients being more likely to delay or avoid getting care due to fear of harassment or discrimination.

Objectives: Our aims and objective in this study were to determine the attitudes and opinions of the various medical and surgical teaching faculties and compare them for gender differences, if any, toward the LGBT community.

Methodology: It was a cross-sectional study done among 129 teaching faculty between November and December 2019 at Sri Devaraj Urs Academy of Higher Education and Research, a rural tertiary medical college in southern India with regular and ongoing postgraduate training in all medical and surgical specialties, with assessment done using a structured and validated instrument, Riddle homophobia scale, meant for the assessment of attitudes and beliefs toward the LGBT community.

Results: Most of the teachers in both the medical and surgical groups reported favorable positive attitudes/beliefs with statements like homophobia and heterosexism are wrong, and there is no need for the LGBT people to undergo reparative surgery; they deserve the same rights and privileges as everyone; however, there were negative attitudes and opinions reported with the statements like the LGBT people did not choose their sexual orientation and teachers themselves need to undergo introspection to be able to be supportive toward them, which is a significant source of concern. There were no differences in attitudes and opinions based on the age groups of the teachers of both the groups. Male teachers, when compared to female teachers (male:females—84:45), reported more favorable beliefs (t^2/p value= 6.316/.0043) toward the LGBT community at p value $\leq .05$.

Conclusions: The teaching of sexuality, especially on the LGBT community, to medical professionals, especially teaching faculty, needs to be perceptive to the issues faced by people with different sexual orientations and identities.

Keywords

Attitudes and beliefs, teaching faculty, medical college, LGBT community

Key Messages

Both the medical and allied sciences and the surgical and allied sciences teaching faculty had negative attitudes of repulsion and pity with uncertain attitudes toward taking a stance against the anti-LGBT community. Medical college teachers should be trained periodically with workshops and continued medical education programs regarding the sexual orientation of the LGBT community so that a practice with a non-judgmental approach and holistic treatment is delivered.

Introduction

Rampant bias and discrimination toward the LGBTQ1A+ community exist, in society and healthcare, despite having come a long way in acceptance and inclusion. LGBTQ1A+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, queer, intersex, asexual; with the 1+ indicating diverse other identities.[1] Lesbian and gay denote same-sex physical/romantic attraction;

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the former indicates women and the latter indicates people of all gender identities, but is usually associated with men.[2] The term bisexual denotes physical/romantic attraction for both men and women, while "queer" is an umbrella term used for non-conforming identities. In the fourth term, transgender people are those individuals whose gender expression does not conform to the sex assigned at birth.[3] Finally, asexual people, in general, are those who feel no sexual attraction at all; this is different from celibacy, in that celibacy is a deliberate choice.[1]

These are all independent of each other: biological sex (gender assigned at birth), gender identity (a person's innate identification as a man/woman/transgender/other), gender expression (external manifestation of gender identity which may or may not conform to societal norms) and sexual orientation (one's physical, romantic, or other attraction or non-attraction to other people).[2]

Homophobia is the fear, dislike, and hatred of same-gender relationships or those who love and are sexually attracted to the same gender. Homophobia includes prejudice, discrimination, harassment, and acts of violence brought on by fear and hatred. It occurs at all levels starting from schools on personal, institutional, and societal levels.

Heterosexism assumes that all people are or should be heterosexual and excludes the needs, concerns, and life experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people giving advantages to heterosexual people.[4] Failure to grasp the concept that these are separate things leads to discrimination in society and the legal and healthcare systems.[5]

In the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental disorders (DSM)-5 (2013), "gender dysphoria" replaced "gender-identity disorder," and it explicitly stated that "gender non-conformity is not itself a mental disorder."[6] It shifts the focus entirely to the distress many transgender people face due to gender non-conformity. It is more this distress and not their identity which leads them to seek medical, surgical, or psychiatric help.

A five-judge bench of the Honorable Supreme Court gave the verdict on September 6, 2018, stating that section 377 violated the fundamental rights.[7] The Supreme Court passed another landmark judgment (NALSA judgment) on April 15, 2014, upholding the legal rights of individuals to self-identify their gender as male/female/transgender, without having first to avail medical and surgical treatment.[8]

The Disparity Model Toward Minorities

According to the "Minority Stress Model," members of sexual or gender minority groups may experience distal stressors (like the experience of discrimination and violence) and proximal stressors (like the expectation of rejection, concealing true identity, and internalized homophobia).[9] This model is linked to poor mental, sexual, and physical health and decreases access to health care for minority populations.[10] LGBT individuals are 2.5 times more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and substance misuse than heterosexual individuals.[11] Twenty percent of sexual minority adults have attempted suicide compared to 4% for the general population.[12] Poor psychosocial health has further led to sexual risk-taking and a higher prevalence of HIV in these populations.[13]

Negative attitudes prevent optimal utilization of healthcare services. Studies have shown physician homophobia as a barrier to health care, with LGBTQ1A+ patients being more likely to delay or avoid care due to fear of harassment or discrimination.[14–16] There are limited studies from India, but they detail the discrimination faced by the members of the transgender community; for instance, there are reports of trans women given male gowns and admitted in male wards.[16,17] In one study, participants (postgraduate medical and dental residents) ranked the Internet and newspapers higher than medical textbooks as sources of their ethics and knowledge.[18]

Understanding the perspectives of teaching faculty and their perceptions toward the LGBT community can negatively affect their clinical practice, and as teachers imparting training to the future specialists in their respective specialties. This study kept in mind the limited resources with minimal access to the correct information, especially non-psychiatric clinicians and teachers. The study aims to assess the attitudes and opinions of teaching faculty toward the LGBT community and compare among the medical and surgical teaching faculty, especially in a rural tertiary medical college in southern India.

Methodology

The Institutional Ethics Committee approved this cross-sectional study proposal of the Institute. After obtaining approval, the study participants were the teaching faculty of both the medical and surgical departments with their allied subjects of Sri Devaraj Urs Medical College & Research Hospital, Kolar, and they provided written informed consent. We omitted teachers with a history of undergoing psychiatric treatment or drug dependence apart from nicotine. As per National Medical Commission (NMC) guidelines, we did not consider senior residents as teaching faculty for the study.

Half an hour of free time was identified for each of the units of the respective clinical departments, and we collaborated with the senior resident of the respective unit on that day of data collection.

Data collection went on for a few weeks. It was made sure that there would be no discussions between the specialists who had finished filling the questionnaire at different points of time, and confidentiality was maintained.

A semi-structured proforma sheet was first given to collect information about their social and demographic details and clinical experiences with the LGBT community. Later we administered the primary tool meant for the study, the Riddle's scale.

The primary tool of the study was the Riddle homophobia scale, which Dorothy Riddle developed. It is an eight-term uni-dimensional Likert-type interval scale with nominal labels and no explicit zero points. Each term is associated with a set of attributes and beliefs; based on the attributes they exhibit and the beliefs they hold, individuals are assigned a position on the scale.

The scale used is divided into two parts: the "homophobic levels of attitude" (the first four statements of the scale served the purpose that Riddle originally had in mind, and the next four state the "positive attitudes" toward the LGBT community).

She devised the scale to explicate the continuum of attitudes toward gays and lesbians and assess the current and desired institutional culture of an organization or a workplace.

Repulsion: Homosexuality is considered a crime against nature. Gays/lesbians are considered sick, crazy, immoral, sinful, and wicked. Anything is justified to change them: incarceration, hospitalization, behavior therapy, and electroconvulsive therapy.

Pity: Represents heterosexual chauvinism. There is a possibility of becoming straight being reinforced, and those born that way are pitied as less fortunate ("the poor dears"). Heterosexuality is considered more mature and certainly preferred.

Tolerance: Homosexuality is a phase of adolescent development that many people go through and most grow out of. Thus, lesbians/gays are less mature than straights and treated with the protectiveness and indulgence one uses with children who are still maturing. Lesbians/gays should not be in positions of authority because they are still working through their adolescent behavior.

Acceptance: People at this level ignore the existing climate of discrimination and accept the LGBTQ people. It is characterized by statements such as "You are not lesbian to me, you are a person!" or "What you do in bed is your own business" or "That is fine with them as long as you do not flaunt it!."

Support: People at this level may be uncomfortable themselves, but they are aware of the homophobic climate and the irrational unfairness and work to safeguard the rights of lesbians and gays.

Admiration: Coming out as lesbian/gay in our society needs strength. People at this level are willing to examine their homophobic attitudes, values, and behaviors.

Appreciation: The diversity of people is considered valuable, and lesbians/gays are validated. People on this level are willing to combat homophobia in themselves and others.

Nurturance: People assume that gay/lesbian people are indispensable in our society. People on this level view lesbians/gays with genuine affection and delight and are willing to be their allies and advocates.[19]

Statistical Analysis

Statistical software, namely, Statistical Package for Social Sciences 22.0 and R environment ver.3.2.2 (Boston, USA), was used for the present study's descriptive statistics and inferential statistical analysis. Using Microsoft Word and Excel sheets, graphs and tables were generated.[20] The *P*-value of less than 0.05 was considered significant.

Results

Study Participants

Among the study participants, 84 were males, and the remaining 45 were females. Of 84 males, 60 (65.94%) belonged to surgery and allied sciences, and the remaining 24 belonged to medicine and allied departments. Out of 45 females, 32 (71.12%) belonged to the surgical group, and the remaining 13 (28.89%) were faculty from the medical group (Table 1).

The majority of the teachers in both groups did their PG training in southern India. 34.22% of the medical doctors and only 15.3% of the surgeons reported treating patients with same-sex orientation. 10.86% of surgeons reported operating on transgender people only in non-genital areas. 23.69% of medical doctors and 5.1% of surgical doctors attended lectures/any special training on the LGBT population. 79.97% and 76.75% of teachers did not treat any LGBT patient and did not know anyone from the LGBT community. 89.15% of the teachers did not have training or attended any conference on the LGBT community in their clinical experience (Table 2).

Current Attitudes of Teachers in Both the Groups Toward the LGBT

The majority of teachers reported positive attitudes among the medical and allied sciences with surgical and allied groups with a median score of a minimum "4" (Agree) in items reflecting tolerance, acceptance, support, admiration, appreciation, and nurturance toward the LGBT community (Figure 1).

The significant unfavorable belief reported among the teachers was that the LGBT people did not choose to be the way they are inclined. The majority of the doctors in both groups reported a need for self-examination (introspection) to actively support them as an ally.

Uncertain responses to statements whether LGBT people need to undergo reparative therapy reflected repulsive attitudes. The statement that homophobia and heterosexism are wrong reflects a lack of a supportive attitude toward the LGBT in both groups (Figure 2).

Current Beliefs of the Teaching Faculty (Both the Groups)

Both the medical and surgical teaching faculty had a negative unfavorable belief that their personal feelings prevented them from accepting and supporting the LGBT community and accepted having significant gaps in understanding and growth to start accepting them. Despite reporting readiness (with

Table 1. Findings of the Salient Social-Demographic Profile of the Teachers.

Profile of the Teachers	Areas of Specialization: Medical & Allied Sciences (*N* = 38)	Areas of Specialization: Surgical & Allied Sciences (*N* = 91)	Total (*N* = 129)
Age			
25–35 yrs	6 (19.4%)	21 (21.4%)	27 (20.9%)
35–45 yrs	13 (34.21)	18 (18.56%)	31 (24.04%)
45–55 yrs	12 (38.7%)	30 (32.97%)	42 (32.56%)
56–70 yrs	7 (18.43%)	22 (24.18%)	29 (22.49%)
Specialization of the Teachers			
Medicine*	18 (47.37%)	0 (0%)	18 (13.96%)
Skin*	9 (23.67%)	0 (0%)	9 (6.98 %)
Pediatrics*	11 (28.95%)	0 (0%)	11 (8.53%)
Surgery	0 (0%)	22 (24.18%)	22 (17.06%)
ENT	0 (0%)	6 (6.60%)	6 (4.66%)
Ortho	0 (0%)	16 (16.3%)	16 (12.4%)
Ophthal	0 (0%)	9 (9.2%)	9 (6.98%)
Radiology	0 (0%)	9 (9.90%)	9 (6.98%)
OBG	0 (0%)	14 (14.3%)	14 (10.9%)
Neurosurgery	0 (0%)	3 (3.1%)	3 (2.3%)
Anesthesia	0 (0%)	12 (12.2%)	12 (9.3%)

Notes: ENT: Ear, nose, and tongue;
* = Medicine and allied subject teachers.

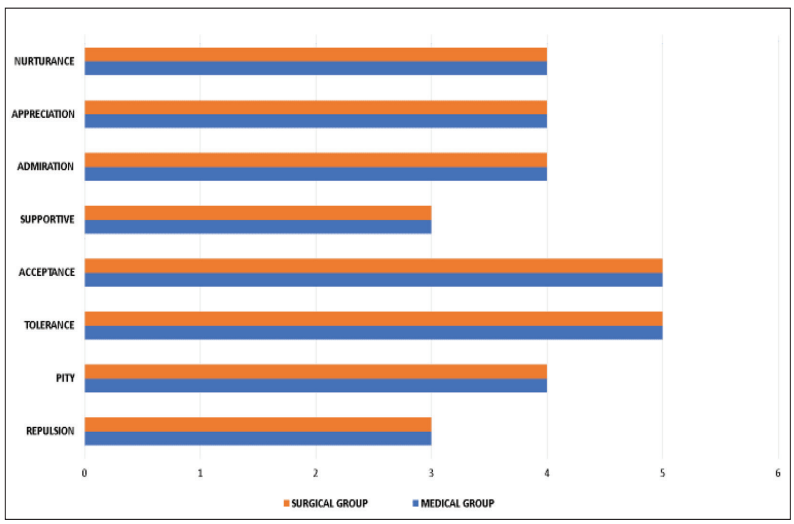

Figure 1. Riddle's Score: Descriptive Findings of Attitudes Among the Teachers.

Note: Responses are 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Uncertain, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree.

medical group reporting higher readiness than the surgical group) to be an effective ally to the LGBT community, both groups did not have a solid belief to do so actively. There was no statistical significant difference among the teachers regarding the beliefs toward the LGBT community in both groups (Table 3).

Discussion

The major highlights of this study are that it is an important study in India assessing the attitudes and opinions of teachers training postgraduates in a tertiary multispecialty medical college. A qualitative study in the United Kingdom

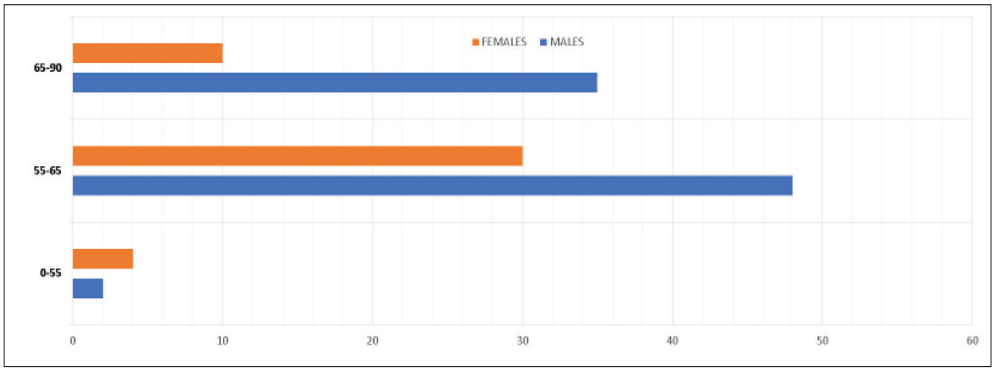

Figure 2. The Higher the Scores, the More Favorable Attitudes Toward the LGBT Community.

Note: Male teachers had a positive attitude when compared to female teachers (Chi-square/*p* value = 6.316/.043*).

Table 2. Clinical Experiences of the Teachers Toward the LGBT.

	Areas of Specialization		
Teachers	**Medical & Allied Sciences (*N* = 38)**	**Surgical & Allied Science (*N* = 91)**	**Total (*N* = 129)**
Given treatment to homosexual clients in the past?			
Yes	13 (34.22%)	15 (15.3%)	28 (21.71%)
No	25 (65.79%)	73 (80.22%)	98 (75.97%)
Not sure	0 (0%)	3 (3.1%)	3 (2.3%)
Whether operated on an LGBT patient?			
Yes/No	0/38	14/77	14 (10.86%)/115 (89.15%)
Know an LGBT individual personally?			
Yes	13 (34.22%)	16 (17.59%)	29 (22.49%)
No	25 (65.79%)	74 (81.32%)	99 (76.75%)
Not sure	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	1 (0.8%)
Zone of PG training in India?			
North	2 (6.5%)	14 (15.39%)	16 (12.41%)
East	3 (7.90%)	5 (5.50%)	8 (6.21 %)
West	4 (10.53%)	3 (3.30%)	7 (5.43%)
South	29 (76.32%)	69 (75.83%)	98 (75.97%)
Attended any training on the LGBT?			
Yes/No	9/29	5/86	14(9.3%)/115 (89.15%)

(UK, 2005) exploring the perspectives of the general practitioners (GPs) on the difficulties they faced when discussing sexual health with lesbian and gay patients in their clinics indicated that non-heterosexual orientation in the patients acted as a barrier, in almost 50% of the GPs. The difficulties were primarily related to the ignorance of lifestyles and sexual practices and also, due to their assumptions about relationships and concerns, the use of language toward the patients with the same-gender orientation.[21] However, in our study, neutral responses (uncertain) for attitudes toward the LGBT of homophobia and heterosexism were found in the teachers' medical and surgical groups.

This uncertainty could be because of the age of the faculty, as more than half of the teachers' samples were older than 45 years. They had completed their PG training at least a decade earlier, and 89.15% of teachers did not have any training or attended any conference on the LGBT community in their clinical experience.

Like patients, even the health professionals of the LGBT community reported having faced difficulties in an online survey of 427 physicians from a national healthcare organization.

A snowball study sample from the database at the worksites found 10% and 15% of the LGBT doctors being denied referrals from heterosexual colleagues and faced harassment by colleagues.

Twenty percentage of the LGBT physicians felt socially ostracized, 65% received derogatory comments, and 34%

Table 3. Riddle Score-Descriptive Statistics: Current Beliefs Toward LGBT.

Responses	Current Beliefs Toward the LGBT Community	SD (Median Score) Medical Group (*N* = 38)	SD (Median Score) Surgical Group (*N* = 91)
Questions 1–4	Personal feelings prevent being accepting and supportive.	2.54*(14)	2.34*(14)
Questions 5–8	Personal feelings have areas to grow to be an effective ally.	2.60*(18)	1.61*(18
Questions 9–12	There is a readiness to ally with the LGBT community effectively.	2.94*(18)	1.71*(16)
Questions 13–16	Ability to ally with the LGBT community.	2.94* (16)	2.02*(16)

Notes: Responses are 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Uncertain, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree;
* = Indication of values rounded off to 2 digits.

Table 4. Riddle Score Distribution According to Age in Years Among Teaching Faculty.

	Age in Years					Chi-square	
Riddle Score	25–35	35–45	45–55	55–70	Total	Value	*p* value
<55	4	1	1	0	6		
55–65	15	21	28	14	78	16.08	0.3042
>65	8	7	15	15	45		
Total	27	29	44	29	129		

Notes: The higher the scores, the higher the agreeableness (FAVORABLE);
Association was significant at a 5% level of significance.

witnessed discrimination of LGBT patients. 36% witnessed disrespect toward an LGBT patient's partner, and 27% had witnessed discriminatory treatment of an LGBT co-worker.[22]

In a three-time survey conducted at the San Diego County medical community in California, USA, 2008, evaluation of the same physicians at different periods found that early year of graduation, male gender, and heterosexual orientation were significant predictors of stigma-associated responses, which showed substantive decline in attitudes toward sexual minorities and HIV-positive people only after 35 years.

A study on medical professionals (2011)[23] of males and religious participants who faced more stigma due to their homosexual orientation was conducted in Europe.

In contrast, our study found that male teachers had a favorable attitude compared to female teachers. However, our sample size in the study had almost double the sample size of males compared to females (84:45). This unequal representation could attribute to the statistically significant difference.

We did not find any statistical significance in attitudes based on the age group among the teachers in our study toward the LGBT community (Table 4). We did not look for any role of religion in doctors toward the stigma of the LGBT community, unlike the European study.

Male faculty reported favorable responses in this study, which could be due to the rural location of our hospital. Transgender people and homosexuals are more comfortable with males than females in their approach, usually for satisfying the sexual pleasure of males, as it is prevalent in our Indian societies. It is a common scenario in all road traffic signals and in trains all over the country, where we find these people asking for money mostly from males only. Why these trans-genders avoid requesting or demanding money from females needs evaluation in a large-scale study. Is it jealousy toward females or fears of being ostracized more from them, a shared public perception that needs evaluation?

Hijras (trans-genders) in South India do not have the same cultural role as their counterparts in North India, and most of them take up sex work to earn a living. Most of them also make a living by singing and dancing at weddings or in welcoming childbirth functions, and the rest of them make a living by begging.

Tamil Nadu and Kerala are the first Indian states to introduce a transgender person (Hijra/Aravani) welfare policy, under which transgender people can access free sex reassignment surgery in government hospitals (only male to female) with proper documentation.[24]

According to the studies conducted by Herek in 2002 and 2006, US[25,26] reported that older people are more prone to stigmatizing homosexuals and bisexuals than younger people. However, in this study, we did not find any significant difference in attitudes across various age groups of the teaching faculty (Table 4).

Both the medical and the surgical teachers reported uncertain/neutral response regarding the need for reparative therapy for the LGBT community. This uncertainty could be due to the popular stereotypes and myths related to gender minorities among clinicians. This uncertainty among teachers training postgraduates currently is a significant concern as conversion therapy is prevalent for "treatment" of homosexuality, with practitioners asking large sums of money for the same. They offer aversive therapy, electroconvulsive therapy, psychotropic medication, and even religious texts to guarantee time-bound, complete conversions.[27] Such practitioners have also propagated baseless notions about hormonal, genetic, and psychological "reasons" for homosexuality.

In July 2018, the Indian Psychiatric Society stated that "there is no scientific evidence that sexual orientation can be altered by any treatment" and strongly supported the "decriminalization of homosexual behavior."[28]

Conclusion

Health care disparities in sexual minorities can be eliminated if clinicians elicit information about sexual orientation and gender identity from their patients through thoughtful, nonjudgmental discussion and history taking.[29]

Continued medical educations and online training could be a good way for practicing clinicians to sensitize them to the LGBT issues and bring them up to speed about hormonal and surgical treatments for transgender individuals, prevention and treatment of HIV/other STDs, and other health needs of the community.[5] Clinical services for people with such issues and concerns need to be sensitive to holistic care.

A positive and non-judgmental attitude will go a long way in relieving distress among the LGBT community instead of pathologizing their identities.

Teaching sexuality to physicians and surgeons needs to be perceptive to the issues faced by people with different sexual orientations and identities.

The emphasis should be on education and a change of attitude among the clinicians. Developing and disseminating clinical practice guidelines are also essential.[30]

Limitations of the Study

Our study sample was small, with an unequal number of medical and surgical teachers working in a rural setting that caters mainly to a low-income group. The findings cannot be generalized to teachers across the entire country.

The Riddle scale has been considered acceptable face validity as a psychometric scale, but its exact psychometric properties are unknown.[31,32]

WE DON'T FALL IN LOVE WITH THE GENDER. WE FALL IN LOVE WITH THE PERSON

Acknowledgment

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Ethical Approval

Ethical committee approval was taken from Institute ethics committee.

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Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from the participants who were the teaching faculty of both the medical and surgical departments with their allied subjects of Sri Devaraj Urs Medical College & Research Hospital, Kolar.

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From isolation to liberation: Story of a hijra transwoman and an entrepreneur

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Personal Narrative

From Isolation to Liberation: Story of a Hijra Transwoman and an Entrepreneur

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Introduction

'Trans-woman molested by a friend, found abandoned on the road with an acid-burnt face'.

'Trans-man stripped at the bus stop and assaulted'.

'Underage trans-woman sexually assaulted by policemen'.

These statements are indicative of the kinds of atrocities against trans-people that have ensued in the country over the past decades. Our legal system has failed them. Most people do not even go to the police because they have so often been told that they deserve such treatment. Most cases do not even make the news. According to a survey of 2,169 respondents across three states of Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka by Swasti Health Resource Centre, a Bengaluru-based non-governmental organization (NGO), 4 out of every 10 transgender individuals in India face sexual abuse, often during early adolescence. But this environment

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of hate against them is overlooked and un/under-reported. The year 2014 came as a beacon of hope for the transgender community when the honourable Supreme Court of India acknowledged their existence, albeit as a third gender. But even today, after 6 years, their fight continues: very few dare to denounce the judgements, 'outcasteism' and the molestation they experience in their lives; even fewer are able to conquer this oppression and become an inspiration for others.

The research for my PhD gave me an opportunity to interact and become acquainted with many wonderful human beings—people I never knew were around. As part of my professional engagement with National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) in India, I knew Abhina—a Hijra transwoman, as a professional, but this academic course gave me an opportunity to know her personally and, in detail, to learn her story and the struggles that led her to where she is now. I wanted to know the story behind squint in her eyes, about the courage and confidence that she exhibited on various professional platforms. This personal narrative is a chronicle of her journey: a transwoman, born and brought up in Mumbai, currently settled in Delhi, with a remarkable career and distinguished achievements to her name. Her inquisitive mind helped her swim against the tide. It is a story of gathering the courage to not just think but go against the norms, to do something different, to not let go of your dreams, to make a change and to break the mould. The case study presents the wounds from her childhood still fresh, while she recollects and narrates a story of being judged, of being discriminated in society, by society. Her inner strength, strong will, passion and inquisitive mind propelled her towards a journey to national and international fame, highlighting her community.

With her new identity and as part of the *Hijra* culture, she found her calling. She is a hijra/transgender activist who also takes care of her own organization for the trans-population in the name of Transgender Welfare Equity and Empowerment Trust (TWEET) Foundation (https://tweetindia.org/). Working tirelessly for her community and their cause, she is also an entrepreneur and is running a business of canine rearing in Delhi.

Her story prompts us to introspect, to ask why hate crimes are under-reported, to reflect on why we do not accept people as they are and why we do not actively support transgender rights. How has our evolution as a society skipped this essential chapter that speaks to the dignity and respect that every human deserves?

The author met Abhina at a residence of her own for this interview in South Delhi, where she lives with few of her community friends and pet

dogs—most beloved to her. The interview was conducted extensively in English with few narrations in Hindi, and the narration presented here is a part of a longer interview conducted as part of data collection exercise for author's PhD. Full interview covered many other aspects such as historical background of hijra culture, role of religion, issues with respect to healthcare accessibility for trans-community, etc. The author found that Abina had an authority on many of the topics discussed during the interview, like a living encyclopedia. She gave her consent to narrate this story in first person and not to use pseudonym—this itself is sufficient to understand her state of mind and confidence that she exhibits.

Abhina's Story

I am Abhina, preferred pronouns: her, she; born as *Abhijeet* in 1977 to a Maharashtrian family in Mumbai, then Bombay. Well, this was the year of my biological birth; in reality, I was reborn at the age of 22 when I discovered myself. Unfortunate to have lost my father at the tender age of 3 years, I was basically a single child. My mother raised me all by herself. She used to have a white-collar job at that time, and we resided in a service quarter in the City of Dreams, *amchi* Mumbai. As a girl born in the body of a boy, my childhood seldom had any happy moments, and of course, in early adolescence and adulthood, the challenges kept becoming bigger and bigger.

My childhood was blessed with the gift of rhythm, with my mother being a classical dancer and my father being an instrument player. As the 7-year-old Abhijeet, I used to harbour dreams of being an artist—a dancer. Unknowingly, my mother had been my dancing coach. I got used to coming home to her doing dance performances and, hiding from her eye, I used to copy her exactly, like *Eklavya* learnt archery. I also used to cross-dress. However, being born biologically as a male, me being the *Madhuri Dixit* of my locality, was a thought my mother could never fathom and, hence, condemned.

There was an instance one day when my mother 'caught' me cross-dressed with make-up on, dancing in front of everyone; she was aghast. She was troubled—seeing something out of the ordinary—and her response was to punish me. Through her tears—which my young, innocent mind could never understand the reason for—she told me to swear to God 1,000 times that I would never cross-dress or dance again. 'Bhagwan ke samne baith ja, hazar baar likh ki, kabhi aisa nahi karega

(swear to God thousand times that you will not repeat this)'. But who would tell her that it was God who had made me this way? Her agony made me realize that I had hurt my mother deeply by being something/someone that I should not be. This was the only thing I knew that mattered. The desire not to cause her any pain was extreme, and I have always been subconsciously aware of it.

For a child with a single mother, with almost no freedom to express himself, school is the one place he can find some solace, perhaps in academics or in friends. At home, I had to shackle my unrealized true identity, with my mother failing to recognize or just not acknowledging the early signs of variance or gender dysphoria in me. And then, the school became the 'ground zero' for discrimination against me. I was enrolled in Maharashtrian Brahmin School and generally used to sit with girls. There were clear demarcations between boys sitting with boys and girls sitting with girls, so my being friends with girls was bothersome for the boys and became a reason for constant ridicule. As we started edging towards puberty, the girls in my class started blooming with apparent signs of it. As their bodies changed more and more, the feelings of insecurity and unfamiliarity grappled me since I was not 'developing' in the same way. My young self wanted to be a pretty girl, too. I wanted people to appreciate me, too. I always kept seeking love, some form of validation, anything, but it was not there.

Around the age of 11–12 years, people, especially my neighbourhood, started realizing the change. My deviation from the norm became very apparent to them. They manipulated and forced my mother into thinking that 'because this person does not have a father, that's why he is like that'. For the sake of introducing a father figure in my life, my mother remarried. However, the second marriage did not last for long as that person was already married and had two children—a whole other family. This effort to fill the void left by my father's untimely demise, rather than bringing us and especially me comfort, was traumatizing for our family, albeit, the whole remarriage fiasco had a 'silver lining,' developing my bond with my mother more strongly than it ever was.

Another issue that stemmed from my lack of self-realization—my isolation—was the feeling of being outside my body. Thanks to my raging hormones, just like any other 'normal' girl, I started having feelings of physical attraction towards the opposite sex—boys, but it was never reciprocated because, phenotypically, I was a male too. People expected me to behave differently, and their expectations, their 'pre-formed' image of how I 'should' be behaving, took a toll on me. There was an instance when I was in Class 9, I was 14 and was caught amid a

tussle between two groups of boys. As a means of torturing me, and committing a 'hate crime' in the process, I was ambushed and taken into a deserted spot behind the library by them, where those demons tried to rip my clothes apart. They wanted to see my genitals—to know what I possessed, whether I was a girl or a boy. The physical assault was topped off with a verbal one—things I could not even understand were said to me, about me. In retrospect, I realized that I had to go through that assault because those boys were trying to 'figure me out'. My not sticking to the gender norms, to a certain set of behaviours they wanted me to exude, was beyond their understanding. While 'probing' me, they also tried to insert two fingers inside my anus. My young mind did not realise that I had been a victim of 'rape'. I also did not realize that it was a forced, non-consensual act and a hate crime against me.

After my suffering, I tried to confide in my teacher and narrated the incident to her in bits and pieces. Her first response was that I 'deserved' it, and I had not even delved into the details of it. I told her that the boys had roughed me up and tried to remove my clothes. Her words shook me to my core. 'Good that they taught you a lesson. Why are you behaving like a girl? You should be behaving like a boy. You should understand what is there on your body'.

When I look back at this incident today, the sheer aversion, the disregard for students' issues that is prevalent in our education system today, it must have pushed lakhs of such 'vulnerable' students to the brink of disaster. Will any student be able to report such crimes? The lack of empathy is bound to not only weaken the morale of the victim but will also act as an enabler for the budding 'criminals' when no action is taken on it.

The same fate was bound to happen to me, and it did. I spiralled into an abyss of self-hate. I started hating my body—the features, the body parts I had. I was undergoing puberty like any 'normal' boy would, I also developed a moustache, my body hair grew, and I started having feelings of sexual arousal. And I was not happy about it; I was not comfortable in my body. I used to look at myself in the mirror and hated what I saw; it made the 'woman' inside me feel threatened. I was uncomfortable and resented the people in my life, I had nobody to seek out and nobody I could talk to, nobody who would understand. I had no 'go-to person'. I could not talk to my mother, not my friends—I never had any friends. It led to stress and feelings of loneliness and depression.

Going to school also became unbearable for me. I felt out of place. Often, in school, I avoided going to the restroom during recess time and used to wait till the recess was over. Some teachers were understanding

and compassionate, so they would allow me to go after the recess, but some of them, not so surprisingly, used to deny me permission. This led to me facing unmanageable abdominal pain, and I suffered urinary tract infections. What would you do when your teachers, your *gurus*, supposedly the people who are your path to God, make you stand on the edge of the cliff?

Other instances of the society 'disappointing' to me were whenever I used to accompany my mother to any public gatherings, functions or weddings, and my mother had to face pressure from our relatives. Some of them would look at me and comment on my appearance—'Iske baal kyu badhe hain?', 'Why is he behaving like this?' and 'Why is he wearing unisex clothes?'

Even during our weekly shopping trips on Sundays, people used to throw pebbles at me from behind—'*Gulel se marr diya. Ek baar to pathar akar lag gaya tha mujhe yahan aankh pe, mera 3 baar operation hua, isliye ye squint hai* (A slingshot once thrown at me went right for my eye, blocking my vision, and I could not see anything. I had to be operated three times, and that is why I have this squint)'.

Seeing all this, my mother used to feel distressed and cried often. Seeing her cry disturbed me deeply. I used to blame myself for what she was going through. She was tortured on my account; she had to hear the things that were never supposed to be said to her—things like, '*Tumne parwarish acchhi nahi ki* (You didn't raise him well)'. She was blamed for my life being in bad shape. My upbringing was put to the test.

I often used to ask my mother what to do. One of the things I often asked her was, 'Should I die?' These questions worried her; she took me to the doctor but to no avail. They asked a few questions, prescribed some tests and said that I was perfectly fine. One thing they suggested my mother to use as a 'remedy' when I had these questions—these episodes—was to just let me sleep in a dark room, with all the windows and doors locked, and to just let me be. They thought that would work when all I needed was a friend—someone who would listen and understand—instead, I got more of solitude. Only I knew that whatever and however I was, it was far from fine. Whom do you go to when you have no one who would understand? I went into isolation and cocooned myself in my 'safe space';it was getting more and more difficult for me to talk to people about my issues. Even today, whenever I feel lonely and want to seek solace, I just go into a room and shut the door.

Going through all the ups and downs that a normal teenager should not have to, and with my mother's support, I somehow managed to complete my higher secondary education. My mother never expressed

any opposition towards the idea of me pursuing further studies, but I think I attained maturity early, which birthed a sense of responsibility. Trying not to be a financial burden on my mother, I decided that I had to start earning, and I started taking up menial jobs, like taking care of the dogs in the society, which gave birth to my love for dogs. So, '*mein dog walking karane le jati thi- uske thode paise milte the. In the morning doodh ka thaili dalna, news paper dalna, fir bank ke chote mote kaam karke dena logo ko* (I used to earn some money while being a pet-sitter, delivering milk or newspaper, other small works)'. With those earnings, I used to pay for my classes, college and everything, and somehow, I managed to complete my education.

For me, my mother was everything. By that time, I had never even thought of leaving my home. There was unyielding perseverance in the sense that I would not be able to leave my mother. I was steadfast on staying with her, no matter what the cost. She was my 'home'.

At that point in time, most of the young population was learning computers, without which jobs were seemingly difficult to find. I completed my computer course with some savings. I did my Diploma in Software Engineering, and then I got into teaching C++, Jawa, Oracle in a Computer Institute before making the switch to a career in the social sector. Later on, I went ahead and pursued Postgraduation in NGO management from SIS College, Navi Mumbai.

Working a job, I knew I had to behave professionally, so I always used to dress up in formal attire like a 'man' would and avoided casual clothes. People thought of me as a 'gentleman', but in reality, I was not one. It was just a way to hide my identity so that people would not recognize 'what' and 'who' I was. I toned down my personality—the way I used to sit, talk, move my hands, even my facial expressions. I started talking less to people. This constant agony of living as someone else, living in discomfort, it was suffocating. I was forced to have a 'reserved' personality in public.

While working as a teacher in a computer institute in Goregaon East, Mumbai, some students somehow came to know about (real) me. They would talk about me in my absence, and many of them lost respect for me. On many occasions, they would do notorious things in the class while I was teaching. Also, the owner of the institute used to make me wait longer than other faculties. 'Just sit in front of me, do this, do that', he would say. And I used to ask him why—'Why are you doing such things with me?' to which he used to say, '*Nahi tum baitho* (you sit here), I like you sitting here'. All these 'signals' insinuated that he wanted to establish a physical relationship with me, and, somehow, I was not happy being a computer teacher anymore.

Though I was around 19–20 years of age, I had no one to talk to. I was unable to meet anyone like me. At that point of time, my one and only goal in life was to earn a reasonably good amount of money, so that I could settle abroad. I thought if I went to another country, my life would be better. '*Foreign me sab chalta hai* (everything is acceptable in other countries)', I would not have to face anybody. Whenever I used to have an interaction with my mother about my true identity, she used to say, '*Ye sab idhar mat karo, main logo ko kya muh dikhaungi?* (Do not do such things here, what will I say to the public?)'. This forced me to not behave like a normal girl. To not make my mother feel bad about who I was, I forced myself to learn every possible 'manly' game—horse riding, badminton, chess, table tennis, carrom, volleyball, football—I knew them all. I wanted to show to her that I was 'perfectly normal', and that she did not have to feel bad on my account. I wanted to show it to 'everyone' that I was normal, too, that I was only human. For the sake of getting this 'validation', I often engaged in things that I did not even really like, things that forced me to pretend to be someone I was not.

I was a curious young adult who wanted to get out of the city. Ironically, this led me to explore the city. One day, I landed at a local *Kabadi* (Scrap) shop in Churni Road. My inquisitive eyes studied the cover page of a magazine, which had a sketch of two men hugging each other—something I had never seen, never thought of seeing. It created a turmoil in my mind, inciting more questions than answers. I bought that magazine at a high price, even in that *Kabadi* shop. The bigger challenge was, where would I read it? Where would I keep it? So, at that point of time, I resorted to going to *Sulabh Shouchalaya* (Public toilet) to read that magazine—'*thoda thoda karke* (few pages at a time)'. Fortunately, that magazine was half in Hindi and half in English.

I came across a section in that magazine, called *Khush Khat*, which had some erotic literature, and through that section, one could get in touch with other people who were like the ones described in the magazine. However, there was no address given; only some 'pseudo' names and ages were given along with a PO Box number. I wrote almost 150 inland letters. '*Abhi to log profile dekh kar pasand karte hain, us time to main aisa dikhta hun, main falan jaisa dikhta hu* (today at least you have some online profile to get an idea about the other person, at that time, you would describe how you look)' and write a letter, without the assurance of somebody responding to you. And it was all based on PO Box numbers, not even a phone number, '*Social application to bhul hi jao* (forget about any social networking site)—I come from a dinosaur age'. So, after writing so many letters, '*Ek phone call aaya mere ghar par* (one phone call came)', and unfortunately, my mom picked up that phone call.

My mother informed me, 'Somebody called – he said your friend from college, wanted to talk to you. But you are not going to college, so who is this person?' I said, 'I don't know, let me talk to him.' When he called again, fortunately, my mom was not around. I asked him why he was calling me, to which, he responded with, '*Main (name of a local magazine) se aati hun* (I come from a local magazine)', and I just banged the receiver, not knowing how to react to this new-found information. I was petrified. I could not say anything. Who was this person, and why was he calling me? There was a possibility of me having passed on my number in desperation as I wrote almost 150 letters to different people. He was about 8–9 years older than me and wanted to establish a sexual relationship with me.

However, I shared my feelings with him,

> I don't know what I am feeling and how should I respond. I do get attracted to men because I have been thinking like a woman. My understanding about relationships, about how I express my gender, is very clear. I am a woman, and I want to get married. When I am sleeping with a man, I don't feel like a man sleeping with another man, and that's my problem.

to which, he said, 'There is nothing like that. Gays are like that. Do you want to see them? I will take you there—there is one garden, there you will find many people like you. They are masculine but feel like women'. His words were music to my ears. I was elated. I was surprised that even after spending 22 long, turmoil-filled years, I had had no idea about anything like that!

All this morphed into an exchange, a business transaction between this so-called college friend and me. If he took me to a garden (famous among the gay population), he could have sex with me. At that time, all that mattered to me was discovering myself, and I did not pay heed to what I was putting at stake. On the inside, I knew that this 'arrangement' meant submitting my body to him; I told him he could do 'whatever he desired' with my body, just for the sake of seeking solace. So, we decided to go there for the first time on Sunday, and I wore my usual formal attire. I saw so many people with all this *Kothi* population (Receptive partner). *Hijras* were not there, but I met some celebrity transgender of current times, and all wearing *Kurta* and *bada mala* and *bindi* and that time few of them, they used to hate 'trans' people. 'We are not Hijra, we are not like them.' Hearing them, I was scared, I could not relate to them. I felt out of place. I did not know who I was.

I started going to that garden quite often, and within a few visits, I became comfortable interacting with people there. It also came as a

cultural shock for me. I met a Maharashtrian gay couple there, who were in a relationship for 3–4 years, and they used to visit an organization working on gay rights. Hearing about that organization was something new to me, something 'one of its kind'. I was adamant on visiting it, although the couple told me I was far to educated for this organization. I somehow convinced them and went there accompanying them. I was excited for two reasons—one, meeting similar people and, second, the possibility of getting a job. During my first visit, it was just a meet-and-greet. I just saw and came back because the whole concept of how this organization functioned was very confusing to me in the first look. But when I visited there for the second time, the founder of this organization was sitting there. I remember when I met him, there was a broken table with one big computer, where he would type with his *gamchha* on. Current leadership was not there during those early days.

When I met him, I felt like he would have the answers to all my questions. I felt as if I was waiting for this day to come. We started conversing:

> Me: *Mujhe lagta hai ki main Aurat hu, ajeeb hun, vichitra hun* (I feel, I am odd, different, like a woman).
>
> Founder: *Ye Vichitra matlab kya hai* (what do you mean)?
>
> Me: I am not normal.
>
> Founder: What do you see on the table?
>
> Me: (few apples were kept there) *Apples dikhte hain* (I can see apples).
>
> Founder: Is everyone the same, the same colour?
>
> Me: No, all are different.
>
> Founder: *To prukruti me bhi sab log aise hi banaye gaye hain. What is Vikruti? Vikruti matlab Prakruti* (Nature has made us like that. Difference means Nature).

This conversation moved me. It opened my mind up to possibilities. It opened a Pandora's box. The several emotional imbalances, my questions, curiosity, my apprehensions, they were all addressed. This was for the first time that somebody was affirming my gender expression, the first time someone said that it was 'Okay' to be what I was. That there was nothing wrong with it, and I did not have to be ashamed of it. I wonder how many of us trans-people just lack that one nudge, that one small conversation, how many of us go through their lives never finding anyone who would understand.

While talking to him, I put it out bluntly, that I wanted to work there. And as a response, he told me that I would have to meet new people, work with people, counsel them and even *distribute condoms*, but I said I would do it. Finally, they gave me a job, at a salary much less than what I was earning at that time, though I was more educated. Despite this, I decided to accept it for the sake of my inner satisfaction and need. I did not tell my mother about this. That was how I made a career switch into the social sector. Coming and working there helped me explore my true self, to overcome my inhibitions. In those 2 years, I sought 'therapy' in the form of mental health counselling, which helped me to open up, and within that safe space, I started identifying my 'gender expression'. I became bold enough to come out with cross-dressing. I developed and honed my skills here. As I was expressing my true gender identity, I also used my skills to mobilize young trans-people, who were begging on the street or doing sex work. I taught them dancing. Through these talented youngsters, I established a group called *Dancing Queens* and, later on, expanded its scope.

My mother was closely watching gradual changes in my lifestyle, clothing, timings of job and other aspects of my life. She saw my wardrobe go from strictly 'male' to 'unisex' clothes. At first, she let me be, but this went on for quite some time, and one day, she finally questioned me about what I was doing with my life. I explained my career path to her, and unsurprisingly, she disapproved. In her response, she asked me, *Hijra hai kya tu?* and I did not, for the life of me, know what to tell her. I had no idea who exactly I was. She started cursing me, herself, banging her head against the wall, but I took a stand. I was adamant about remaining on the same career path, and that I would not leave my job. This confrontation and the shocking revelations from both of us caused an obvious rift.

It often happens that parents force their children to do things, which they could not achieve, whether it is education, job or even having a family, birthing feelings of possessiveness and insecurity. My mother, like any other parent, was expecting me to have whatever she could not in her life—a great career, a happy family. For her, I 'shattered' all those dreams. For 6 excruciatingly long years, my mother and I lived and breathed under the same roof, but we did not talk to each other. We could not. She went on with her job, and I went on with mine.

Since I was a 'trans-woman' and that organization was a hard-core gay organization, albeit an open Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ+) organization now, my presence led to some ethical issue. I decided to move on after serving them for almost 6 years. Though

I joined another development organization, I was not happy working there as a man—I cut my hair, switched back to formal male attire, as the job demanded. I was working with a variety of stakeholders, and going to work dressed as a woman, I obviously would not get any respect. It was not even paying enough to take care of my needs. I had no other option left but to continue until I found a suitable job. During the same time, I was transitioning and was already on hormone therapy. My relationship with my mother was strained, but I did not want to leave her. My cost of living was increasing day by day because of my gender transition. Every month, I required around ₹10,000 for hormone intake to maintain my body, my hair and the smaller surgeries that I was undergoing. So, I left the job in this development organization and entered into prostitution. I was a sex worker for almost 2.5 years in *Nala Supara*, Mumbai. I was entertaining nearly 12 clients a day. It may sound abnormal, but that phase was 'liberating' for me, as I did not have to cover myself in the garb of a man. I was free to do what I wanted to without any inhibitions.

During my stint in prostitution, I came across someone from a highly reputed university in the USA, who was undertaking a research study in Mumbai. We had a conversation, and she wanted to know the 'real' reason behind me being a sex worker. I told her how being a sex worker was liberating for me, but this further deteriorated my relationship with my mother because who I was, was undecipherable for her, and she could not accept it or what I was doing with my life.

One day, this person from the University said to me,

> This is not how you will be able to do and achieve what you want to do in your life. If you really want to create a difference to your mother, you must make sure that you become somebody whom she would be proud of.

And that changed my way of thinking and my life. It started my association with that University. I started working closely with a development organization working on HIV since 2010, who was supporting and working in association with the national government agency in India.

Sex Affirmation Surgery

After joining a new job with the same University, I shifted to Delhi. One good thing about this was that I started having open conversations with my mother. Finally, my mother came around and accepted my decision

to go ahead with the surgery. She also provided financial support to me for undergoing physical transition. During one of our conversations, I made it clear to her that I needed to live my life, that at the age of 30, she had decided on what kind of life she wanted to lead, and I was 30 then, so it was about time I started living my life. We cried a lot that day, after which she said to me,

> I am not your enemy, but I come from an entertainment background. I have seen how people like you are treated in society. I don't want my son to be treated like that. It is not about me, but I am concerned about what will happen to you after my death - who will take care of you?

My response was simple. I assured her and said, 'I will take care of myself. I don't need anybody to take care of me, and just because I don't have a spouse or I will not have kids, that should not be my motivation for not going for transition'. My mom ended the conversation by saying, 'I just know that we both belong to B+ blood group, so let's be positive about this. When you started walking, I held your hand for the first step, now you are walking on a different path, and I am not gonna leave you'.

Such was the bond that both of us cried as we shared our feelings. This brought some much-needed bonding and understanding. The 'real change' had started, and that was the beginning of my true acceptance in the family. I felt like I was ready to conquer the world with my new identity. I was finally 'me'.

Finding my Calling

Next day, I was supposed to go for the surgery. My mother tapped into her provident fund to provide support for this surgery. This gesture of hers came as enlightenment for me. It was a striking revelation. I looked at her and said that.

> From now onwards, I will make sure that you will be proud of me. I won't live for myself but for my community as well. I want to open the windows. I don't want any mother to feel ashamed of having a baby who is a Trans-person.

Since then, I have never looked back. Starting my career as a peer educator with an organization working with LGBTQ rights in Mumbai, I remained there for almost 6 years, and then I worked for another Mumbai-based development organizations for 3 years. Then, I worked with a US-based University for another 3 years. Currently, I am working

for an organization working on HIV/AIDS since 2010. Although I joined the *Hijra* community almost 15 years ago, I established certain terms with the *Guru* of my *Gharana*: that I would take care of my people and do all the work, but that I could not leave my mother behind because she had no one else, and that while maintaining the *Hijra culture*, I also wanted to continue to have a professional life. During this wide-spanning 24-year long career, my mom has ended up becoming my 'anchor'. She always supported me in living for the community and is now part of an LGBT support group.

To be an example and entrepreneur, one needs an extraordinary amount of commitment to self and zeal to surpass in unusual circumstances. Abhina's journey so far, from isolation to liberation, can inspire many, not only from her community but also within the binary world at large—to live a dignified life, to never give up, but to raise like a phoenix, as there is always something better waiting for you in life, provided you do your duties.

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Homosexuality and Indian civil society: Reading Mahesh Dattani after decriminalization of section-377

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Abstract

The Indian Supreme Court in the *Navtej Singh Johar vs Union of India* judgement (6th September 2018), decriminalized homosexuality. However, the space cleared by the legal judgement cannot be immediately availed of by those affected by it because legally determined/defined space doesn't necessarily become social space. This essay looks at the formation of this social space and the perception of homosexuality in civil society. It will examine the impediments of communication that homosexuals encounter in the heteronormative world, and the ensuing misunderstandings regarding homosexuality. It argues that a proper medium is necessary to provide communication in a social space that would then treat homosexuality as 'normal'. I argue that Mahesh Dattani's plays enable the imagination and the construction of such an accepting civil society.

Keywords

Civil society, homosexuality, Mahesh Dattani, public sphere, plays

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Introduction

Indian society has inherited values and administrative systems from both modern concepts in the West, and its own heritage/past. One such system modelled, at least partially, after the West is civil society. Civil society in India tries to bridge the gap between the public and the government. It acts as a mouthpiece for many of the marginal sections of society whose voices have never reached the appropriate authorities. Nonetheless, there is a need to redefine the space of civil society where the problems of specific groups continue to remain 'invisible' in modern India. One such problem is discrimination based on gender and sexuality, particularly against the third-genders and homosexuals. The verdict of the Supreme Court in September 2018 on Section 377[1] of the Indian Penal Code has decriminalized same-sex relations, granting immense legal relief to homosexuals. However, a big challenge which needs to be tackled is on the social front—will Indian society tolerate or accommodate homosexuality?

This essay argues that the plays of Mahesh Dattani become significant at this crucial moment when legally acceptable homosexuality comes up against social rejection. It argues that Dattani redefines Indian civil space for homosexuals. His plays which showcase the distress of homosexuals and embody the social issues faced by them, in a hostile society, could help civil society to rethink and remake the public space and galvanize it. In this essay, the first half will examine civil society and homosexuality in the Indian context, and the second half will deal with Dattani's plays, their theme of homosexuality, and the implicit need to redefine civil society.

Civil Society and Homosexuality

Sunil Khilnani accounts for the expanding interest in civil society in the late 20th century thus - in the West it is a consequence of disillusionment with 'the increasingly decrepit processes of party politics', and in the East it is due to the concern with 'private property rights and markets' (Khilnani, 2001, p. 11). There wasn't a great deal of importance attached to the concept of civil society before World War II. Marxism identified it with bourgeois society: 'a realm of contradiction and mystification sustained by relations of power'. There was a 'serious revival' of the term in the late 1960s by the Left among 'radicals disaffected with

Marxism', influenced by Antonio Gramsci's work of re-conceptualization of Marx's schema of base and superstructure which gave the concept of civil society a wholly 'novel centrality'. The term 'civil society' acquired significance in Eastern Europe and Latin America in the late 1970s and 1980s. Neera Chandhoke (2003) writes that during the 1980s the East Europeans wanted a mechanism to address questions related to their freedom from 'unbearable political situations', and the 'remedy' was in the formation of a 'free zone' within the existing system. The free zone was a solution which provided a space for people to articulate their problems in a systematic manner. This free zone was peopled by 'social associations, self-help and self-management organisations, and solidarity networks', and it was called 'civil society' by the East Europeans (Chandhoke, 2003, p. 14). The emergence of this free zone, namely, civil society, spread political awareness and action among people transforming them into the 'political public'. Chandhoke continues: 'The civil public, which had initially turned its back on the state, had dramatically transformed itself into the political public, concerned with the form and content of power' (Chandhoke, 2007, p. 610). Civil society interlaced socio-economic rights along with political and civil rights.

In the West, civil society as an idea and as a space emerged to facilitate those needs of the people that could not be directly addressed to or by the state. It enabled people to participate in the political environment by providing a space for debate and understanding their basic rights. But the concept of civil society operated in a different modality in different parts of the globe. In the global south, the functioning of associations is effective in the operation of democracy: 'It is as social collectiveness that citizens can resist, escape or influence state or society' (Rudolph, 2000, p. 1762). The associations facilitate an awareness of people's rights and duties within the state, particularly the right to democratic participation in the functioning of the state.

In India, the concern of the civil society was 'to deliver a minimum standard of life to its people' (Chandhoke, 2003, p. 20), particularly in the post-Independence phase where the powerful bureaucracies and political elites had 'shrugged off' the interest of the masses. After the Emergency in 1977, 'the civil liberties movement and the environment movement' came to the fore in the political scene (Chandhoke, 2007, p. 611). In order to articulate the concern of these struggles a language was necessary which was provided by civil society. The language which enabled the establishment of civil society in England and France also served in the context of countries 'struggling to consolidate fledgling democracies'. Sunil Khilnani writes that the need to have an Indian civil

society was felt during the 1980s when the chasm between the elite and vernacular universes of discourse was apparent; at a time when the entry of the agrarian groups into state and national-level politics changed parliamentary politics (Khilnani, 2001, p. 27). It is in this kind of civil society that one needs to locate homosexuality, mainly so because of the role that civil society plays in the social, economic and political spheres, touching upon the lives of people from various sections of society, especially the marginalized and voiceless.

The 1980s saw the rise of the second phase of the women's movement and critical theory in the West, and the reverberations of these could be felt in South Asia including India (Vanita & Kidwai, 2000, p. 205). In India, this was the post-Emergency period when multiple disparities existing within Indian society had not been bridged; one such disparity was based on gender and sexuality. The sexually marginalized, particularly homosexuals, remained invisible: 'With a few exceptions, South Asianists in India and outside have contributed to the myth that homosexuality is unknown in India by ignoring it completely or relegating it to the footnotes' (p. 205). To battle the ill treatment of the marginal sections through negotiation with the power/government, the formation of strong representative bodies is necessary. Homosexuals as a marginalized category need appropriate representation for their concerns and problems and for these to be visualized by civil society. To understand the need for such a voice it is imperative to have an understanding of homosexuality in India.

Homosexuality in India

Yeshwant Naik writes that the concept of homosexuality has been present in India since 'time immemorial', and was never considered a sin by Hinduism although 'viewed worthy of punishment' (Naik, 2017, p. 8). In ancient India, homosexuality resulted in certain punishments, like tonsuring, being made to ride a donkey and the loss of caste. These punishments were comparatively light and not a matter of life and death. Ruth Vanita (2005) states that it was 'under colonial rule … [that] … a minor strain of homophobia in Indian traditions became the dominant ideology' (p. 11). In Britain, the Buggery Act of 1533 targeted male homosexuality for persecution, therefore, 'sodomy convictions were punishable by death' (Dryden). The anti-sodomy law passed in Britain in 1860 was a progressive move as it 'reduce[d] the punishment for sodomy

from execution to ten years imprisonment' (Vanita & Kidwai, 2000, p. 195). However, the anti-sodomy law was a 'retrogressive step' when introduced in India in 1861 as Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code because it entailed 'imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to 10 years, and shall be liable to fine' (Alok Gupta, 2006, p. 4816). The objective of 'S 377 has remained unclear and unsubstantiated' but could be based on 'shared Biblical morality' (ibid. 4816).

Vanita and Kidwai write that the idea of homosexuality in the 1980s and 1990s in India was in a nascent stage of discussion in the press or other media. Instances of same-sex marriages were reported: 'In all cases [of marriages] photos appeared of the wedded couples, one was dressed in conventional male and the other in conventional female attire' (Vanita & Kidwai, 2000, pp. 208–209). The opposition to homosexual relations came mainly from the family circle rather than from 'organized religious or political opposition'. Over time, homosexuality featured more often—in newspapers, TV talk shows and books. During the 1980s, many magazines and newsletters were founded in India and abroad by Indians to create a space to discuss issues related to homosexuality: *Gay Scene* (1980, Calcutta), *Trikone* (1986, California), *Shakti Khabar* (1988, London), *Bombay Dost* (1990, Bombay), *Pravartak* (1991, Calcutta), *Friends India* (1990, Lucknow) and *Good as You* (1990, Bangalore) etc. (p. 210).

In the 1990s, there was 'a new positive representation of homosexuality' in fiction despite the continuation of homophobic fiction. The screening of movies like *Tamanna* (1997) and *Fire* (1998) brought the 'invisible issues' of the third gender and homosexuals to the forefront (Ruth & Vanitha, 2000, pp. 212–213). There were groups and organizations (like the *NAZ* foundation) which challenged the illegitimacy ascribed to homosexuality and took recourse to the law. Now, when the law has the upper hand in deciding matters concerning the private spaces of gender and sexuality it creates a 'gendered subject position as well as subjectivities or identities to which the individual becomes tied or associated' (McGhee, 2001, p. 15).

The debate and discourse around homosexuality has undergone some changes after 2009 within the Indian legal framework. In 2009, the Delhi High court decriminalized gay sex in private between two consenting adults. But in December 2013, the Supreme Court set aside the Delhi High Court verdict, pronouncing 'same-sex relations' as 'unnatural', and thus recriminalized gay sex even between two consenting adults (Venkatesan, 2013). This judgement, according to commentators,

showed the 'lack of proper knowledge about gender identity and sexual orientation on the part of law-makers and the Judiciary [which] ha[d] caused many misconceptions and prejudices regarding homosexuality and issues connected thereto' (Naik, 2017, p. 19). Then, in a landmark ruling of 6 September 2018, the Supreme Court of India *overturned* a 2013 judgement that upheld a colonial-era law, Section 377, under which gay sex is categorized as an 'unnatural offence' (BBC News 2018). The 2018 verdict decriminalized homosexuality and same-sex relations once more. However, does decriminalization mean social acceptance for homosexuals/homosexuality? Does it entail equal rights and opportunities for them? Does decriminalization ensure that the individual in question earns respect in civil society? Will the heteronormative outlook of society accommodate this new development within Indian society?

Homosexuals have been conditioned to live as subalterns in society due to their sexual orientation. The word 'subaltern' is used here in the sense that Gyanendra Pandey meant when he refers to Gayatri Spivak's usage of the term 'a relational position in the conceptualisation of power, a space without identity' (Pandey, 2006, p, 4735). Pandey proposes that 'it is "citizen" that qualifies subalternity, not "subaltern" that qualifies (or describes) the status of citizenship'. However, subalterns/homosexuals are 'subjects' of the law and have a right to claim their citizenship like others. Pandey talks of the 'citizen' in two different senses: firstly, as the 'bearer of the legal right to residence, political participation, state support and protection in a given territory', and secondly, a 'diffuse sense of acceptance in, and acceptance of, an existing order and existing social arrangements'. Of the two senses of citizenship that Pandey mentions, the court verdict ensures the protection of the first legally, but the second part ensues from recognition of civil space in civil society for the homosexual subaltern. In real terms, the existing inequality around sexual orientations in social spaces cannot be rectified by legal means alone. Within the realm of power politics between the dominant and the suppressed—the former tries to 'perpetuate subalternity' and the latter tries to subvert the dominance. The powerful and dominant group tries to enforce its hegemony which meets the resistance of the marginalized and suppressed group. In other words, the mainstream society imposes heteronormative order in society which is resisted by the sexual 'subalterns'. I now turn to the social position of the homosexual in society.

To be homosexual is to occupy the position of the 'abject' and to be stigmatized, and this stigma is produced through reiteration and citation of heterosexual discourse and practices which are considered to be normative. In order to, first, erase this stigma, and second, to acquire

citizenship in the sense that Gyanendra Pandey identifies it (that is, not legal alone), we require a pro-homosexual-subaltern discourse in the social, cultural and civil spheres. Some such discourse emerged in the 1980s. Vanita and Kidwai write that during this period, Indian debates around homosexuality changed because of the changes in the political and economic spheres. Culturally too, debates, discussions, movies and literature have been quite vibrant, and many books, journals and movies began clearing a space in the public domain.

I use the term 'public' in the sense that Christian Lee Novetzke defines it: 'a social unit created through shared cultural phenomena and reinforced by demonstrations in public of these shared cultural phenomena' (Novetzke, 2008, p. 255). Combining the above concepts, one could argue that for homosexuality to acquire social acceptance (after and beyond the legal one), the making of a public is required. Such a public, a constituent of civil society, is formed as Novetzke demonstrates, through cultural and literary phenomena, or through audiences around texts. In other words, a public that accepts homosexuality can be formed when literary–cultural texts that endorse homosexuality circulate and are consumed. I propose that Mahesh Dattani's plays serve to construct such a public. His plays become more relevant ever since S.377 was struck down, as they can provide a better understanding of alternative sexuality.

Reading Dattani Post Section 377

The plays of Mahesh Dattani (b. 1958) have attracted much attention from audiences, critics and readers by broaching 'invisible issues' (Mee, 1997, p. 19) and bringing them to the public domain. They deal with contemporary issues and 'sometimes as actual as to cause controversy' (McRae, 1994, p. 7). The matter of controversy is mainly due to the sensitive subjects that Dattani picks up: 'power-play in class and gender', 'the individual's struggle over societal demands or inflictions', and matters which are of 'social interest' (Banerjee, 2004, p. 166). His plays deal with the middle-class Hindu family. Ashis Sengupta takes up Dattani's plays to discuss the '(sub/urban) Hindu family' which is a joint family with its own 'religiosity' (Sengupta, 2005, pp. 150–151). He argues that modern urban nuclear Indian families are governed by the cultural content of the Hindu tradition which valorizes 'hyper-masculinity' in menfolk, and criticizes the 'effeminate' male. One of Dattani's major themes has been (trans-)gender and (homo-)sexuality, as critics have noted.

Abin Chakraborty has examined homosexuals as 'sexual subalterns' in Dattani's plays, arguing that in the 'hierarchies' prevalent in the homosexual world 'the bottom of such divisions are exploited both by elite members of their own communities as well as the generally homophobic societal institutions' (Chakraborty, 2012, p. 147). Niladri Chatterjee suggests that 'by introducing the queer into his oeuvre Dattani seems to be communicating to the audience the simple yet often ignored point that living as a homosexual entails much of what living as a heterosexual does' (Chatterjee, 2015, p. 78). Preeti Singh writes that Dattani's plays deal with 'the homosexual, the ostracized and marginalized segment of society, within the middle class, where heterosexuality epitomizes the normal' and deviation is not entertained (Singh, 2016, p. 143). Thus, we can see that for most critics, there is a strong current of social realities being reflected in Dattani. My own essay builds on this recognition of the social 'connects' of Dattani's plays.

My paper focuses on, first, Dattani's representations of the problems confronted by homosexuals with regard to articulating their angst. Second, it analyses how the challenge of articulation for homosexuals in these plays is compensated by the use of gestures which enable them to communicate their feelings and desires. Thirdly, it spotlights the instances of exclusion of homosexuals, and the pressures exerted by the heteronormative family and society. Finally, an attempt will be made to see how Dattani's plays enable the remaking of Indian civil society.

Linguistic Lacunae

Even if the law permits homosexuals to celebrate their identity, identity requires a language for its expression and for social understanding. The signifier 'homosexual' has often meant other than what it is ontologically, particularly in a society where the concepts of gay and lesbian have not been linguistically defined. In such an atmosphere, coming out of the closet would require a presumptive understanding among people (family or relatives) to decode what it means to be a homosexual. Given that sex as a discourse itself is taboo in Indian civil society, and homosexuality a silent topic, any attempt to define it fails. For a homosexual to even express himself/herself to a heterosexual person becomes difficult.

One Muggy Night in Mumbai (1998) (*OMNIM*) documents the difficulty of enunciating love towards another homosexual character. This failure to present emotions in language makes homosexuals anxious, lest they should be misunderstood by their partners; the alternative is to

leave feelings unexpressed. In the play, Kamlesh tells Sharad that after the latter 'went away' from his life he felt a 'void' (Dattani, 2000, p. 68). It was the same feeling which Kamlesh experienced three years ago after Prakash had left him as he was 'ashamed of [their] relationship' (p. 69). Kamlesh says, 'I was very angry. I left my parents and my sister to come here, all because of him' (ibid). Due to this 'void' he visits a 'straight homophobic psychiatrist' 'every Wednesday morning'. To this, Sharad replies, 'Why didn't you *tell* me? I would have *talked* you out of it!' (emphasis added) (p. 69). This 'talk[ing] out' would have been possible in 'normal' circumstances or in a heterosexual relationship where Kamlesh could have shared his feelings of pain with others, his family members or friends, but in this case, he had to look for professional help. Even professional help doesn't prove helpful as entrenched homophobia is palpable in the suggestions and treatment of the doctor.

In the same play, another character, Bunny, does not know how to communicate his homosexuality to his wife and parents. Except for his close friends, he remains in the closet. Bunny is excessively caring about his wife and assumes that she is 'content' with him. He is always in a quandary: 'What about me? I exist too, you know! Why doesn't anyone *ask* me whether I am happy or not? (Dattani, 2000, p. 84, emphasis added) Adjusting himself between the two worlds—the homosexual inside and the pretended heterosexual outside—Bunny is thoroughly disturbed. The overtly macho character that Bunny impersonates is an attempt to conceal his sexual orientation, an attempt to fit into the 'normal' world. Glover and Kaplan write, 'men who appear to be *too* masculine are also a problem since there is always the worry that they might have something to hide' (Glover & Kaplan, 2005, p. 87, emphasis in original). Bunny's question—why nobody *asked* him—suggests that his anguish is the result of his impersonation but also the inability to articulate his true state, since everybody accepts he is happy as a heterosexual.

This want of language is also apparent in *Do the Needful* (1997), where the protagonist Alpesh is not able to state his sexual preference when his parents force him toward a second marriage. His mother pressurizes him thus:

> ALPESH. Yes. All right. I give up. If you like her, I will marry her.
>
> KUSUMBEN PATEL. It is not a question of what I like or don't like. When we are begging, what is the point in hiding the begging bowl?

ALPESH. Baa, I want to ask you something.

KUSUMBEN PATEL. Yes?

ALPESH. Is it…is it very important for me to get married?

(Dattani, 2000, p. 125)

And when Alpesh says that this marriage might also end in divorce, Baa blackmails him: 'I might as well take poison and die if it happens again' (Dattani, 2000, p. 126). He knows that the breakdown of his first marriage was caused by his homosexuality: 'I wasn't going to say it. She wanted me to'. Perhaps, after knowing Alpesh's sexual orientation, which she was unaware of earlier, his first wife might have broken off the relationship.

Dattani, I believe, *stages the impossibility of communicating sexual orientation in the heteronormative context.* Alpesh is comfortable when communicating with Trilok (his gay partner) in his 'thoughts' but never talks openly in real life to his parents. Dattani implies that it is the lack of a discourse on such matters which makes it impossible for a gay individual to communicate with others, and, at times, even with oneself. Hence, it would certainly not be feasible for Alpesh to talk about this matter to his 'illiterate' (Dattani, 2000, p. 132) mother or to his conceited father. Similarly, in *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1997) (*BFQ*), Nitin is not able to tell Baa, his mother, that he loves Praful. Baa considers Praful to be bad company and warns Nitin to remain away from him, and not to marry his sister, Alka (Dattani, 2000, p. 301). Nitin eventually marries Alka, however, he is not able to confide his homosexuality to her, and their marriage turns bitter. He represses his feelings and desires, suffers from an inferiority complex, and is unduly dominated by his elder brother, Jatin.

If it is difficult for middle class homosexuals to articulate their angst, lower class homosexuals face even more hardship. In *BFQ*, *Do the Needful* and *OMNIM,* 'lower-class homosexual men [the auto-driver, the gardener and the guard] operate as doubly subalternized individuals who are turned into fetishistic commodities of elite gaze' (Chakraborty, 2012, p. 156). The middle-class homosexuals who exploit them presume that they enjoy the act:

Kamlesh [to guard]: You do enjoy it. What you do to me, what I do to you. Don't you? (in *OMNIM,* Dattani, 2000, p. 51)

Again,

> Alpesh [to Alka]: Wait a minute! He (Mali) was enjoying every minute of it! (in *Do the Needful,* Dattani, 2000, p. 153)

Any scope for full-fledged, emotionally enriching homosexual communication is overshadowed by elite middle-class homosexual men who treat it as a mere sexual favour by paying lower class men. The social hierarchy and class difference are barriers that separate elite and lower-class homosexuals; the latter undergo similar emotional desires and pain as their exploitative elite homosexual partners (even the fleeting ones). Hence, hierarchy, class and economy also circumscribe the language of communication between homosexuals, especially those from underprivileged social backgrounds.

Gestural Compensation in Gay Discourse

The homosexual characters in the plays have various ways of expressing their feelings, mainly through their gestures, when conventional language doesn't facilitate articulations of homosexual feelings, or the homosexuals find the language restrictive. By 'gesture' I mean a wide variety of actions here, such as facial and corporeal gestures, as well as a sustained behavioural pattern and body language of the characters.

In *OMNIM*, the protagonist Kamlesh who has sex with the guard, 'stoops down' before him and tries to tie his shoelace:

> Kamlesh: Aapki shoelace…
>
> *Kamlesh kneels before him. He is about to tie the guards' shoelace. The guard moves away quickly.*
>
> Guard (*aghast*). Yeh aap kya kar rahen hain, saab? Ji, main kar loonga.
>
> *The guard moves away and is about to put his foot on a stool, but decides against it. He looks around, foot in the air, and decides to attempt tying his shoelace as he is.*
>
> Kamlesh: (*rushing to him*) Let me do that for you. Please….
>
> *Kamlesh kneels beside him, grabs his foot and tries to put it on his thigh*.
>
> (Dattani, 2000, p. 50)

I suggest that the acts described convey a gestural compensation for the shortfall in Kamlesh's language, a shortfall that prevents him from verbally expressing his concern for the guard. In the absence of linguistic structures to enunciate homosexual affection, Kamlesh employs the gesture. In the same play, Sharad tries to enact humorously the pent-up emotion of Kamlesh for Prakash: 'SHARAD (*with a drunken slur à la Meena Kumari*). Prakash! (*Rubs off his 'sindoor'.*) Prakaash! (Breaks his 'bangles' on the wall.) Prakaaaaash! (*Slides down the wall, sobbing uncontrollably*)' (Dattani, 2000, p.57). Sharad playacts since he realizes that Kamlesh will not articulate the pain which he is undergoing after his separation from Prakash.

In *Do the Needful*, Alpesh who resists marrying Lata, initially acquiesces to the idea but later imposes the condition that Mali (her gardener) should accompany her as a dowry. During their marriage, Mali tells everyone that Alpesh intends to gift him a 'motorcycle in Bombay' when they move there (Dattani, 2000, p. 156). This benevolent gesture towards Mali implies that Alpesh intends to take (sexual) favours from him, and that Mali understands this implication.

In *BFQ*, Nitin nurtures a bonsai which Jatin sees on his table. They have a conversation about it:

> JITEN. What the shit is that?
>
> NITIN. A plant.
>
> JITEN. I know. But why so ugly?
>
> NITIN. It's an art.
>
> (Dattani, 2000, p. 288).

Nitin's cordial attitude towards the bonsai, which may be interpreted as a gesture, is also his approach towards his own life. It is 'ugly', full of problems, like a bonsai pruned and clipped from every side, yet he sees it as a work of art.

Social Exclusion

Dattani's plays reveal the dark side of society: mutual slandering, social exclusion and ostracism, which occur for the simple reason that the individuals in question do not fit into a certain cultural group. People are expected to nurture or denounce certain passions, which are categorized

as gender or class appropriate. An apt example is provided in *Dance Like a Man* (Dattani, 1989) ' a play about a young man wanting to be a dancer growing up in a world that believes dance is for women' (Chaudhuri, 2005, p. 67). Amritlal is the patriarchal voice in the play who lambasts his son Jairaj for being different: 'I have never seen a man with long hair… normal men' (Dattani, 2000, p. 417). Naik writes about the image of men that pervades society:

> Men's choice to perform effeminate roles is viewed as a perversion or unmanly, whereas women's choice to perform masculine roles is often considered as a sign of empowerment. A man has to be a man. If he withdraws from being a man, he is stigmatised. Hence, he has to live and die as a man. He cannot be something else. Unmanliness makes him 'gay'. (Naik, 2017, p. 116)

Amritlal, in the play, consolidates what Naik states above: 'A woman in a man's world may be considered as being progressive. But a man in a woman's world is pathetic' (Dattani, 2000, p. 427). In other words, masculinity is considered as the benchmark for men, and if women emulate it then it is supposedly progressive. This notion indicates a uniform standard of gender worthiness. Failing to maintain the set standard of masculinity puts men in a negative light and results in labelling or name-calling with words like 'impotent'. On the other hand, when a woman does some valiant deed she may be called 'the son of the family', hinting at masculine superiority, affirming the intrinsic gender hierarchy at the core of Indian society.

Parents in the Indian family often pressurize their children to marry. Accordingly, their children have to marry members of the opposite sex irrespective of their sexuality. In Dattani's plays there are many such instances: Alpesh marries Lata in *Do the Needful*, Nitin marries Alka in *BFQ*, and Bunny in *OMNIM* is already married. The married lives of these couples deviate from the norm. Lata takes advantage of Alpesh's sexual orientation to continue her relationship with her boyfriend, Salim. Alka becomes alcoholic and complains about the devastation of their marriage, 'I know I haven't been an ideal housewife. And you haven't been a…well, a competent husband' (Dattani, 2000, p. 300). Bunny is neither sure of his happiness, nor that of his wife:

> DEEPALI. Do you love your wife, Bunny?
>
> BUNNY. Yes! I do.
>
> DEEPALI. Can you love your wife?

BUNNY. Of course I can!

DEEPALI. With the same intensity with which you can love a man?

BUNNY. You know I would be lying if I said I could. But I give her so much more. More than any heterosexual man. I do look after her well. She is content.

RANJIT. Content!

BUNNY. She boasts about my work to all her neighbours. Our children are popular in school. And they all love me. At least I am not depressed like Kamlesh!

(*Silence*.) Sorry, Kamlesh.

DEEPALI. We were talking about your wife, not you….

(Dattani, 2000, p. 84)

In the plays, one can notice the undue dominance of homosexual characters by others. In *BFQ*, Nitin is bossed by Jatin, who, therefore takes important decisions at home and in the office. He also commands Nitin to control his wife, Alka, or to '[g]et rid of [her]' (Dattani, 2000, p. 90). In *Do the Needful,* Alpesh is also commanded by his mother, who blackmails him by threatening suicide if he doesn't marry. Instances of homosexual people made to conform to the demands of people whom they trust, or of 'straight' people who enter into sexual relations with them can be seen in *BFQ*. The protagonist Nitin trusted Praful in a 'sexual' relation, and the latter manipulates his sister, Alka, to marry Nitin. Praful assures Nitin that Alka knows everything about Nitin, and yet would marry him as she just 'wanted the security of marriage' (Dattani, 2000, p. 314). Recounting this, Nitin says, 'Oh! But how ashamed he made me feel after! He made me cry each time! That was a game he played'. Repercussions follow blackmail and false promises made to sexually marginalized characters; their psychological anxieties, are aggravated especially when they do not find anyone to talk to.

Similarly, in *OMNIM*, Ed/Prakash wishes to marry Alpesh's sister, Kiran, so that it would be easy for him to retain his relationship with Alpesh. Socially sanctified marriage becomes a subterfuge to pass for 'normal', and enable continuity of a life in the closet as also happens in *Do the Needful*. Naik reads such a choice as an 'instance of enduring hegemonic masculinity [which] is the existence of men who are gay in private and married in public, a phenomenon which is highly prevalent

in India' (Naik, 2017, p. 124). The family as a unit which fortifies the inviolable social norm of marriage is valorized in such circumstances, mainly so because 'the family [i]s an agency of control and point of sexual saturation' and 'it was in the "bourgeois" or "aristocratic" family that the sexuality of children and adolescents was problematised' (Foucault, 2008, p. 120). Hence, homosexuals are pressurized by both family and society with different injunctions.

The Making of a Gay Imaginary in Dattani

The Gay Imaginary in Dattani is made up of specific reconfigurations and reorientations of notions, ideas and myths about the form of language and the institution of marriage. The audience/public is attracted by the 'technologies of modernity' (Novetzke, 2007, p. 261), and they play a salient part in witnessing the presence of the 'other' (sexual minorities/ other genders). Of such 'technologies', I suggest, plays are a prominent example.

The problems of linguistic lacunae and social exclusion in homosexuality find a new conduit of relief in the plays of Dattani. The lack of articulation due to language deficiency goes on to find a new technique through 'gestures' which become a compensatory medium or a language of desire. His plays orchestrate various gestures that gays use in order to overrule the heteronormative discourse related to emotional feelings. In this way, they devise their own means to communicate their concerns with one another. This language of desire is comprehensible only to other homosexuals. For instance, Kamlesh and Sharad in *OMNIM* understand each other well through subtleties in language. Homosexual individuals relate to each other in a subtle way—identifying each other's sexual orientation, using certain nuances in their conversation—which is difficult for heterosexuals to decipher. Most of the homosexual characters in Dattani's plays relate to each other as if they have been together forever. Their communication occurs unconsciously/intrinsically and such communication can be deciphered or decoded by people with a similar bent of mind or sexual orientation. An instance of this can be seen in Alpesh's intention to take Mali to Bombay, an intention that is clear to both of them, and consent is silently communicated in *Do the Needful*. Relationships among homosexuals are too complex for heterosexuals to understand—the bond between Prakash and Nitin remains intact despite their dislike for each other, something which Baa and Jatin fail to

understand in *BFQ*. Though the relationship of Kamlesh and Sharad breaks up, they still treat each other with care and love as if their relation is intact in *OMNIM*. Bunny might be a mystery to his wife and family in *OMNIM*; however, his homosexual friends understand him thoroughly. They can read between the lines when he speaks, and understand what he means. For example, when he says, 'We don't want to believe that we can never love one another', Deepali retorts, 'Speak for yourself' (Dattani, 2000, p. 88). She knows that he loves men but is scared to acknowledge it openly, therefore, he remains in the closet throughout. There is a language of communication among homosexuals, the language of desire and this is available only to those within their circle. This language has to be made communicable to the outer/heterosexual world too so that heterosexuals too can understand the language of desire, hardship and suffering of the homosexuals. It is this non-exclusionary, non-abusive language pioneered by homosexuals that constitutes the foundation of a gay imaginary in Dattani's plays.

Dattani's plays show the psychological distress that homosexuals undergo on a daily basis. They struggle with their own being or identity, trying to understand themselves and their sexuality. On top of that, the pressure from family and society compounds their trauma. The compulsion for gays to behave 'normally' adds to their distress. The plays of Dattani also showcase social/familial coercion of individuals to opt for gender-specific careers. For instance, in *Dance Like a Man* Jairaj has to give up his dancing career because his father, Amritlal, deems it unfit for men to indulge in such a 'din' (Dattani, 2000, p. 413). He would rather endorse cricket for his son: 'I would have made a cricket pitch for you on our lawn if you were interested in cricket. Well, most boys are interested in cricket, my son is interested in dance' (p. 414–415). Dattani makes us rethink the whole concept of passion and career as it is streamlined in the normative order. Similarly, he makes us re-consider the heteronormative institution of marriage which is intolerant of any deviance. For instance, in *Seven Steps Around the Fire* (1999) when Mr. Sharma, the minister, finds out that his son Subbu is married to Kamla, a hijra, he arranges 'to have [the latter] burned to death' (Dattani, 2000, p. 41), and prepares his son for another marriage with 'a wife from a fine family'. The plays of Dattani demonstrate that homosexuals who are trapped in heterosexual marriages, willy-nilly, fail terribly in the relationships forced on them. The married lives of Nitin in *BFQ*, Alpesh in *Do the Needful*, and Bunny in *OMNIM* turn out to be disastrous. Ed/Prakash in *OMNIM* is tired of living like a

homosexual and tries to be heterosexual, in vain, by marrying Kiran which evidences the limited options that homosexuals have in society.

Dattani shows that the gay life is an alternative lifestyle to a heterosexual one, and it would be unwise to force a heterosexual lifestyle on homosexuals thinking that they will turn 'normal'. Dattani, accordingly, subverts the notion of 'normal' and 'abnormal' in these sexualities. The myth of the heterosexual family, argues Dattani, is detrimental to a homosexual imaginary because it forces the gay into a system of relations that rejects his sexual identity. The plays of Dattani enable the redefining of space for the sexual identity of homosexuals where they can accept themselves without fear. For this, the plays question the *raison d'être* of the traditional heteronormative mindset which is intolerant of other sexualities.

The plays of Dattani highlight the discourse of resistance to and by gays. Heterosexuals do not accommodate homosexuals within their social sphere due to paranoia. This paranoia is an outcome of the stereotypical representation of homosexuals in society over a period of time. His plays challenge this stereotype by showcasing homosexuals as ordinary/common people. Dattani's characters are honest in revealing their feelings and desires which highlights the fact that gays have been victims of prejudice and misrepresentation in the hands of the mainstream literature/films for very long. With unprejudiced representation, Dattani opens up a window of hope, of tolerance, towards homosexuals in society. The plays hopefully can become a medium of acceptance for alternative sexualities. For a gay imaginary to emerge, Dattani suggests, we need to see the gay as another human, not as a special or strange case. In thinking of and treating the homosexual as just another human being, he implies, the social acceptance of the gay can evolve. We can then say that Post- S.377 the challenge to create a space of awareness regarding homosexuality is greater now than before.

Conclusion

A proper understanding of sexuality and gender can dispel the myths and misunderstandings attached to homosexuality. Dattani's plays enable the opening up of a space for discussion on alternative sexualities. They engage the middle-class audience through themes which are of utmost relevance in the present time. Dattani's innovative use of the multiple-level-stage provides him an edge over traditional stagecraft to juxtapose

polyphonic voices, which are at times in contradiction. It is through this constant revision/repetition/citation of the themes and performances that Dattani's plays impact the civil society. The redefining and expansion of civil society can extend the frontier of providing 'minimum standards of life' (which Neera Chandhoke suggests as the reason for the emergence of the civil society in post-Independence India) to people who have been sexual subalterns for a long time.

The law has asserted its stand by decriminalizing homosexuality in India, but for the realization and implementation of this judgement social participation is important. Civil society can play a major role in this by providing a space for articulations by homosexuals that aim to secure respect and dignity for their individuality. Procuring respect or social capital would boost the confidence of homosexuals to accept themselves as they are, and be open with family and society. To come out of the closet is considered important and necessary for homosexuals as it would give them the freedom to live their lives as they want. Most of the homosexual characters in Dattani's plays stay within the closet and feel stifled and traumatized. In a 'free zone' in an accepting civil society, an individual can fully realize his/her potential without being destroyed by prejudice and fear. Dattani gives voice to these sexual subalterns by providing them with this free zone through the texts/plays. The performance of his plays on stage has a metaphorical resonance to what takes place in society. Watching individuals with different sexualities and their behaviour on stage will doubtless increase the understanding that will lead to acceptance of the existing 'other'. Dattani becomes that voice of assertion which renders possible this intervention to shine the spotlight on homosexuality within Indian civil society.

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1. Section 377 cites, 'Unnatural offences–Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either

description for a term which may extend to 10 years, and shall be liable to fine.' For a critique of Section 377, see Gupta (2006).

For the Supreme Court ruling see, 'In the Supreme Court of India Criminal Original Jurisdiction Writ Petition (Criminal) no. 76 of 2016: *Navtej Singh Johar vs Union of India* through Secretary, Ministry of Law and Justice' https://www.sci.gov.in/supremecourt/2016/14961/14961_2016_Judgement_06-Sep-2018.pdf

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Influence of perceived media support on negative experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals

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Article

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Abstract

Few studies have scrutinized the use of popular media as a practical tool for reducing homophobia and providing services for LGBTQ+ people. This survey study sought to gauge the association of LGBTQ+ individuals' subjective judgment that social support is available through media (Perceived Media Support; PMS) with their identity and psychological status. We turn to *Cultivation Theory* and the *Parasocial Contact Hypothesis* as guiding frameworks to develop the *Perceived Media Support Inventory* (PMSI), capturing the emotional, instrumental, informational and esteem support that LGBTQ+ individuals perceive from popular media. We collected data from 200 self-identified participants in Iran. Factor and item analyses verified the robustness of the *PSMI*. PMS was revealed as associated with identity certainty in gays, lesbians and transgender people, identity affirmation in bisexuals, decreased acceptance concerns in transgender people, reduced anxiety in gays, and elevated resilience to stressful circumstances in LGBTQ+s. Besides, surprisingly, PMS was linked to several ramifications, such as identity uncertainty in bisexuals, identity superiority and concealment motivation in gays, internalized homonegativity in transgender people, difficult orientation/identity development process in gays, anxiety in LGBTQ+s in general, a feeling of psychological distance from the community in lesbians and feeling of hatred toward the community in gays. Findings suggest that perceived media support has positive and negative

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psychological consequences on Iranian LGBTQ+ people, leading us to theorize the *dialectics of cultivated media support*.

Keywords

LGBTQ+, media, perceived support, anxiety, resilience, measurement

Introduction

LGBTQ+ Identity, Homophobia and Perceived Support

Full acceptance of LGBTQ+ identity is still widely opposed in many parts of the world (Ellis et al., 2020), with multiple variables contributing to the degree of acceptance, including gender, race, religion, political affiliation and geography. Men generally express more homophobic attitudes than women (Nagoshi et al., 2008), likely because young men regularly receive more homophobic messages than women (Herek, 2002). Homophobia is also prominent in Black and Latin communities (Chaux & León, 2016; Ward, 2005), conservative and religiously fundamentalist populations (Nagoshi et al., 2008; Wilkinson, 2004) and Eastern parts of the global landscape where queerness is often interpreted as a uniquely Western 'problem' (Weiss & Bosia, 2013). Homophobia, as understood through a Western lens, is also common in Iranian culture, where discourses surrounding non-hetero sexualities have a long and complicated history (Korycki & Nasirzadeh, 2013).

Though research on sexual minorities in Iran is limited because researchers generally avoid investigating LGBTQ+-related issues (Yadegarfard & Bahramabadian, 2014), most conclude that Iranian LGBTQ+ individuals live under systematic oppression (Karimi, 2018; Yadegarfard, 2019), with negative cultural attitudes about LGBTQ+ people commonly expressed in the country (Mireshghi & Matsumoto, 2008). As a result of identity delegitimization, LGBTQ+ individuals often experience feelings of social and cultural isolation (see Abdi & Van Gilder, 2016). There is evidence that Iranian LGBTQ individuals suffer from a disproportionate amount of severe mental health symptoms and suicidal ideation (e.g., Kabir & Brinsworth, 2021). Iranian LGBTQ+ people regularly adopt coping strategies to deal with stressful encounters (Yadegarfard, 2019), such as attempting to *integrate into* the dominant community by identifying with Iranian family values (e.g., marriage and children; Karimi, 2018) or cultivating cultural *distance from* the dominant Iranian community (Abdi & Van Gilder, 2016). In some cases, leaving Iran (Yadegarfard, 2019) and seeking refuge in other countries serve as a last resort coping strategy (Ahmady, 2018; Karimi, 2018). With the internet and, by extension, social media becoming increasingly emergent in Iran, Iranian LGBTQ+ representations are becoming more visible. However, they starkly contrast with Iran's anti-LGBTQ+ social and cultural system. The internet is a remarkable apparatus for minorities (Mehra et al., 2004), providing opportunities for information gathering and social bonding (Mesch, 2012). Iran's LGBTQ+

community frequently uses Western-based internet sources to obtain information, expand social networks of sexual minority groups and engage in activism (Nasirzadeh, 2015). The present study examines the extent to which popular media provides social support to LGBTQ+ people in Iran.

LGBTQ+ people often face harassment and discrimination related to their sexual and gender identities (see Meyer, 2003), with reactions possibly mitigated by social support. Previous research illustrates that LGBTQ+ individuals commonly experience significant mental health challenges (e.g., Moagi et al., 2021), including severe depression (McNeil et al., 2017), anxiety (Meyer, 2003) and suicidal tendencies (Shields et al., 2012). Meanwhile, several lines of evidence suggest that social support provides a buffer against these adverse life events (e.g., McConnell et al., 2015; McNeil et al., 2017). It has been argued (Wethington & Kessler, 1986) that the stress-buffering effects of social support are more strongly associated with the perception of availability of support (perceived support) rather than receiving actual support (received support). For example, McDowell and Serovich (2007) find that perceived social support is a better predictor of positive mental health than actual help. Previous investigations revealed that perceived support mediates received support (Wethington & Kessler, 1986). The perception of being supported influences the appraisal of stressful circumstances, which buffers the link between stress and health (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Wills & Shinar, 2000). Therefore, perceived support is a crucial feature of functional coping with stress. The current study assesses the degree to which LGBTQ+ people perceive support from media sources.

Previous studies have attempted to develop the concept of social support by categorizing types of support (see Barrera, 1986; Cobb, 1979; Cohen & Hoberman, 1983; House, 1981; Norbeck et al., 1983; Weinert & Brandt, 1987; Weiss, 1974). Gottlieb and Bergen's review (2010) integrates various categorical schemes, establishing emotional, instrumental, informational, companionate and esteem supports as principal support types. More recently, García-Martín et al. (2016) listed emotional support, instrumental support and informational support as the major features of social support. In the present study, we develop an instrument to assess LGBTQ+ people's perceived support from popular media. The instrument is designed using the four most studied types of social support (i.e., emotional, instrumental, informational and esteem support).

Western and Iranian LGBTQ+ Media Representation

Media can be considered a source of perceived social support (see Reining et al., 2018) and has been critical for securing minority rights legislation, improving public opinion on minority groups and providing a communicative bridge between minorities and dominant communities. LGBTQ+ youth regularly turn to media for information about gender and sexual identities (Brown et al., 2005), often when real-life role models are absent (Paroski, 1987). Such media engagement by LGBTQ+ individuals is likely affected by the intersectional situatedness (e.g., age, race, gender identity, physical ability and socioeconomic status; see Crenshaw,

1990) of the individual. Utilizing media for education and support is becoming more common, as global LGBTQ+ media representation has steadily increased despite its troubled history in the new millennium. Cultural norms can, however, either encourage or prohibit LGBTQ+ media representation and stifle its potential to provide social support. For example, gay Iranian men report being familiar with Western media (movies, news and blogs) that tend to depict well-off, white, Western versions of being gay, while Iranian government-sponsored media rarely includes LGBTQ+ media presence (Karimi, 2018).

While internet access provides the Iranian LGBTQ+ community with abundant media representation worldwide, Iranian media is mostly limited in its LGBTQ+ portrayals. The rise of both independent and social media has increased the representation of LGBTQ+ populations and related issues in Iran. Independent media covers broad aspects of the LGBTQ+ population (see Vanzan, 2014), bolstered by support from private sector investment. Online programming addresses some of the concerns of LGBTQ+ Iranians. Persian-language media located abroad also provide programs criticizing the government's lack of support for LGBTQ+ individuals, addressing the complexities of LGBTQ+ life and providing education to increase LGBTQ+ awareness and reduce negative public attitudes. The independence and anonymity of social media platforms have made it possible for LGBTQ+ Iranian people to create networks that address the challenges of the LGBTQ+ population. Given that LGBTQ+ Iranians live in a society that is openly hostile toward sexual minorities (Rehman, 2021), it may be possible to identify support and refuge in global media representations.

While modern LGBTQ+ media representation can be a productive force challenging homophobic views, popular media also has a long history of perpetuating homophobic stereotypes (Capsuto, 2000; Russo, 1981) that increase negative associations with minority groups (Ross, 2019), indicating media's contradictory influence on the community. Historically, increased LGBTQ+ representation in Western media has been partially attributed to the AIDS crisis (Walters, 2001), solidifying connections between LGBTQ+ subjectivities and pain, destruction and threat. Moreover, media sources have often made questionable choices regarding character traits and story arcs. For example, older LGBTQ+ individuals are often neglected, with the media's primary focus on younger LGBTQ+s populations (see Hurd et al., 2020). Moreover, programs have routinely focused on middle and upper-middle White gays and lesbians (Capsuto, 2000), featured dateless and asexual LGBTQ+ characters rather than those in romantic or sexual relationships (Battles & Hilton-Morrow, 2002), framed gay men as promiscuous (Herman, 2005) and consistently represented gay characters as both one-dimensional (Cooper, 2003), and as comedic punchlines (Tropiano, 2002). There have also been efforts to de-feminize gay men on television, constructing them as masculine to make their queerness more digestible to heterosexual audiences (Avila-Saavedra, 2009).

Recent years have, however, experienced an uptick in more optimistic, complex media representations of LGBTQ+ characters and issues (Magrath, 2019), especially those in newer and emergent media platforms (McInroy & Craig, 2017). In addition, contemporary queer Western media representation has increased

critiques of neoliberal ideology (Monaghan, 2021), enhanced the visibility of trans- and gender-non-conforming communities (GLAAD, 2016) and shifted toward representing healthy, loving relationships between members of the LGBTQ+ community (Edwards, 2020). These shifts evidence the cyclical and conflicting relationship between cultural progress and mediated representation. Here, increased media visibility of marginalized groups helps to either reproduce or modify public opinion about those communities, which can confirm or change public policy. Cyclically, this yields the potential to destigmatize LGBTQ+ communities and thus grant them greater access to and participation in constructing the mediascape (Appadurai, 1990), which can cultivate positive public attitudes about the communities represented.

Cultivation Theory

Cultivation Theory (*CT*; Gerbner, 1998) posits that social life has transitioned from being an essentially private matter to one taking place in the public sphere of mass media, therefore positioning the media as a major tool for creating shared understandings of reality. Gerbner (1998) initially argued that television was the 'source of the most broadly shared images and messages in history' and is the 'mainstream of the common symbolic environment into which our children are born and in which we all live out our lives' (p. 177). The theory, which originally focused on interconnections between televised representations of racial violence and off-screen attitudes toward racial prejudice (Gerbner, 1969, 1970), suggests that television content is understood by viewers as accurately reflecting off-screen realities (Gerbner, 1969, 1970, 1998), even though such representations are often inaccurate and misleading (Gerbner, 1998; Harmon, 2001). Viewers internalize mediated portrayals of individuals and communities, constructing real-life understandings and expectations about them (Gerbner, 1998). Consistently viewing media programming results in *mainstreaming*, or the verification of media's 'cultivation of common perspectives' (Gerbner, 1998, p. 183), in which specific forms of reality are constructed through shared meanings and assumptions countering other, more marginal discourses.

Research has supported that media consumption informs viewer attitudes about the issues and communities featured in programming (Fisch, 2009). For example, research has shown that consistently watching content featuring teenage motherhood increases viewer perceptions that such lifestyles are aspirational (Martins & Jensen, 2014). Heavy viewers of medical dramas are more likely to downplay the severity of chronic illness than light viewers (Chung, 2014). Relevant to the present study are findings illustrating correlations between exposure to openly gay characters in media and support for their social equality in real life (Bond & Compton, 2015). Heterosexuals who view programming with prominent gay characters are less likely to be hostile to gay people (Schiappa et al., 2006). In addition, individuals who consider television their primary form of entertainment are more likely to have favourable views of same-sex marriage (Lee & Hicks, 2011). Therefore, extant research shows that positive representations

of LGBTQ+ characters can minimize viewer prejudice (Calzo & Ward, 2009; Riggle et al., 1996).

Interestingly, research utilizing *CT* to examine media's influence on attitudes toward LGBTQ+ issues has, to our knowledge, all focused on heterosexual audiences. This means that the specific effects of and benefits associated with LGBTQ+ representation are relatively unknown for communities with the most at stake through such representation. Of course, LGBTQ+ audiences orient to and take from media representations of their community differently than straight audiences, meaning that additional analytical frameworks are necessary. Additionally, contemporary social actors now find themselves exposed to and immersed in a much more prosperous media economy far surpassing that of just television. This means that cultivation processes now occur across various media formats, including those affiliated with the digits here, such as social media platforms (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010; North, 2011). The current study examines how LGBTQ+ audiences might cultivate positive feelings associated with their sexual and gender identities through media consumption and their relationships with such content.

LGBTQ+ Media Representation, Parasocial Relationships and Cultivated Support

To bridge the gap between *CT*'s emphasis on media effects on public opinion and our desire to understand better how those representations influence feelings of support among Iranian LGBTQ+ viewers, it is useful to consider the psychological and interpersonal significance of parasocial relationships. Parasocial relationships involve forming attitudes about and developing intimacy with individuals represented in media content, including social media (Baek et al., 2013). Parasocial interaction differs from cultivation processes, which are not unidirectional but 'part of a continual, dynamic, ongoing process of interaction among messages and contexts' (Gerbner, 1998, p. 182). Schiappa et al.'s (2005) *Parasocial Contact Hypothesis* (*PCH*) contends that viewers cultivate intimacy with mediated personas with whom they relate and that these orientations function similarly to interpersonal relationships.

In parasocial relationships, individuals develop a connection with a character and, subsequently, feel support from that character (Conway & Rubin, 1991). Parasocial connections can have similar and sometimes even more positive effects than interpersonal friendships (Kanazawa, 2002). This is particularly true for individuals lacking friendships and who feel lonely because of that absence (Bond, 2018), like LGBTQ+ individuals who regularly experience social isolation (Mereish & Poteat, 2015). Given that social support from relationships with friends and family can lessen feelings of loneliness and anxiety associated with LGBTQ+ identity (McLaren et al., 2008; McNeil et al., 2017), it is not surprising that LGBTQ+ people with low social support are more likely to create parasocial relationships with media figures than those who report more social support (McCutcheon et al.,

2021). Given the stressful experiences of LGBTQ+ Iranians and the pivotal role of perceived support in combating stressful events, perceived media support may be an important stress reliever for the LGBTQ+ population in Iran.

Emphasis placed upon parasocial relationships is an essential departure from *Cultivation Theory* as it shifts focus from the viewer's ability to create *understanding toward* or *comfort with* to *identify with*. Theories of cultivation may, for example, invest in understanding how programs featuring LGBTQ+ characters influence straight audiences' homophobic attitudes. At the same time, the parasocial contact hypothesis may investigate the degree to which audiences identify with or disdain those personalities and why. Characters on television series will have varying, if not competing, effects on LGBTQ+ versus straight audiences. Straight audiences may, for instance, find *Will & Grace's* Jack McFarlane's caricature-driven performance to be a harmless and easily digestible form of gayness, reduced mainly to a comedic punchline. Although the unthreateningly consumable nature of such portrayals may modify straight audiences' *attitudes about* and *comfort with* gay people, it also establishes a fictitious conceptualization of LGBTQ+ communities. It, therefore, calls into question the legitimacy and conditions of such 'support'. Alternatively, LGBTQ+ viewers may find Jack McFarlane to be a shallow or unobtainable representation of gayness—one failing to capture LGBTQ+ embodiment and sensibilities accurately. This means that, oddly, LGBTQ+ programming may engender straight support at the expense of the well-being of LGBTQ+ audiences, further indicating the contradictory, tension-fuelled characteristics of LGBTQ+ media content that routinely go undescribed.

In sum, combining processes of cultivation and parasocial interaction calls upon us to reconsider the metrics traditionally used to assess media success in destabilizing anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes. We must also be more attentive to such representations' inherently contradictory nature and consequences. Rather than solely using 'straight acceptance and comfort' as the determinant for media content's ability to cultivate pro-LGBTQ+ attitudes, it is important to fully assess the degree to which the media cultivate social support in LGBTQ+ audiences. We must also better nuance the implications of LGBTQ+ media content, recognizing that it may simultaneously constrain and champion LGBTQ+ sensibilities.

The present study is invested in understanding the positive and negative implications of media viewing among Iranian LGBTQ+ audiences. Given the absence of research on this topic, we approach the investigation by developing an instrument to measure perceived media support among LGBTQ+ people. We establish the reliability and validity of the instrument while examining an LGBTQ+ population in Iran. Subsequently, we examine the correlates of perceived media support and negative LGBTQ+-related experiences (acceptance concerns, concealment motivation, identity uncertainty, internalized homonegativity, difficulty with identity development processes, identity superiority, identity affirmation and identity centrality). We hypothesize that perceived media support will be associated with both positive and negative consequences in LGBTQ+ participants for the following reasons: (a) Iranian LGBTQ+ participants will tend to find support in Western media sources, which may appear socially

supportive, yet present LGBTQ+ culture as foreign and different to Iranian culture and (b) Media content featuring representations of LGBTQ+ people may be focused on securing heterosexual viewership. While it may be supportive to view LGBTQ+ media representations, such representations may not fully depict the depth of the LGBTQ+ experience for LGBTQ+ viewers.

Method

Participants

A convenience sample of self-identified Iranian LGBTQ+ individuals was recruited from LGBTQ+ community websites, online forums and chat rooms. For the total sample ($n = 200$), the participants' mean age was 20.53 years (SD = 3.96 years; range = 17–39 years). About one-fourth (28.5%) self-identified as bisexual, 25.5% as lesbian, 21.5% as gay, 13.5% as queer and 11% as transgender. This study was conducted following the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and all respondents provided personal online written informed consent to participate in the study.

Measures

The *Perceived Media Support Inventory* (*PMSI*)was developed (in Persian) to measure perceived media support by LGBTQ+ individuals. Considering theoretical frameworks and measurements on social support (see Lakey & Cohen, 2000), 14 potential items were generated to reflect the content of perceived support from media sources. Items were developed to include the four most studied types of social support: emotional support, instrumental support, informational support and esteem support. In addition, several amendments were made concerning linguistic analysis (linguistics with scale translation expertise, $n = 2$), assessment of the content validity (experts with media psychology knowledge and scale validating experience, $n = 5$) and an online pilot study ($n = 35$) of initial items. Therefore, perceived media support by LGBTQ+ individuals refers to how LGBTQ+ individuals perceive the media as a source available to provide emotional, instrumental, informational and esteem support (see Table 1). Response options ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), with higher scores indicating a higher perception of media support. The psychometric properties of the *PMSI* are evaluated in the present study using factor (i.e., Explanatory factor analysis—EFA and Confirmatory factor analysis—CFA) and item (i.e., inter-item correlation, corrected item-total correlation and Cronbach's α) analyses.

The 27-item *Lesbian, Gay* and *Bisexual Identity Scale* (*LGBIS*; Mohr & Kendra, 2011) is a revision and extension of the *Lesbian* and *Gay Identity Scale* (*LGIS*; Mohr & Fassinger, 2000). To increase inclusiveness in our study, we changed the original acronym of 'LGB' to 'LGBTQ+' in the items. We used the scale to assess eight

Table 1. Initial Items of *PMSI* for LGBTQ+.

1.	The media makes LGBTQ+ individuals feel good about themselves (*emotional support*).
2.	The media is sensitive (shows respect, care and thoughtfulness) to LGBTQ+ viewers (*emotional support*).
3.	The media seems to care about LGBTQ+ people (*emotional support*).
4.	The media helps LGBTQ+ people cope with negative emotions (*emotional support*).
5.	I can easily identify with LGBTQ+ characters portrayed in media (*emotional support*).
6.	The media offers content (e.g., discussions about, directions for, and/or solutions) unique to LGBTQ communities and individuals (*instrumental support*).
7.	The media creates content that enhances LGBTQ+ individuals' well-being (*instrumental support*).
8.	The media offers content that improves the lives of LGBTQ+ people (*instrumental support*).
9.	The media informs the non-LGBTQ+ community about LGBTQ+ individuals' challenges (*informational support*).
10.	The media teaches the non-LGBTQ+ community about appropriate ways to communicate with LGBTQ+ individuals (*informational support*).
11.	Media portrayals of LGBTQ+ people serve to reduce homophobia (*informational support*).
12.	I feel proud of LGBTQ+ representations in media (*esteem support*).
13.	LGBTQ+ portrayal in the media has many good qualities (e.g., confidence and independence) (*esteem support*).
14.	The media shares proud moments of LGBTQ's successes and achievements (*esteem support*).

Source: The authors.

Note: The *PMSI* was originally developed in Persian and the English version presented here is translated.

dimensions of LGBTQ+ identity including (a) acceptance concerns (concerns about stigmatization and marginalization; e.g., 'I can't feel comfortable knowing that others judge me negatively for my sexual orientation'), (b) concealment motivation (concern about revealing one's LGBTQ+ orientation/identity; e.g., 'My sexual orientation is a very personal and private matter'), (c) identity uncertainty (uncertainty about LGBTQ+ orientation/identity; e.g., 'I'm not totally sure what my sexual orientation is'), (d) internalized homonegativity (negative views and feelings regarding one's own LGBTQ+ orientation/identity; e.g., 'If it were possible, I would choose to be straight'), (e) difficult processes (perception that the LGBTQ+ orientation/identity development process was slow and difficult; e.g., 'Admitting to myself that I'm an LGBTQ+ person has been a very painful process'), (f) identity superiority (view that LGBTQ+ orientation/identity is superior to heterosexuality; e.g., 'I look down on heterosexuals'), (g) identity affirmation (affirmation of LGBTQ+ orientation/identity; e.g., 'I am glad to be an LGBTQ+ person') and (h) identity centrality (LGBTQ+ orientation/identity as central to one's overall orientation/identity; e.g., 'My sexual orientation is a central part of my identity'). Averaging subscale item ratings compute the subscale scores. Items are scored on a 6-point scale (1 = *disagree strongly*, 6 = *agree strongly*) with two reverse-scored

items. Acceptable psychometric properties of the scale have been established (Mohr & Kendra, 2011). Through a standardized process (see Maneesriwongul & Dixon, 2004), the scale was translated to Persian employing the back- and forward-translation strategies by two bilingual translators and the authors of the current investigation. Cronbach's alphas of the *LGBIS* subscales in the current study were moderate to robust (Taber, 2017; see Table 5).

The *Brief Symptom Inventory* (*BSI*; Derogatis, 1975) is a 53-item self-report inventory designed to assess nine symptom dimensions, including somatization, obsession-compulsion, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, anxiety, hostility, phobic anxiety, paranoid ideation and psychoticism. Responses are scored on a 5-point Likert scale (0 = *not at all* and 4 = *extremely*). The depression subscale (6 items; e.g., 'During the past seven days, how much were you distressed by feeling lonely?') and anxiety subscale (6 items; e.g., 'During the past seven days, how much were you distressed by feeling tense or keyed up?') were used in the present study. The scale has shown good psychometric properties (Derogatis & Melisaratos, 1983). Findings also confirmed excellent construct validity and internal consistency of the Persian version of the *BSI* (Mamaghani & Javanmard, 2008).

The *Brief Resilience Scale* (*BRS*; Smith et al., 2008) contains six items that assess a unidimensional construct of the perceived ability to bounce back or recover from stress. Response options ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), with higher scores indicating higher perceived resilience. The scale has satisfactory validity and reliability (Smith et al., 2008). Additionally, the *BRS* demonstrated reliable psychometric characteristics in Iran (Kashani & Najafi, 2016).

The items *How distant do you feel from the community because of its reaction to your identity or sexual orientation?* and *How much do you hate the community for its reaction to your identity or sexual orientation?* were asked to investigate feelings of psychological distance from the community and hatred toward the community. Response options were scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale from *not at all* (1) to *significantly* (5).

The participants were also asked to respond to the following questions: (a) *Which forms of media do you find most supportive of LGBTQ+ people?*; (b) *Which forms of media do you find least supportive of LGBTQ+ people?*; (c) *As an LGBTQ+ person, which media sources do you engage with the most?*; and (d) *As an LGBTQ+ person, which media sources do you engage with the least?*. The response options were Print Media (Newspapers, Magazines), Broadcast Media (TV, Radio), Outdoor or Out of Home (OOH) Media (e.g., Billboard, Cinema) and the Internet (e.g., social media, video sharing sites).

Procedure

The study was advertised (via recruitment banner and post) on LGBTQ+ community websites, online forums and chat rooms. The Persian-language online survey opened by clicking on a banner or link. The survey assessed participants' sexual orientation and gender identity, perceived media support and LGBTQ+-related experiences.

EFA, CFA, inter-item correlation, corrected item-total correlation and Cronbach's alpha were conducted to obtain in-depth information on the

Table 2. Exploratory Factor Analysis of Items in the *PMSI*.

Item	PMSI	h^2	u^2
2. The media is sympathetic toward LGBTQ+ individuals.	0.83	0.68	0.32
6. The media creates programs to enhance LGBTQ+ individuals' well-being.	0.82	0.67	0.33
9. The media shares proud moments of LGBTQ's successes.	0.82	0.67	0.33
10. The media portrays LGBTQ+ individuals as confident, independent and respectful.	0.89	0.78	0.22
11. Media portrayals of LGBTQ+ people serve to reduce homophobia.	0.90	0.80	0.20
12. I feel proud of LGBTQ+ representations in media.	0.81	0.65	0.35
14. The media shares proud moments of LGBTQ's successes and achievements.	0.90	0.81	0.19

Source: The authors.

Note: N = 200. h^2: Communality, u^2: Uniqueness, SD: Standard deviation.

psychometric properties of the *PMSI*. Furthermore, Pearson correlation and regression analyses were utilized to assess the potential impacts of perceived media support on negative experiences, anxiety, depression and resilience of LGBTQ+ individuals, in addition to their feeling of psychological distance and hatred toward the community. Data analysis was performed using SPSS statistical software (IBM SPSS Statistics 25.0) and lavaan package in R software.

Results

As the preliminary step, we conducted an initial unidimensional EFA to evaluate if any item pairs showed unexpectedly high correlations. To avoid item redundancy and poor model fit, we dropped seven items (items 1, 3–5, 7–8, 13). After eliminating the problematic items, the *PMSI* with the remaining seven items still showed excellent reliability ($\alpha = 0.95$, 95% CI = [0.94, 0.96]). Then, we evaluated sampling adequacy and suitability. The outcomes of Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO = 0.94) and Bartlett's test of sphericity ($\chi 2$ (21) = 1249.17, $p < 0.001$) confirmed that *PMSI* is suitable for factor analysis. We performed a parallel analysis to determine the optimal number of underlying factors to retain (Horn, 1965). The scree plot demonstrated one latent factor, suggesting that a one-component solution best fits the data. Although one-factor EFA and CFA returned the same factor loadings, we presented the results of two analyses to report the communality from EFA and the goodness-of-fit from CFA. The one-factor EFA of the *PMSI* accounted for 72.51% of the total variance (see Table 2). Considering previously enumerated fit indices for the comparative fit index (CFI; cut-off≥0.90; Bentler, 1990), the Tucker–Lewis index (TLI; cut-off≥0.90; Bentler & Bonnet, 1980) and the root means square error of approximation (RMSEA; cut-off≤0.08; Browne & Cudeck, 1993), the one-factor CFA satisfied the recommended

Table 3. Item Characteristics and Inter-item Correlations of the Items in the *PMSI*.

Item	Mean (SD)	Corrected Item-total Correlations	Cronbach's α if the Item Deleted	Item 2	Item 6	Item 9	Item 10	Item 11	Item 12	Item 14
2	1.95 (1.20)	0.80	0.94	1						
6	2.03 (1.24)	0.80	0.94	0.73	1					
9	2.17 (1.29)	0.79	0.94	0.66	0.67	1				
10	1.93 (1.22)	0.86	0.94	0.72	0.69	0.74	1			
11	2.04 (1.28)	0.87	0.94	0.73	0.70	0.77	0.81	1		
12	2.10 (1.41)	0.79	0.94	0.68	0.69	0.62	0.70	0.74	1	
14	1.98 (1.36)	0.87	0.93	0.74	0.75	0.73	0.83	0.78	0.73	1

Source: The authors.

Note: N = 200. SD: Standard deviation. All inter-item correlations of the items were significant ($ps < 0.001$).

benchmarks for good fit ($\chi 2 = 33.39$, $p < 0.05$; CFI = 0.99; TLI = 0.98; RMSEA = 0.08).

In addition, item analyses indicated that the scale shows reliable internal consistency (see Table 3) evaluated by inter-item correlation ($r = 0.66$–0.83), corrected item-total correlation ($r = 0.79$–0.87), Cronbach's α if the item deleted ($\alpha = 0.93$–0.94) and Cronbach's α ($\alpha = 0.95$, 95% CI = [0.94, 0.96]).

Next, we computed Pearson correlation coefficients between *PMSI* scores and LGBTQ+-related experiences. Table 4 shows that *PMSI* is positively correlated with identity affirmation ($r = 0.20$, $p < 0.01$), anxiety ($r = 0.20$, $p < 0.01$) and resiliency ($r = 0.20$, $p < 0.01$). To deeper understand the associations between perceived media support and LGBTQ+-related experiences, we investigated the relationship between the *PMSI* and other related variables using multiple regression analysis. Mean centring has been recommended when conducting regression analyses because it renders the intercept more interpretable (Reid & Allum, 2019). That is, the intercept can be interpreted not as a value when the predictor is 0 but as a value when the predictor is average. For this reason, we conducted mean-centring for all continuous variables in Table 4, in addition to the variable of age.

Employing regression analysis, it was traced whether LGBTQ+ individuals of different ages and sexual identities/orientations perceive different levels of media support. Since we did not find statistically significant interaction effects of age and sexual orientation/gender identity, we reported only the age and sexual

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for the Study's Variables.

Variables	Mean	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Acceptance concerns	4.30	1.51	0.85	1													
2. Concealment motivation	5.01	0.97	0.59	0.27***	1												
3. Identity uncertainty	1.96	1.11	0.80	0.03	−0.12	1											
4. Internalized homonegativity	2.08	1.40	0.87	0.22**	0.05	0.35***	1										
5. Difficult processes	3.44	1.30	0.57	0.26***	0.18*	0.25***	0.48***	1									
6. Identity superiority	1.90	1.17	0.78	0.11	0.15*	−0.08	−0.09	−0.09	1								
7. Identity affirmation	5.16	1.25	0.91	−0.12	0.05	−0.43***	−0.63***	−0.42***	0.18*	1							
8. Identity centrality	3.90	1.19	0.77	0.13	0.11	−0.26***	−0.20**	−0.12	0.35***	0.39***	1						
9. Anxiety	1.90	1.22	0.90	0.27***	−0.03	0.02	0.16*	0.15*	−0.11	0.05	0.05	1					
10. Depression	2.33	1.13	0.88	0.36***	0.02	0.15*	0.22**	0.21**	−0.13	−0.13	−0.06	0.67***	1				
11. Resilience	3.13	0.95	0.88	−0.29***	−0.03	−0.20**	−0.18*	−0.15*	−0.07	0.25***	0.07	−0.31***	−0.54***	1			

(Table 4 continued)

(Table 4 continued)

Variables	Mean	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
12. Feeling of psychological distance from a community	3.94	1.26	–	0.15*	−0.01	−0.06	−0.03	−0.04	−0.08	0.02	0.05	0.36***	0.40***	−0.22**	1		
13. Feeling of hatred toward the community	4.08	1.06	–	0.27***	0.13	−0.14*	0.03	0.12	−0.07	0.08	0.12	0.24**	0.29***	−0.18**	0.41***	1	
14. Perceived media support	2.03	1.12	0.95	−0.01	0.10	−0.08	−0.04	−0.05	−0.12	0.20**	0.06	0.20**	0.06	0.20**	0.08	−0.01	1

Source: The authors.

Note: $N = 200$. SD: Standard deviation. α: Cronbach's alpha. *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

orientation/gender identity main effects. As individuals got older, their *PMSI* score decreased by 0.06 ($B = -0.06$, SE = 0.02, $\beta = -0.23$, $p < 0.01$). Meanwhile, there were no significant differences in *PMSI* scores between sexual identities/orientation groups.

Next, we investigated whether the perceived media support by LGBTQ+ individuals significantly predicted their LGBTQ+-related experiences. Tables 5 and 6 show the perceived media support effect on identity-related experiences by sexual orientation/gender identity. When the *PMS* level is average, the average identity uncertainty score of individuals with bisexual identity was 0.31 ($p < 0.05$, $\beta = 0$). At the same condition, the average identity uncertainty score of individuals identifying as gay was 0.31–0.51 = −0.20 ($p < 0.05$, $\beta = -0.17$). For those with lesbian identity, the score was 0.31–0.65 = −0.34 ($p < 0.05$,

Table 5. Perceived Media Support Effect on Identity-related Experiences (i.e., identity uncertainty, identity superiority, identity affirmation, and identity centrality) by Sexual Identity/Orientation.

Sexual Identity	PMS Score	Identity Uncertainty		Identity Superiority		Identity Affirmation		Identity Centrality	
		B (SE)	β	*B* (SE)	β	*B* (SE)	β	*B* (SE)	β
Bisexual (Reference)	Average PMS	0.31* (0.14)	0	−0.14 (0.15)	0	0.12 (0.16)	0	−0.08 (0.16)	0
	PMS Δ	−0.01 (0.13)	−0.01	−0.04 (0.14)	−0.03	0.30* (0.14)	0.29	0.11 (0.14)	0.11
Gay	Average PMS	−0.51* (0.22)	−0.17	0.48* (0.23)	0.15	−0.40 (0.25)	−0.13	0.35 (0.24)	0.10
	PMS Δ	0.02 (0.18)	0.01	−0.01 (0.20)	0.00	−0.15 (0.21)	−0.08	0.07 (0.20)	0.03
Lesbian	Average PMS	−0.65** (0.21)	−0.24	0.33 (0.22)	0.12	0.19 (0.24)	0.07	0.18 (0.23)	0.08
	PMS Δ	−0.04 (0.18)	−0.02	−0.23 (0.20)	−0.14	−0.28 (0.21)	−0.12	−0.30 (0.20)	−0.15
Queer	Average PMS	0.14 (0.27)	0.03	−0.25 (0.29)	−0.07	−0.21 (0.30)	−0.05	−0.30 (0.29)	−0.09
	PMS Δ	−0.38 (0.27)	−0.10	−0.28 (0.30)	−0.09	0.15 (0.31)	0.04	−0.19 (0.30)	−0.05
Trans	Average PMS	−0.61* (0.27)	−0.20	−0.16 (0.29)	−0.04	−0.38 (0.31)	−0.12	0.00 (0.30)	0.00
	PMS Δ	−0.05 (0.27)	−0.01	−0.19 (0.29)	−0.04	0.11 (0.30)	0.03	0.24 (0.30)	0.07

Source: The authors.

Note: $N = 200$. *B*: Unstandardized coefficient. β: Standardized coefficient. SE: Standard error. *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

Table 6. Perceived Media Support Effect on Megative LGBTQ+-related Experiences (i.e., acceptance concerns, concealment motivation, internalized homonegativity and difficult processes) by Sexual Identity/Orientation.

Sexual Identity	PMS Score	Acceptance Concerns		Concealment Motivation		Internalized Homonegativity		Difficult Processes	
		B (SE)	*β*	*B* (SE)	*β*	*B* (SE)	*β*	*B* (SE)	*β*
Bi-sexual (Reference)	Average PMS	−0.10 (0.20)	0	−0.21 (0.13)	0	−0.17 (0.18)	0	−0.27 (0.17)	0
	PMS Δ	0.22 (0.18)	0.25	0.15 (0.11)	0.12	0.03 (0.16)	0.03	−0.06 (0.15)	−0.07
Gay	Average PMS	0.28 (0.30)	0.10	0.48* (0.19)	0.15	0.43 (0.28)	0.12	0.62* (0.26)	0.23
	PMS Δ	−0.47 (0.25)	−0.22	−0.24 (0.16)	−0.09	−0.03 (0.24)	−0.01	−0.23 (0.22)	−0.11
Lesbian	Average PMS	0.11 (0.29)	0.03	0.25 (0.19)	0.09	−0.16 (0.27)	−0.07	0.15 (0.25)	0.05
	PMS Δ	−0.03 (0.26)	−0.02	−0.03 (0.16)	−0.02	−0.14 (0.24)	−0.07	0.13 (0.22)	0.06
Queer	Average PMS	0.24 (0.37)	0.06	0.21 (0.24)	0.06	0.22 (0.35)	0.07	0.29 (0.32)	0.08
	PMS Δ	−0.08 (0.38)	−0.02	0.25 (0.24)	0.08	−0.05 (0.36)	−0.01	0.14 (0.33)	0.03
Trans	Average PMS	−0.13 (0.38)	−0.03	0.26 (0.24)	0.07	0.85* (0.35)	0.19	0.54 (0.33)	0.14
	PMS Δ	−0.98** (0.37)	−0.33	−0.13 (0.24)	−0.03	−0.26 (0.35)	−0.07	0.25 (0.32)	0.08

Source: The authors.

Note: $N = 200$. *B*: Unstandardized coefficient. *β*: Standardized coefficient. SE: Standard error. $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$.

$\beta = -0.24$) and for those with transgender identity, the score was 0.31–0.61 = −0.30 ($p < 0.05, \beta = -0.20$). In addition, at the same condition, the average identity superiority score of people identifying as gay was −0.14 + 0.48 = 0.38 ($p < 0.05$, $\beta = 0.15$). Interestingly, as one unit increased in *PMS* score, the expected identity affirmation score of individuals with bisexual identity increased by 0.30 ($p < 0.05$, $\beta = 0.29$; see Table 5). For individuals identifying as transgender, as their *PMS* score increased, their expected acceptance concerns score decreased by 0.076 (0.22–0.98, $p < 0.01, \beta = 0.25–0.33 = -0.08$). When the *PMS* level is average, the average concealment motivation score of people identifying as gay was −0.21 + 0.48 = 0.19 ($p < 0.05$, $\beta = 0.15$). At the same condition, the average internalized homonegativity score of those with transgender identity was −0.17 + 0.85 = 0.68

Table 7. Perceived Media Support and Sexual Identity/Orientation Effect on Anxiety, Depression and Resiliency.

	Anxiety		Depression		Resiliency	
	B (SE)	β	*B* (SE)	β	*B* (SE)	β
Intercept	0.13 (0.16)	0	0.06 (0.15)	0	0.01 (0.12)	0
PMS Δ	0.21** (0.08)	0.21	0.06 (0.07)	0.06	0.17** (0.06)	0.17
Gay	−0.52* (0.24)	−0.23	−0.44 (0.23)	−0.19	0.04 (0.19)	0.02
Lesbian	0.00 (0.23)	0.00	0.04 (0.22)	0.01	0.01 (0.18)	0.00
Queer	−0.03 (0.28)	−0.01	0.24 (0.26)	0.07	−0.11 (0.22)	−0.03
Trans	−0.15 (0.30)	−0.05	−0.05 (0.28)	−0.02	−0.04 (0.24)	−0.01

Source: The authors.

Note: *N* = 200. *B*: Unstandardized coefficient. β = Standardized coefficient. SE: Standard error. *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

($p < 0.05$, $\beta = 0.19$) and the complex processes score of those who identify as gay was −0.27 + 0.62 = 0.35 ($p < 0.05$, $\beta = 0.23$; see Table 6).

We also investigated whether the *PMSI* score and sexual orientation/gender identity are related to anxiety, depression, resiliency, psychological distance from the community and hatred toward the community. Since there were no significant interaction effects between *PMSI* scores and sexual orientation/gender identity, Table 7 reported only the main effects of *PMS* and sexual orientation/gender identity. For those who identify as gay, moderate anxiety was 0.13–0.52 = −0.39 ($p < 0.05$, $\beta = -0.23$). Across the sexual orientation/gender identity groups, as one unit increased in *PMSI* score, the expected anxiety increased by 0.21 ($p < 0.01$, $\beta = 0.21$) and the expected resiliency increased by 0.17 ($p < 0.01$, $\beta = 0.17$). Table 8 presents findings regarding whether the *PMSI* score and sexual orientation/gender identity predict psychological distance from the community and negative feelings toward the community. For those with lesbian identities, as the *PMSI* score increased, the average feeling of psychological distance from the community increased by −0.10 + 0.45 = 0.35 ($p < 0.05$, $\beta = -0.10 + 0.24 = 0.14$). For individuals identifying as gay, the average hatred toward the community was −0.25 + 0.50 = 0.25 ($p < 0.05$, $\beta = 0.16$).

Finally, the results indicated that 96% of respondents find the internet the most supportive media source (print media = 0%; broadcast media = 1.5%; & outdoor or out-of-home media = 2.5%). The print media was the least (47.5%) supportive source for respondents (broadcast media = 34.5%; outdoor or out-of-home media = 15%; and internet = 3%). Most respondents reported the most engaging with the internet (97%) (print media = 0.5%; broadcast media = 1.5%; and outdoor or out-of-home media = 1%). The print media (72.5%) was the format respondents engaged with the least (broadcast media = 16.5%; outdoor or out-of-home media = 8.5%; and internet = 2.5%).

Table 8. Perceived Media Support Affects the Feeling of Psychological Distance from the Community and Hatred Toward the Community of Sexual Identity/Orientation.

Sexual Identity	PMS Score	The Feeling of Psychological Distance from Community		The Feeling of Hatred Toward Community	
		B (SE)	*β*	*B* (SE)	*B*
Bisexual (Reference)	Average PMS	0.04 (0.17)	0	−0.25 (0.14)	0
	PMS Δ	−0.10 (0.15)	−0.10	0.08 (0.12)	0.09
Gay	Average PMS	0.03 (0.25)	0.01	0.50* (0.21)	0.16
	PMS Δ	0.11 (0.21)	0.05	−0.27 (0.18)	−0.13
Lesbian	Average PMS	−0.33 (0.24)	−0.14	0.24 (0.21)	0.10
	PMS Δ	0.45* (0.21)	0.24	0.08 (0.18)	0.04
Queer	Average PMS	−0.14 (0.31)	−0.04	0.26 (0.26)	0.07
	PMS Δ	0.13 (0.32)	0.03	−0.12 (0.27)	−0.03
Trans	Average PMS	0.46 (0.31)	0.14	0.32 (0.27)	0.09
	PMS Δ	0.34 (0.31)	0.10	−0.25 (0.26)	−0.07

Source: The authors.

Note: $N = 200$. *B*: Unstandardized coefficient. *β*: Standardized coefficient. SE: Standard error. $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$.

Discussion

This research investigates perceived media support and psychological well-being in an Iranian LGBTQ+ population. The study's main contribution is the development of the *Perceived Media Support Inventory* (*PMSI*). We established the validity and reliability of the *PMSI* using factor analyses (i.e., EFA and CFA; see Table 2), inter-item correlation, corrected item-total correlation and Cronbach's alpha (see Table 3). The *PMSI* is a single-factor brief instrument that shows satisfactory psychometric properties and appears to be a promising tool for gauging perceived media support among LGBTQ+ groups. We additionally examined the correlates of perceived media support. As hypothesized, perceived media support predicted positive and negative outcomes among LGBTQ+ Iranian participants. These outcomes were distinct among groups differing in sexual orientation and gender identity.

Our findings illustrate that the vast majority of LGBTQ+ participants engaged with internet media and found the internet to be the primary source of media support. This indicates that the Iranian LGBTQ+ population is focused on internet media as a source of social support. The LGBTQ+ population in Iran faces systematic oppression from the government and society (Karimi, 2018;

Yadegarfard, 2019). Extreme social ostracism for LGBTQ+ people is common and same-sex sexual activities are punished with unfair trials, often resulting in the death penalty (Rehman, 2021). In this repressive climate, it is not surprising that LGBTQ+ people turn to the internet as a source of information, social support and parasocial connection. Mesch (2012) suggests that disadvantaged minority groups face significant barriers to forming social networks in society. These barriers tend to increase minority groups' motivation to use the internet since the internet provides multiple global venues for information and association. Our findings suggest that LGBTQ+ people in Iran are motivated to use the internet to gain information about LGBTQ+ issues and expand social networks. The social support provided by internet media sources can potentially empower LGBTQ+ people in Iran (Mehra et al., 2004). However, internet media originating from primarily Western sources mostly feature portrayals of White, middle-class LGBTQ+ people. Such depictions likely have paradoxical effects on Iranian LGBTQ+ people (Karimi, 2018).

Perceived media support was associated with age, with younger people perceiving media as more supportive. The lack of social support for older LGBTQ+ people may explain this finding. This conclusion is supported by media content analysis showing that few print or news stories feature LGBTQ+ older adults (Hurd et al., 2020). The finding younger people perceived more outstanding media support indicates that the extent to which individuals turn to media for self-affirmation and parasocial connection may be influenced by the intersectional domains of age, economic status and gender and sexual identity (Crenshaw, 1990). Future research should further examine how intersecting demographic factors predict perceived media support.

Our findings show that perceived media support predicts positive and negative outcomes in the LGBTQ+ population. Among our LGBTQ+ participants, perceived media support was positively correlated with identity affirmation and greater resilience (see Table 4). These findings suggest that social support from the media tends to increase positive feelings about LGBTQ+ identity (see Tables 4–6) and help people better cope with stress (see Table 7). However, perceived media support positively correlated with increased anxiety among LGBTQ+s. More specifically, regression analyses demonstrated that PMS was related to identity certainty in gays, lesbians and transgender people, identity affirmation in bisexuals, decreased acceptance concerns in transgender people, reduced anxiety in gays and high resilience to stressful circumstances in LGBTQ+s. Contrary, PMS was found associated with identity uncertainty in bisexuals, identity superiority and concealment motivation in gays, internalized homonegativity in transgender people, difficult orientation/identity development process in gays, anxiety in LGBTQ+s in general, the feeling of psychological distance from the community in lesbians and feeling of hatred toward the community in gays. These results suggest that media representation engenders positive and negative feelings in the LGBTQ+ community (see Tables 5–8), revealing a phenomenon we are terming *dialectics of cultivated media support*.

Rooted in Bakhtin's treatment of dialogue, relational and cultural dialectics (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Martin & Nakayama, 2013) posit that people

routinely negotiate intrapsychic, interpersonal and intercultural tensions (Altman, 1993). It is this push-and-pull complexity that defines social life. These tensions are comprised of competing yet interconnected poles (e.g., autonomy versus connection, novelty versus predictability, privilege versus disadvantage; Baxter, 1988; Martin & Nakayama, 2013). The present study reveals that LGBTQ+ individuals associate increased media support with both constructive and destructive feelings, indicating a series of tensions that may partially constitute Iranian LGBTQ+ identity and subjectivity.

This study's results indicate three relevant dialectics as they concern media representation and feelings of support and belonging: *LGBTQ identity certainty–uncertainty, LGBTQ communal inclusion–exclusion* and *LGBTQ confidence–fragility*. These tensions appear to be experienced simultaneously within specific subgroups of the LGBTQ+ community because, as data suggest, they work to inform and augment one another. As noted, the effects of increased LGBTQ+ media representations should be considered from an intersectional perspective, as perceived media support was related to psychological well-being in distinct ways according to sexual orientation and gender identity. Gay men, for example, seem to be the most positively and negatively impacted by perceived media support. This is likely because gay men are typically the most represented among the broader LGBTQ+ community within the media landscape.

Our data suggest that increased perceived media support in Iran may promote feelings of both *identity certainty* and *uncertainty* dependent on one's sexual identity (see Table 5). Findings indicate that social support from the media tends to, for some, increase positive feelings about LGBTQ+ identity. As they concern specific LGBTQ+ identities, data reveals that increased media support enables gay men to be more likely to have less identity uncertainty and more significant identity superiority (LGBTQ+ people are superior to others) and lesbians to maintain less identity uncertainty (see Table 5). For those identifying as transgender, perceived media support also predicted less identity uncertainty (see Table 5). However, we found that for those identifying as bisexual, perceived media support was associated with greater identity uncertainty (see Table 5), possibly due to limiting representations of gayness that may result in bisexual audiences questioning the legitimacy of their same-sex desires and subsequent identities.

Participants also illustrate a tendency to associate increased media support with both the positive feeling of *community inclusion* and the more harmful feeling of *exclusion*. While data suggest that increased perceived media support may establish connections to and knowledge of LGBTQ+ lifestyles and communities for audiences, it also reveals that increased media support can splinter the community. When we examined sexual orientation and gender identity groups separately, transgender individuals with increased perceived media support experienced fewer acceptance concerns (see Table 6) and gay men held higher feelings of disdain (see Tables 6 and 8). Lesbians reported increased psychological distance from the community (see Table 8). Lastly, participants reporting increased

media support maintained the ability to facilitate and prohibit feelings of positive *self-confidence* as it concerned their LGBTQ+ identity. Bisexual participants with greater perceived media support demonstrated greater identity affirmation (positive feelings about LGBTQ+ status; see Table 5), while gay men yielded greater concealment motivation (of LGBTQ+ status) and more complex social processes associated with their LGBTQ+ identity (e.g., with coming out; see Table 6). Lastly, transgender individuals with greater perceived media support evidenced greater internalized homonegativity (Table 6).

It is possible that increased media visibility and the parasocial connections it fosters yields negative feelings because they (a) intensify attention brought to a topic that is still largely culturally stigmatized, therefore more directly implicating individuals without their consent and (b) promote feelings of insecurity due to a perceived inability to correctly 'do' LGBTQ+ lifestyles as modelled in media content, especially if that content originates from Western culture. These maligned representations can, in turn, enable feelings of disidentification with the media representation. Such interpretations can result in a perceived sense that one is not 'being the *right* kind of LGBTQ+ person,' producing, ironically, feelings of internalized dissatisfaction, disappointment and isolation.

Here, LGTBQ+ individuals navigate a unique, precarious dialectic in which their LGBTQ+ status augments and, in many ways, runs counter to Iranian identity. In short, individuals may feel that they are not—or, more accurately, *cannot* be—'correctly' LGBTQ+ within an Iranian context and are too 'non-Western' within an LGTBQ+ context. In addition, media representations of LGBTQ+ characters likely offer a stark contrast to the real-life conditions experienced by many Iranians, thus producing the identified feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, disconnect and fragility, positioning LGBTQ+ identity as a dialectical phenomenon both *within* the Iranian LGBTQ community and *between* the community and the Iranian nation-state.

Conclusion

This research is one of the first studies to address the extent to which LGBTQ+ people perceive popular media as supportive. We developed a valid and reliable instrument to assess perceived media support. Among Iranian LGBTQ+ participants, the internet was the most supportive media source. Younger adults were more likely to perceive the media as supportive. Perceived media support predicted positive feelings about sexual orientation/gender identity and greater resilience when faced with stressful circumstances. However, perceived media support was additionally associated with LGBTQ+-related negative experiences and greater anxiety. Our findings support *Cultivation theory* (Gerbner, 1998) and the *Parasocial contact hypothesis* (Schiappa et al., 2005), suggesting that media sources have the potential to shape viewer attitudes and provide social support that can result in both positive and negative outcomes.

Limitations

Further work needs to be done to establish the association of sociodemographics and socioeconomic status with perceived media support and subsequent outcomes. Given our correlational design, we can only speculate about the causal relationships between the perceived media support and psychological well-being variables. The diversity in psychological correlates of perceived media support among lesbian, gay men, transgender people and bisexuals underscores the fact that these groups show substantial diversity and should be analyzed independently in future research.

Limitations of the study include the homogeneous Iranian sample of LGBTQ+ participants. Considering the specific cultural-societal sphere of Iranian LGBTQ+s, we cannot generalize our findings to other cultures or non-LGBTQ+ minority groups. The results, therefore, need to be interpreted with caution. The reliability and validity of our instrument should be tested on cross-cultural samples to verify its utility in other populations further. Since our data were collected using online forums, findings will likely represent populations experienced with internet use. Apart from age and gender, the socioeconomic status and other sociodemographic characteristics (e.g., education, income and type of job) of the LGBTQ+s participating in the current study were not dissected. Further work needs to be done to establish the association of sociodemographics and socioeconomic status with perceived media support and subsequent outcomes. Given our correlational design, we can only speculate about the causal relationships between the perceived media support and psychological well-being variables. The diversity in psychological correlates of perceived media support among lesbian, gay men, transgender people and bisexuals underscores the fact that these groups show substantial diversity and should be analyzed independently in future research.

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Queer women and habeas corpus in India: The love that blinds the law

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Article

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Abstract

The article employs the example of the use of the writ of Habeas Corpus in cases involving lesbian women in India. These cases, few and far between, provide a broad canvas to theoretically reflect on the relationship of the lives of queer women with the law as well as with the women's movement and the queer movement in India. The article proposes a critical analyses of the way the law frames identities, struggles and movements and suggests possible direction for theoretical perspectives that take on this nexus and evolve a language that is closer to the reality of the lives addressed in legal, academic and activist work, with all its conflicts, contradictions and chaos.

Keywords

Habeas Corpus, queer, lesbian, women, feminism, law, social movements in India

> For the 'I' to launch its critique, it must first understand that the 'I' itself is dependant upon its complicitous desire for the law for the possibility of its own existence.
>
> Judith Butler (1995, p. 7)

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The term 'queer' is used by some activists and theorists in India to mean a critique that does not merely address normative practices *vis-à-vis* gender and sexuality in isolation. 'Queer' encompasses and engages with a larger world view that recognises and critiques complex systems of class, caste, gender, sexuality, race, region and religion (Menon, 2005, pp. 33–39). In the context of this article, the term 'queer' is being used to refer to women who engage in sexual and/or romantic relations with other women. It also refers, in some cases, to women who identify as men or as transgendered individuals. The use of the phrase 'queer women' is thus a conscious political and theoretical choice distinct from an engagement with a long list of markers of 'identity', which can never be exhaustive. Alternatively, this choice is in favour of a limited reading of the coinage of 'queer' as many of the cases referred to in this article involve queer women from backgrounds that are marginalised on the basis of class, region and caste. It is these women who are often forced to appear in front of the law; this is much less so among queer women of relatively privileged backgrounds in urban areas and from upper class and caste backgrounds.

The epigraph of this essay on the 'I', when read as 'queer women' in many ways summarises the tensions this article attempts to analyse. Even a cursory look at the position of queer women's everyday lives will make this apparent. The constraints of space and mobility that affect the lives of all women also apply to queer women. This is best explained by contrasting their story with that of many queer men in the Indian context. Many queer men[2] in India are often married to women, which might well create pressures for them. But this multiple life is itself only possible because of the kind of space and mobility that remains the privilege of men. Apart from such privilege within the private sphere, the public sphere still remains largely hostile to women's presence and their forms of expression. For instance, the option of discussing 'cruising' in public parks as in the case of queer men is an impossibility for queer women. Queer women often meet, get to know each other and evolve different kinds of relationships through networks created specifically for this purpose and/or in their everyday lives like others. The gendered privilege then is a comment on the construction of the role of sex in the lives of men and women, which is often drastically different. While it would be wrong to generalise, we do argue that the relative chances of looking at 'sex' as a 'good' thing remain greater for men. This in turn is a comment

on how women and men view their bodies in terms of feeling pain, shame and pleasure. A language for pleasure for women is simply much rarer.

Apart from this, the engagement of queer men with the law is also significantly different. A large part of the conflict with the law lies in everyday harassment of all kinds from the police and other persons in the public sphere. Cases of indecency, immorality and so on are common. Queer men who are sex workers face all the harassment that female sex workers face, above and beyond their plight as queer men. More often than not, the law's effect on queer women's private spaces is not visible. All of this is apart from the overarching suppression imposed by Section 377[3] of the Indian Penal Code, the law to curb sodomy introduced in India, among other colonies, by the British. This statute still remains in the books and its use has traditionally been associated with 'queer men'.

Segregated gender spaces are common in our society. These spaces often become ones where illicit pleasures are experienced, which we can illustrate through the story of the 'L' in a particular women's college hostel. The hostel in question saw a lot of same sex activity, often not secretive. These encounters did not always grow into longer term emotional commitments between the women involved, nor did they lead these women to identify themselves as 'lesbian'. 'L' was how all the girls referred to those who engaged in same sex sexual activity. This 'L' was a nondescript, not particularly dangerous, entity. It almost seems as if the use of the term 'L' was safer, if not absolutely safe, in contrast to 'lesbian'. In the case of both queer men and women it is the act of naming that becomes the source of the threat, rather than the sexual act, so long as it is done in secret.

Even at this preliminary stage of our discussion, it becomes apparent that queer women share a great deal with any heterosexual woman who chooses her own partners (irrespective of caste, class, religion, race, region), who engages in sexual activity before or outside of marriage, decides to be a single mother, have multiple sexual partners and so on. There are, however, significant differences in the challenge that queer women articulate to heteronormativity. First, they shake the very basis of heteronormativity, which is the need to have a man in an intimate, interdependent relationship. Second, the structure of the family is significantly challenged, as these women engage in sexual activity which does not and cannot result in procreation or in the fixed legal category of marriage.

Third, and most significantly, lesbian women's sexual activity is one that is *only* for sexual pleasure.[4] Sexual pleasure, a 'luxury' not allowed to women as a whole and to some men (the disallowing being a gendered process) is in many ways the basis of lesbian sexual activity, thus making it incomprehensible and a threat (Thangarajah and Arasu, 2011, pp. 325–338).

Queer Women and the Law

> Section 377 explicitly linked criminal sexuality… with male agency, and hence did not *have to* criminalise lesbian sexuality… [emphasis added] (Thadani, 1999, p. 149)

Most discussions concerning queer identities and the law begin with Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. IPC Sec. 377, as well as the legal position of queer women, are complicated issues (Thangarajah and Arasu, 2011, pp. 325–338). The symbolic potential of the struggle against Sec. 377 within the context of the history of the law and its role in constructing a homosexual identity remains a significant one (Narrain, 2004, p. 76). In the context of the present article, we are less concerned with critiques of articulating social struggles and identities around a law, than in noting Giti Thadani's comment regarding how the struggle against Sec. 377 has been primarily male and thus addresses queer men.

There are many other laws that affect the lives of queer women and need to be foregrounded. Given the nascent stage of thinking about and analysing the relationships between queer women and the law in India, Habeas Corpus occupies a very important place. Such cases are part of the little known story of queer women and the law, and will be the focus of our reflections here. We offer some examples in the following paragraphs, in order to broaden the common sense knowledge of the relationship between law and queer women in India.

Section 339[5] and Section 340[6] of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) make wrongful confinement a crime. Wrongful confinement occurs when a person is confined by one who does not have the authority to do so. In Habeas Corpus cases we see this section being used when it is alleged that the state or husband/lovers or fathers/families are illegally confining a woman. In the case of M and L[7] who ran away together when they

realised that they could not live together in their village, L's parents filed a case of illegal restraint. Even though L stated that she would not like to go home, the court ordered that this 21-year-old be sent back to her parents (April 2006, Kokrajhar, Assam).

Section 361[8] is concerned with kidnapping from lawful guardianship. If a person 'entices' or takes a minor (under the age of 18 for girls) from the legal guardian without the consent of the guardian, he/she can be charged for kidnapping. The consent of the woman/girl kidnapped is immaterial under law. Kidnapping is a crime that most families take advantage of in the case of queer women and it is interesting to note the extent to which proof is produced regarding the minor status of the woman so as to keep her in the custody of her family. What is even more pertinent is the court's decision to send an adult woman back into a home that she does not wish to live in, leading to an ironic violation of the requirements under Section 340. In the case of Sonu (21) and Rekha (18) who eloped to Punjab, they were traced after Rekha's parents filed a kidnapping complaint. Sonu was forced to undergo a medical examination to establish that she was a woman. Under pressure, the girls publicly declared they were just friends. In this remarkable case, on 8 March, the Halol magistrate ruled that as consenting adults they were free to live together (January 2006, Halol, Gujarat).

Section 362[9] is concerned with abduction. Abduction is another allegation that gets thrown at women who run away together. The allegation then is that one of them enticed the other to another place with the intent of committing a crime such as an illicit sexual relationship. Pooja, a widow with an 8-year-old son, was jailed for 'abducting' Sarita (19). The two had exchanged vows in a temple and eloped. Sarita was sent back to her parents. The police claimed Pooja was 'characterless' and involved in 'criminal activities' (December 2004, Patna, Bihar).

Interestingly, Section 366 has also been used against lesbian women. Section 366 criminalises kidnapping that is done with the intention of compelling someone to marry them.[10] This section is used widely by parents of heterosexual couples when they run away. R and M met while working together. When R's parents heard of the relationship they confined her within their home. However, R and M left home. Their parents filed a complaint under Section 366. The magistrate's court decided that the 21-year-old R must return to her parents. The decision was appealed against by an activist, and lawyers in the Delhi High Court. The judge

agreed that no adult can be forced to be with her parents. Throughout the case, the relationship between R and M was consciously concealed.

It is interesting to note that the court has also charged lesbian couples with perjury. Under the IPC and other penal codes in the subcontinent, giving false evidence to the court is seen as a crime.[11] SR was a female transsexual who was married to ST. They both live in Pakistan and all court proceedings mentioned below were in Pakistani Courts. ST's family filed a case against SR for kidnapping and fraud. While the magistrate's court decided in their favour, the Lahore High Court on the allegation by ST's father that SR was a woman ignored the contentions before him and ordered that SR be examined. When it came to be known that 'he' was indeed a 'woman' SR and ST were sentenced to 3 years' imprisonment for perjury. Note here that although ST had undergone basic surgery and he himself identified as a man, the court took no heed of this and declared his 'manhood' a lie in the eyes of the court. However, the Supreme Court, in a path-breaking judgement, not only held that there was nothing wrong with the relationship that these women had but also that there was no perjury on their part as it was not illegal to change one's gender identity.[12]

Feminist Legal Debates in India and the Place of Lesbians

The story of feminist legal debates is a nuanced one, and has been told by many with different foci and in many contexts.[13] It would suffice here to say that legislation has been a significant method of affirming women's rights in India, thus forming a significant analytical frame[14] for gender and feminism in India. As Flavia Agnes (1992, p.19) has put it:

> If oppression could be tackled by passing laws, then this decade [namely the 1980s] would be adjudged a golden period for Indian women when protective laws were offered on a platter. Almost every single campaign against violence on women resulted in new legislation.

At the same time, the effects of legislations on the lives of women have also been analysed critically, and advocacy for legislation as a strategy for feminist struggles has been questioned.

There have been specific analyses about the role of sexuality in the Indian women's movement(s), and the law has been a significant aspect of these studies. 'Interestingly enough, it is in the legal sphere… that the mediations of sexuality by the structures of gender, caste and class are most clearly revealed' write John and Nair (1998, p. 24). For this particular essay, we wish to borrow those aspects pointed out by feminists which might be useful to our analysis. With regard to the addressal of sexuality within legal activism by feminist struggles, certain broad observations can be made.

First, until now feminist struggles engaging with the law have primarily concentrated on violence, though of different varieties such as the struggle for legislations around domestic violence and sexual assault. This is not, for a moment, to say that these movements and discussions are not significant. However, it is important to critically analyse them in light of more recent struggles such as that of queer women. The law often recognises violence in a way that it does not in many other acts. Many social movements, including feminism, have spoken to the law in the language it understands—that of highlighting instances of violence while the issues might be broader. Legal advocacy around the issue of sexual violence has been criticised and its limitations articulated[15] (Menon, 2000, pp. 66–106). Consider for a moment the recent struggle of the bar dancers in Mumbai or the debate over sex work in India. Both issues have had legal dimensions. Neither of these struggles has had the kind of unequivocal support from feminists in India as did the Domestic Violence bill that became an Act in 2005. Interestingly, this bill was being debated around the same time when the ban was first imposed on bar dancers in Bombay, which was also when sharp differences over prostitution/sex work emerged among feminists.[16] Interesting insights emerge when the differences are considered, between women who are the subjects of the Domestic Violence Act, on the one hand, and the bar dancers and sex workers on the other. The main difference seems to be a clear articulation of desire and sexual agency in the case of the latter. Although all women suffering one or other forms of violence might invoke the language of rights, citizenship and so on, the differences between them are important. A feminist language that incorporates discourses of pain, pleasure and shame, sometimes with blurred lines between them has yet to be developed. The rudiments of such a language are not yet legible, but the process of finding one ought to be a worthwhile feminist exercise in India

today. Lesbians tell this complex story of violence unleashed on them by virtue of their 'deviant' desire and their choice to live by them.[17]

Second, while campaigns have critiqued the heteronormative family from various angles—violence against women, dowry, female infanticide, to name a few—there has been inadequate articulation of the fact that the law is entirely based on the 'legitimate' heteronormative[18] 'family' and on heteronormative marriage. This is not to claim that bar dancers or sex workers have been excluded from feminist concern. There have been debates along the lines of the 'objectification of women' which include bar dancers and sex workers.[19] There have been other nuanced differences for instance, over 'decriminalisation' versus 'legalisation' in the context of sex workers. There have been criticisms that the emphasis on 'pleasure' as it were, cannot be extended to the level of denying the experiences of violence altogether. For their part, sex workers' organisations and activists have critiqued feminists in this country for only addressing so called 'chaste' women (chaste being a euphemism for married) while leaving out the issues of the '*veshya*'[20] (prostitute). From these debates, we hope to ask a different question. Is the reason for reluctance to address issues impelled by the general need to give a secondary status to women outside the folds of normative 'marriage' and 'family'; or is there also a discomfort with and/or the lack of a feminist *language* to address issues outside the frame of marriage and family? These questions will continue to structure the following sections of this article.

Habeas Corpus and Queer Women

Feminists have argued that the writ of Habeas Corpus[21] is often used by members of the natal family of a woman to claim ownership over her in cases of marriage against the will of and/or without the consent of the natal family. This brings into focus the feminist critique of family/community's ownership of women's bodies, spaces and lives. Nasser Hussain discusses one of the earliest Habeas Corpus cases involving a woman where the court's utter incomprehensibility of looking at her 'individual agency' turns the case instead, into one between two religious organisations, one that the girl seems to have chosen to join and the other that supports and helps the parents to 'get her back' (Hussain, 2003, p. 90). In

his discussion of the 'writ of liberty' (read writ of Habeas Corpus) he argues primarily that the evolution of Habeas Corpus in the pre-World War II period was caught in the conflict of assuring people their rights while not allowing any challenge to the colonial state or its policies (Ibid.) This analysis can offer useful parallels in the feminist context, namely, the need of the state to maintain normativity while claiming sensitivity to rights. More specifically, in the context of Habeas Corpus, we argue that the 'ownership of women' position is taken forward through an analysis of case law involving women (Chakravarti, 2005, p. 314; P. Baxi, 2006, p. 59).

What often gets left out of such discussions is how the institution of marriage itself is upheld as the only recognisable institution of partnership/intimacy in the context of heterosexual couples. Put simply, if a heterosexual couple were to counter a case of Habeas Corpus (or any other case) filed in court by the girl's family, they would have to be legally married. Proving legal marriage has been the crux of their defense in most cases. This of course does not mean that such a line of defense assures the woman's interests. First, the natal family might still be privileged in the courtroom (Chakravarti, 2005, p. 314; P. Baxi, 2006). Second, the implication is that the woman's individual interest within the marriage cannot be questioned as it (legality of marriage) is the couple's sole defense and questioning it would mean jeopardising their chances of being together. The woman rarely questions her marriage of choice as the only other option (according to the court) remains her natal home, which she has left for myriad reasons, including the desire to be with her male lover.

This power tussle between the father and the husband is not a simple process. It is not simply a case of the state upholding the norms of society, while paying lip service to rights. It is one that complicates the very intention of the state.

> …the lower judiciary acts in complicity with the family to 'rescue' adult women from 'improper' alliances, which contradicts the juridical emphasis on enforcing marital relations through the technique of reconciliation. The emphasis on upholding the institution of marriage means that distinctions between arranged marriages and marriages of choice must find challenge within the judiciary… (P. Baxi, 2006, p. 60)

We wish to extend Pratiksha Baxi's argument by drawing on the experiences of queer women. First, this means looking more critically at the

implication of the supreme legitimacy of marriage as an institution in the lives of women. Second, this means looking at the bodies that the court identifies and those that it does not. Upendra Baxi's (2006) discussion of 'readerly rights' is useful in this context. He complicates the notion of rights ensured within the constitution by arguing that rights are not those that are simply *given* to citizens, but rather are also those that can be *read into* the constitution. Thus, if a particular reading is not possible then acquiring those rights through constitutional means becomes correspondingly difficult. It is this 'readerly right' that is the one we possess (U. Baxi, 2006, p. 178). To read queer desire then is the challenge. The standard position on queer women in court, in society at large, as well as within queer movements themselves has been that of 'silencing' (Thangarajah and Arasu, 2011, pp. 325–338). The 'readerly rights' argument counters as well as takes forward this view to read it as non-recognition.

Third, we need to look at the implications of this non-recognition and how it can be used for an assertion of oneself and one's desire. As we have already seen, arguments so far have taken the form of a complaint against silencing and thus a lack of agency to assert one's rights and desires (Thadani, 1999). In this article, we hope to ask questions which might complicate this alleged 'lack of agency'.

The next section will look at two cases that have involved queer women and the writ of Habeas Corpus. These are the only two cases we have found so far, having looked at records of Habeas Corpus cases involving women from the 1940s till October 2007. Our examination of the records was to look for what we, almost in jest now, refer to as 'lesbian undertones'. In all these cases there was a husband/male lover and a father/natal family; however, we also know that many cases that do involve women wanting to be with/love other women have not entered the court records as cases ostensibly involving same sex desire. In the following paragraphs is the script of a hearing that one of us (Ponni) witnessed.

The case involved a lesbian couple who had left home and the parents of R,[22] one of the women, charged the other, M, with kidnapping. R had to present herself at the Delhi High Court and declare that she left home out of her own will and volition. R and M 'won' the case as the judge declared that R was an adult and could live wherever she pleased. The charges against M were nullified. The scene in the court is described as below. This is to give you a sense of the nature of the drama in court,

in order for you to be able to perceive the nature of these cases beyond what the judgements and other paper based sources tell us:

> A packed court room with an old, pleasant looking man as the judge. A senior lawyer who supports the case of queer persons in India is fighting the case. Ponni stood next to R who was dressed respectably in a salwar kameez, dupatta and bindi (read good North Indian girl).
>
> Parents' lawyer *(after restraining R's parents from physically pushing us, in an angry tone)*: Your honour, M has kidnapped R to use her for immoral and illegal purposes.
>
> R's lawyer *(in a calm and composed tone)*: Your honour, there remains no proof to assert that R has not left with her own will and volition. R does not have any relationship with M apart from being a colleague. My client and I have no knowledge or concern with her whereabouts *(in a mocking tone)*. Besides, my dear friend here in his submission has alleged a sodomy charge. This is unheard of, as you can clearly see that R is a woman and so is M from what I gather. This day too we had to see—of women being charged with sodomy.
>
> *(giggles in court and the judge laughs openly)*

The exact nature of M and R's relationship is obviously known only to the activists and lawyers involved in the case, and have been *actively kept out* of court records. This remains the primary methodological problem with writing a legal history of lesbian relationships and law in India, and hence demands a different reading than one of mere absence or silence.

Further, in one of the two cases we discuss below, N and R were thrown out of court for the reasons that will be mentioned. One can comfortably assume that this is not specific to N and R but is the story of many such cases invoking the writ of Habeas Corpus or any other law. We are able to write this story only through our access to queer archives that are being built in India which tell stories that could never enter the haloed sphere of the court.

Two Stories

Two adult women, Mini aged 29 and Nisha aged 19, were working together in an industrial unit that employed unmarried women at

Varapuzha, Kerala. In May 2000 the girls left their village for Coimbatore, where Mini changed her name to Babu, cut her hair and dressed like a man. Mini's family filed a complaint regarding her disappearance. When the women heard of this they returned home. They were produced before the first class magistrate in Paravur. At the hearing Mini was dressed as a 'man' (*Malayala Manorama*, 11 October 2000). The court then granted them permission to live where they wanted to but the families wanted them separated (Ibid.). Even though the court ruled that two adults could live together as they wished, the parents separated them and took Nisha with them. Subsequently Mini filed a writ of Habeas Corpus demanding that Nisha be brought to court and that she was being illegally confined by her parents. The relationship, however, broke down when Nisha was brought before the High Court and she said that she was not being held against her wishes and that she would like to return to her parents (*Malayala Manorama*, 23 November 2000).

In the year 2005, N filed a writ of Habeas Corpus at the Kerala High Court for the release of R, who was being confined against her wishes by her parents. N and R were friends for a long time and R confided in N about the abuse she faced from her brother. This was one of the reasons why R wanted to leave home. The situation increasingly deteriorated and the girls decided to run away as R threatened to commit suicide, if she had to continue to stay in that house. They ran away and sought shelter at a women's organisation, Sahayatrika[23] and called their parents to assure them of their safety. The parents complained to the police due to which they had to be presented to the magistrate who allowed the women to do as they wished. Despite the assurances given by their parents, they were separated and N was put on medication. N escaped from her parents but was unable to find R and thus sought remedy under the Constitution. The court however dismissed the writ of Habeas Corpus on the grounds that N had no right to seek this remedy as she had no *locus standi,* she was not related to R, neither was she an affected party.

The Stories Within the Story

Let us take a cursory look at available court records and newspaper reports about the two cases in question. These quotes involve descriptions

of the women by the press which often uses the language of the court as well of the women themselves cited in court documents and in the press.

Naming the Relationship

> 'close friends for the past two and half years' (*Malayala Manorama*, 11 October 2000).
>
> 'The petitioner submits that she has been searching for her friend' (Mini's petition to the Kerala High Court).
>
> 'Mini returned to her home with Nisha. Her father Bhaskaran received the friends with pleasure' (*Malayala Manorama*, 23 November 2000).
>
> '…extremely nervous nature and would easily get frightened and it was a major support for the detainee that she had a friend' (Mini's petition to the Kerala High Court).

The most common and safest form of referring to lesbian women in the court and in reportage has been 'friend'. A process of sanitising, de-intensifying the relationship then is in place. Other references in news reports are more truthful.

> 'Nisha is trying to give up her partner and friend Mini after living together for months in Coimbatore' (*Malayala Manorama*, 23 November 2000).
>
> '…who kidnapped her partner and lover' (*Malayala Manorama*, 23 November 2000). [The term 'partner' is used, commonly used also in the case of an unmarried heterosexual couple. Rarely does one see the word 'lover'. This term is however used here without leaving any loose ends in declaring the illicit nature of this 'love' affair.]
>
> 'They lived there for three months as husband and wife' (*Malayala Manorama*, 23 November 2000).
>
> '…they came back from Coimbatore after three months of married life. After they got this permission they were living together as husband and wife in Mini's house' (*Malayala Manorama*, 23 November 2000).

A common and interesting practice is to refer to these couples as 'married'. This is done, one can argue, for two reasons. First, often the couples

themselves imitate a marital relationship through performances of their gender and married roles. Second, the press often has no other way of recognising this relationship except through the trope of marriage. Taking the invocation of marriage as a description of such a relationship to new heights is the heading of an article which says:

> 'Nisha not in confinement, divorces Mini' (*Malayala Manorama*, 23 November 2000).

> 'The Petitioner fears for the safety of the detainee and it is under these extreme circumstances she is approaching this Hon'ble court' (in Mini's petition to the Kerala High Court).

> '…into a depressive state and would threaten to commit suicide if she continued staying there. It was only on the persuasion of the Petitioner that the detainee would avoid taking that extreme step' (in Mini's petition to the Kerala High Court).

> '…earlier she tried to commit suicide. She threatened Nisha's family saying that she would hang herself in front of their house if they don't allow Nisha to live with her' (*Times of India*, 23 November 2000).

In a desperate bid at least to begin to articulate the intensity of the relationship to the court, the petitioner uses convoluted language. As there remains no language to articulate intimacy outside of heterosexuality and heterosexual marriage, she is left with no choice but to argue her case in a language that is almost incomprehensible to the court. The last quote is anecdotal to prove the intensity and thus the significance of the relationship.

The Natal Family's Recognition of the Relationship

> '…he started tormenting the detainee mentally by spreading rumors that she did not have a healthy relation with the Petitioner' (Mini's petition to the Kerala High Court).

> 'Nisha's relatives stated that Mini began a close relationship with Nisha by loving and threatening her' (Nisha's father's response to the Habeas Corpus petition in the Kerala High Court).

It is by invoking immorality and criminality that the natal family puts forward their case. The family's non-acceptance of the relationship is not expressed in any other way. Giving a reason is considered unnecessary in the case of 'unhealthy', immoral and criminal relationships. Here is where you see the stark difference between heterosexual and homosexual 'runaway couples': in the former the question is always one of 'non acceptance' by the family for various stated reasons, be they of caste, class, religion or any other.

Some conclusions can be drawn from the above. First, the court hears the cases without ever being exposed to the full nature of the case in question. This of course remains inadequate and unjustified legal practice. Second, exposure to the court would be impossible as there is no legal language that permits the expression of the nature of this relationship. If one were to risk serious consequences and use terms such as 'lesbian' or 'homosexual' or 'women loving women', the court might still not comprehend the concept and were this to happen the situation would only worsen as it would provide grounds for criminal prosecution under Section 377, although this is no longer the case in Delhi.[24] The language of the media follows that of the court, spicing it up with an element of sensationalism. The simple fact that the exact nature of the relationship has not entered the court at all has never been pointed out, and seems to lie outside the scope of media coverage. Positive media coverage may even express support to the couple and point to the 'injustice' done to them if any, but will still not address the silences.

Describing the Body

> 'I am no longer Mini, I am Babu' (*Malayala Manorama*, 11 October 2000).
>
> 'Mini cut her hair and wore men's clothes so as to live like a man' (*Hindustan Times*, 24 November 2000).
>
> 'Mini's voice and structure are almost like a man's. She is able to do electronic work and climb trees. She has changed her name to Babu. She has had some similar relations with other girls in the unit in which she worked' (*Hindustan Times*, 24 November 2000).

Notice that the discussions of Mini's body are entirely descriptive in nature. Being limited by the man–woman dichotomy, description of attire, physical attributes and so on becomes the only means of hinting at the situation.

> 'Mini is the youngest daughter of Bhaskaran. She was brought up as a boy since the family has no male child'(*Malayala Manorama*, 11 October 2000).
>
> 'I dress like a man for safety in traveling. For this reason I have decided to live as Babu'(Ibid.).
>
> 'Mini dressed like a man for filing a petition before the court. Mini is filing this petition for the protection and safety of Nisha as well' (Mini's petition to the Kerala High Court).

These quotes point to the reasons for Mini being a 'man'. This of course flows from the assumption that the deviance has to be compulsorily explained. It is also important to note that it is also a bid to legitimise the deviant body through explanations that can be justified. The last quote is the most interesting. It points to many things. For one, the ease of the male self in court is apparent as opposed to that of the female (Mini repeatedly stated that safety was a reason for her 'male behaviour'). Second, in this particular instance, Mini, a woman, seems to be doing nothing but performing the recognisable act of a husband seeking the body of his wife in a context where a Mini/Babu is not recognised in court. Further, that Mini's case was thrown out for lack of *locus standi*, points yet again to the fact that this intimate relationship is unimaginable let alone legitimate.

In the light of the discussions above, what is it that we are asking for? Do we want to see terms such as 'lesbian' normalised in the court and media? Do we want 'lesbian marriage' to be deemed legitimate? Is one asking for the recognition and acknowledgement of the 'deviant' body? The simple answer would be to ask for these rights, which will then 'normalise' and thus maybe ease the strains on these women. Normalising then becomes another matter of debate. Are we asking for a place within the norm or are we asking to create our own spaces outside of and sometimes opposing these norms? The reality today remains that many lesbian, gay, transgendered individuals veer towards the comfortable space of normalcy. The relief of this comfort in the otherwise difficult life of lesbian, gay and transgendered people cannot be emphasised enough. Not for a moment can we be disrespectful towards the use of such comfort in order to advance our critical arguments. However, it cannot be left unquestioned or held sacred. It is as important to the everyday lives of LGBT people as it is to the purposes of critiquing the traps of normativity. The non-

inclusivity of normalcy becomes apparent in LGBT lives sooner rather than later, and this facilitates the questioning of it. This is most explicit with the non-inclusivity even of 'L, G, B, T'. Many slip through the cracks of this alphabet list and have to create new ones. It remains to be seen how long this 'alphabet creation' can sustain itself as a strategy, apart from its limitation as an analytical frame. Either way, this quest, we argue, is primarily because of the lack of even the remote beginnings of a fresh imagination.

For now however, by virtue of this denial of a name and recognition or acknowledgement, lesbian women and some others in India have only the privilege of challenging societal attitudes in court, among other spaces. This challenge becomes important within the trope of creating new feminist legal languages and spaces. It gives us the pleasure of imagining new desires, intimacies and even rights.

Concluding Questions

Let us begin our conclusion with a provocative statement using heteronormative marriage as a symbol. This discussion is not limited to marriage but uses marriage to discuss normativity as a whole.

Even for argument's sake, at the risk of sounding naïve and unproductive, can we imagine a critique that asks for the 'abolition of marriage' in the way that the 'abolition of sex work' has been argued for, for instance? Needless to say, we aren't the first to suggest this in one form or another and we will not be the last.[25] We are not suggesting that this provocative view be a serious demand. The point is not to 'abolish' marriage because the dictum of abolition itself can be deemed as problematic.[26] The intention is only to explore the possibilities of destabilising marriage's position as the sole system of intimate relationships and social organisation, and examine what we can learn from this line of thought.

First, we do have to train ourselves to think outside of this structure, for which we need a more comprehensive critique of the family that goes beyond its unequal structure (however world altering this critique has been, and one from which so many arguments have been made, including our own) to also address the ways in which the power it holds

structures our bodies, desires and our perceptions of intimacy and violence. This critique would therefore encompass normative notions of gender, sexuality, identity, community, marriage, family, desire and intimacy, and the list could continue. This critique might have to be coupled with questioning all the realms we deal with in processes of social change, including the law. The law, being based entirely on privilege and criminalising, rooted in marriage and family norms, can then be questioned. Let us be warned however, that this will necessarily shake up the very notion of 'the law' which necessarily requires 'naming'. A politics of deconstruction that refuses to 'name' will have consequences which will also have to be dealt with. The challenge seems to lie in simultaneous processes of broadening the scope of the law while maintaining a basic critique of it at all times. Our critique then will extend as much to the law as it will to the nature of our interactions with it (Thangarajah and Arasu, 2011, pp. 325–338). Recalling Butler's 'I' we know that 'for the "I" to launch its critique, it must first understand that the "I" itself is dependent upon its complicitous desire for the law for the possibility of its own existence' (Butler, 1995, p. 7). Can we imagine a critique of the law which goes beyond one that is from an imagination different from the legal and thus finite 'I'? What will that critique look like? And how will we say it, shout it, assert it?

Second, if these critiques were to evolve significantly, then maybe we could recognise and acknowledge different kinds of support structures and social organising. Queer women, in many ways, demand this acknowledgement and this language, by virtue of being denied marriage as well as the privilege to make choices freely by virtue of being women.[27] This imagination might contribute positively to the earlier process of interacting with the law.

The fine balance between critical and strategic engagement is the challenge ahead of us. The imagination, theoretical as it may be, if used in engagement, may then show us this colourful spectrum we wish to create. Yet another challenge lies in communicating this imagination through creating a language equipped to do so. Let us remember that the theoretical remains different from everyday engagement precisely because of this lack of language. Last, and not by any stretch of imagination the least, we must be aware at all times that this imagination will be and should remain vibrant and we would do well to challenge one another constantly.

Notes

1. It is important to note at the very outset that the co-authorship of this article is in itself a statement of the dialogues and tensions we wish to highlight. Apart from both of us being queer women and feminist activists, we also come from two different kinds of academic backgrounds. Priya is trained primarily in law and Ponni mainly in the social sciences, leading to a partnership in which the dialogue between different kinds of criticisms of the law through articulations of feminism occurs.
2. Here the term 'queer men' is used in the same way that 'queer women' has been used earlier, that is, those who are recognised by society to be 'men' irrespective of their own identification *vis-à-vis* their gender and sexual orientation.
3. The Sodomy law introduced by the British in India among many other colonies criminalises 'carnal intercourse against the order of nature' and prescribes a punishment of up to 10 years and a fine. This law was challenged for the first time in 1998 by the Aids Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan. That case was dismissed. The Naz foundation brought forth a case in 2000. Naz was then supported by other support groups such as Voices against 377, a coalition of child rights, women's rights, sexuality rights and human rights groups. This case in the high court ended with a historic judgement on 2 July 2009 which read down Section 377, thereby decriminalising adult consensual same sex sexual activity in private. The judgement used the Constitutional argument to reach its end, thus providing a major boost for arguments of dignity and respect for LGBT communities. This case has now been challenged in the Supreme Court and the hearings are underway.
4. See http://www.dnaindia.com/lifestyle/comment_my-favourite-part-of-being-lesbian-is-the-exhilarating-sex_1540708
5. Section 339 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC): Whoever voluntarily obstructs any person so as to prevent that person from proceeding in any direction in which that person has a right to proceed, is said wrongfully to restrain that person.
6. Section 340, IPC: Whoever wrongfully restrains any person in such a manner as to prevent that person from proceeding beyond certain circumscribing limits, is said 'wrongfully to confine' that person.
7. The first letter of the names of the persons involved has been used for purposes of anonymity in the article, except when the use of the full name has been consented to by the person involved.
8. Section 361 (IPC). The text is as follows: Whoever takes or entices any minor under 16 years of age if a male, or under 18 years of age if a female, or any person of unsound mind, out of the keeping of the lawful guardian of such

minor or person of unsound mind, without the consent of such guardian, is said to kidnap such minor or person from lawful guardianship.

9. Section 362 (IPC). The text is as follows: Whoever by force compels, or by any deceitful means induces any person to go from any place, is said to abduct that person.
10. Section 366 of the IPC (Kidnapping): Whoever kidnaps or abducts any woman with intent that she may be compelled, or knowing it to be likely that she will be compelled, to marry any person against her will, or in order that she may be forced or seduced to illicit intercourse, or knowing it to be likely that she will be forced or seduced to illicit intercourse, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to 10 years, and shall also be liable to fine.
11. Section 191 (IPC): Whoever being legally bound by an oath or by an express provision of law to state the truth, or being bound by law to make a declaration upon any subject, makes any statement which is false, and which he either knows or believes to be false or does not believe to be true, is said to give false evidence.
12. See http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/6679733.stm, http://womensspace.wordpress.com/2007/05/31/todays-male-terrorism-female-born-couple-imprisoned-for-marrying-to-prevent-one-of-them-from-being-sold-to-pay-uncles-gambling-debt/, http://www.samarmagazine.org/archive/article.php?id=239, http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2007%5C10%5C30%5Cstory_30-10-2007_pg13_2
13. Some significant texts on feminist movements in India have discussed in detail the role of advocacy for legislation as well as the debates around the same. See, for instance, Baxi (2006); Chakravarti (2005); John and Nair (1998); Kapur (2005); Khullar (2005); Kumar (1993); Menon (2000); Mukhopadyay (1998); Parashar and Dhanda (2008); Shah and Gandhi (1992) and Thapan (1997).
14. It is important to remember that by 'frame' we do not mean an unquestioned context but one that is not only useful but also constantly and critically analysed.
15. Menon (2000) argues that the 'binary logic' of the law cannot comprehend women's experiences in all its complexity. She further questions the construction of the 'body' as a pre-existing entity which can be universalised through the law. She speaks of the primary place given to legal changes in feminist practice and therefore of how we might be reasserting notions that we seek to break through processes of law, by being forced to resort to its binary language.
16. We are not arguing that there was unanimity on every aspect of the DV Act or the process by which it was formulated, since we are well aware that there

were differences. A general consensus however did prevail over the need for the law. Sex workers and bar dancers, on the other hand, have had the support of only some feminists, while others have opposed their demands.

17. This is not to deny the role of desire in women's experiences in general as well as in experiences of violence in particular. It is only to emphasise the singular nature of the role of desire in the lives of queer women and the violence they face.
18. Heteronormativity here is being used to refer to a system that asserts as the norm not only heterosexuality, but also caste, religious, regional oppressive factors. Arranged marriages for instance have been critiqued by feminists as a system that keeps in place all these practices at the cost of loss of agency to the woman in the matter of choosing the course of her life.
19. See JAGORI (1998); http://jagori.org/wp-content/uploads/2006/03/Trafficking%20workshop.PDF
20. This term is used extensively in the contemporary context by VAMP (Veshya AIDS Mukabla Parishad), a sex workers' organisation providing new meaning to the older Sanskrit term referring to sex workers.
21. Habeas Corpus is a constitutional writ that can be used in the higher judiciary to ask that the court orders relevant authorities and/or persons to produce a person who is in custody of the state or otherwise, to be produced in court.
22. The names of persons are protected in the interest of safety and anonymity.
23. Sahayatrika is an organisation based in Kerala that works on issues concerning queer women and facilitates creation of safe spaces for queer women and a network of queer women within Kerala. Sahayatrika's work has involved a large number of emergency interventions.
24. Refer to Note 4.
25. Mary Wollstonecraft's (1796) reference to marriage as 'legal prostitution' in *A vindication of the rights of women,* and Alexandra Kollantai calling for the abolition of bourgeois marriage are examples.
26. The abolition of any specific set of practices usually does not necessarily translate into the abolition of the spirit it embodies or the politics it espouses. Abolition of sex work, for instance, does not mean that women will not be seen as 'sexual objects'. We are not speaking of 'being viewed as a sexual object' in a pejorative tone but only as an example for purposes of this explanation.
27. This is not to say that queer women in India have necessarily been denied the privileged place of marriage. On the contrary, some of the earliest records of lesbians in modern India have emerged through news of them getting married. The marriage of Leela and Urmila, two police constables who got married in 1988, is often used as a starting point or a significant event in any history of lesbian women in India. But the fact that they often accept these norms have

to do with the comfort that normativity seems to give them, as well as not knowing any other way to 'solemnise' their relationship as it were.

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Transgender youth and social support: A survey study on the effects of good relationships on well-being and mental health

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Article

Transgender Youth and Social Support: A Survey Study on the Effects of Good Relationships on Well-being and Mental Health

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Abstract

Positive gender-supportive relationships have been found to promote well-being of transgender youth. The present study investigates how the quality of relationships to parents, friends and partners affects the mental well-being of transgender youth. An online survey was used for data collection. The sample consisted of 1,613 Finnish youth between 15 and 25 years of age. Youths who were identified as a transgender (n = 370) were compared to cisgender (= no gender conflict, n = 1,243, mostly sexual minority youth) on measures of relationship quality and positive well-being. Transgender youth reported poorer well-being and relationships to parents than the control group did. Relationship quality predicted well-being of all participants, and there were no significant interactions between gender identity and relationship quality. Social support is important for transgender youth and has an impact on the well-being of youth regardless of gender identification.

Keywords

Transgender, youth, relationships, well-being, mental health

Introduction

Transgender youth are a heterogeneous gender minority group whose gender identities or gender expressions sometimes, or always, differ from the social expectations based on their sex declared at birth (Grant et al., 2011; Grossmann, D'Augelli, & Frank, 2011). Several factors that support well-being have been identified in the

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literature. These include factors that are general, that is, apply to all people, and factors that are specific to transgender persons. Positive relationships have been identified as a general and universal source for well-being (e.g., Seligman, 2011). Studies have shown that social support from family and friends is also an important source of well-being among transgender youth (e.g., Alanko, 2014; see also Ehrensaft, Giammattei, Storck, Tishelman, & Keo-Meier, 2018). In this study, we wanted to investigate how relationships with family members, partners and friends influenced the mental well-being in a sample consisting of 370 transgender or gender unsure identified participants. This group was compared to a control group consisting mainly of non-heterosexual cisgender youth. The introduction briefly presents the concept of well-being and results from empirical studies with transgender samples. Thereafter, factors that support resilience in transgender youth are reviewed with the main focus being on social relations.

The study was conducted in Finland, a Nordic country, generally scoring high on measures of gender equality between men and women (National Institute of Health and Welfare, 2017). In Finland, it is not possible to choose a third juridical gender as it is in many countries today (Transgender Europe, 2017). However, there is an ongoing debate on the topic, and several organizations actively promote the rights of gender and sexual minority individuals in Finland. In a report on gender and sexual minorities in Europe from the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA), the situation in Finland was described as being relatively good, but that there are serious problems concerning the civil rights of trans- and inter-gender individuals. In fact, one of the recommendations made by ILGA-Europe is: 'Updating the existing legal framework for legal gender recognition, to ensure the process is based on self-determination and is free from abusive requirements (such as GID/medical diagnosis, or surgical/medical intervention)'.

Mental Well-being and Risk Factors for Transgender Youth

Mental well-being does not imply the absence of infirmities, but the capacity to cope despite these (WHO, 2014). Resilience refers to the competence to adapt positively to aversive events and contexts faced during one's developmental process (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000). The complexity of these constructs makes measuring them challenging. Also, all individuals experience hardships in their lives, and many experience mental health problems, but their causes might not be straightforward, and the severity of symptoms varies greatly as a function of time.

Transgender youth might be at risk for mental health problems due to many stressors that have been associated with growing up not conforming to gendered expectations. It has been shown that transgender persons are not distressed by the transgender identity per se but by the negative reactions to it from the environment (Bower, 2001; Cohen-Kettenis & Van Goozen, 2002; McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010). According to a study by Olson, Durwood, DeMeules, and McLauglin (2016), transgender youth who are supported in their identities are actually as well-being as cisgender youth. Social marginalization felt stigma (Bockting et al., 2013), early traumas and difficulties (Nuttbrock, Rosenblum, & Blumenstein, 2002), as well as experiences of harassment and victimization (Clark et al., 2013; Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2008; Kreiss & Patterson, 1997), have been shown to

decrease the well-being among transgender youth. Also, transgender youth have reported negative reactions (Grossman, D'augelli, & Salter, 2006; Wren, 2002), verbal and physical abuse (Grossman et al., 2011), as well as poor relationships and conflicts with parents related to their gender identity (Cohen-Kettenis & Van Goozen, 2002). According to previous studies, transgender youth who have faced relational and environmental invalidation from an early age due to their gender identity expression are more likely to express externalized and internalized problems (Carver, Yunger, & Perry, 2003; Cohen-Kettenis, Owen, Kaijser, Bradley, & Zucker, 2003; Leibowitz & Telingator, 2012) including psychosocial problems (Garofalo, Deleon, Osmer, Doll, & Harper, 2006; Vanderburgh & Forshée, 2003), depression (Clark et al., 2013; Nuttbrock et al., 2010; Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, Card, & Russell, 2012) and suicide attempts (Grossmann & D'Augelli, 2007; Mustanski & Liu, 2013).

Of course, one needs to bear in mind the diversity of experiences and identities of individuals. That is, research has to consider individual differences as well as contextual differences in which the research is conducted. Labelling an entire group with the term transgender does not do justice to the diversity and the many individual experiences of gender identity. However, it is likely that youth who feel that the gender ascribed to them at birth does not match their gender identity will share some experiences and features not shared by other youth. In this particular study, we wanted to study relationships and the role of relationship quality in the lives of Finnish transgender youth.

Social Relationships and Other Sources of Resilience in the Lives of Transgender Youth

Social support, personal mastery and self-esteem have been identified as resilience factors for the well-being of transgender youth (Grossman, et al., 2011). In a qualitative study, 19 Finnish trans-identified participants were asked to tell their gender-related narrative. Three central sources of empowerment were found: social support, meaningful leisure time and experiences of having a congruent gender and body identity (Alanko, Aspnäs, Ålgars & Sandnabba, 2018).

For transgender people, personal empowerment, that is, feelings of having agency over things in one's life and feeling good about oneself, is an important supportive factor (Higa et al., 2012). Higa et al. (2012) suggested that transgender persons can achieve personal empowerment through feelings of being in control of how one describes one's gender identity or by embodying a sense of uniqueness because of one's gender identity. The felt acceptance and support from others is, however, often needed (Nuttbrock, et al., 2002).

Most studies on the effects of social support on the well-being of transgender youth have focused on the effect of family and parent support. Since the process of self-acceptance and valuation of self starts long before adulthood, the parents' attitudes and fostering are vital to the well-being of transgender youth. In preadolescent gender atypical children, the felt pressure from parents and peers to conform to gender stereotypes has been associated with a negative self-concept (Egan & Perry, 2001). Family support has been found to have a positive effect on well-being (Bockting et al., 2013), a reduced risk for depression, trauma symptoms, internalizing and externalizing symptoms (Grossman et al., 2011), and suicide (Mustanski & Liu, 2013).

A recent study by Olson et al. (2016) showed that when parents had a gender affirmative approach, transgender youth reported no more psychiatric symptoms than the cisgender control group. In a sample of 245 young LGBT adults between 21 and 25 years, out of which 9 per cent were identified as a transgender, an association was found between reported family acceptance in adolescence and mental well-being in young adulthood (Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010). Family acceptance was measured as the participants' recognition of the families' and parents' attempts to display acceptance of their LGBT identity behaviour. The more the reported youth were accepted by the families, the better were their self-esteem, social support and general health. Moreover, youth from accepting families were less likely to suffer from depression and have a history of attempted suicide during adolescence than youth from non-accepting families. However, transgender youth reported significantly lower social support and as a possible reaction to this, their general health was significantly poorer compared to non-transgender youth (Ryan et al., 2010). Similarly, Alanko (2014) found that transgender youth who were more open with their families regarding their transgender identity and were less controlled by their parents regarding their gender expression scored higher on well-being, identity pride and self-esteem.

Studies of how mothers and fathers relate to their gender nonconforming or transgender child have reported some differences in how mothers and fathers respond. Fathers of 5-year-old boys were more accepting of their sons' cross-gender behaviour than were mothers (Sandnabba & Ahlberg, 1999). Grossman et al. (2006) reported more negative initial reactions by fathers, but after three years, they found more negative attitudes by mothers. In the study by Alanko et al. (2018), adult participants described becoming especially close to their mothers after being able to discuss together the gender-related themes.

When relationships within families are less supportive, there might be other relationships that can offer support. Although gender nonconforming youth are less accepted by peers in general (Fitzpatrick, Euton, Jones, & Schmidt, 2005), most transgender youth have at least one friend that they feel cares about them (Clark et al., 2013).In a study by Garofaloet al. (2006), friends were the most frequently reported source of social support among transgender youth. In the sample of 51 transgender identified participants aged 16–25, 98 per cent reported that friends were at least somewhat helpful in providing emotional support. Moreover, like-minded peer groups have been shown to offer important support for gender variant children's self-concept and self-esteem (Balleur-van Rijn, Steensma, Kreukels, & Cohen-Kettenis, 2013). In an online study, Bockting et al. (2013) found that peer support could moderate the effects of enacted stigmatization and work as a protective factor against psychological distress among transgender identified adults (n = 131).

Romantic partners are important life companions who can reinforce one's desired gender identity (Alanko et al., 2018). When partners' reactions towards one's gender identity are negative, it is often a source of distress and makes gender identity acceptance more difficult (Testa et al., 2012). In previous studies, partners in non-transgender built relationships have been found to respond negatively to the partners transitioning (Budge, Adelsson, & Howard, 2013; Nuttbrock et al., 2002). A study by Gamarel, Reisner, Laurenceau, Nemoto, and Operario (2014) investigating the

relationship between gender minority stress, mental health and relationship quality found preliminary support for a 'dyadic stress theory', that is, external stress in one partner is transferred to the other partner in a relationship. In a sample of 191 transgender women and their cisgender partners, it was found that when partners experienced that their relationships were stigmatized, it was reflected in the couple's relationship quality, as well as in their mental well-being. Researchers concluded that higher levels of external stressors limit the communication skills within relationships and thus negatively affect important coping resources within romantic relationships. According to Budge et al. (2013), many effective coping strategies, for example, well-being enhancing activities, require a supportive and positive social context.

The present study investigates the role of relationships in supporting the well-being of transgender youth. In light of prior research, transgender youth were hypothesized to report poorer relationship quality to parents and friends. Good relationships to parents, friends and partners were hypothesized to predict mental well-being.

Method

Participants

Data for the study was collected April–June 2013 as part of the 'How are LGBTIQ people doing in Finland?'('Hyvinvoiva sateenkaarinuori', Alanko, 2013), an extensive web questionnaire investigating health and living conditions of sexual and gender minority youth. The questionnaire was answered by 2,515 respondents in the age range 13–72 ($M = 23.9$, $SD = 7.4$). Although the questionnaire was open for participants above 25 years of age, adult respondents were not the primary focus. Instead, youth participants and items focusing on supporting factors and their relationship to mental well-being were chosen for the analysis.

1,613 participants between ages 15 and 25 were included in the final analysis. Based on the respondents' answer for the question 'Are you trans?', youth who answered *Yes* ($n = 199$) or *Unsure* ($n = 171$) were grouped as 'transgender' ($n = 370$), whereas those who answered *No* were grouped as 'cisgender' ($n = 1,243$). A definition of trans was given as follows:

> [T]rans is an umbrella term that describes all those whose gender identity or gender expression always, or sometimes, differ from those ascribed to them at birth. To this group transvestites, transgender and trans people are included. In this survey, trans is used to describe all these states (Alanko, 2013).

After a subsequent question, transvestites and inter-gender respondents were directed to a different path of the questionnaire, and therefore excluded from the analysis presented here. Respondents included in the analysis described themselves with words such as transman, transwoman, trans, gender bender and queer.

The decision to group together trans-identified and unsure respondents was made after much consideration and analysis indicating no statistically significant group differences on the interaction between gender identity and the effects of parental control on self-esteem and positive mental health. Yet, for instance, transgender-identified youth were more open about their identity to their families than gender

unsure youth were (Alanko, 2014). The mean age for the total youth sample was 20.0 (SD = 2.5), which was also the mean for the transgender and uncertain (M = 20.0; SD = 2.5), as well as for the cisgender (M = 20.0; SD = 2.5) youth groups. Due to the focus and sampling procedure of this study (see further section on Distribution), most participants were recognized as non-heterosexual youth (Alanko, 2013).

Procedure

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was cooperatively produced and developed by a research group including two senior researchers and one representative for SETA, the organization for equal rights for LGBT people in Finland (Alanko, 2013). It was then reviewed and commented upon by researchers from the Youth Research Society, followed by a review and discussion by youth in LGBT groups on two occasions. Furthermore, clinical personnel from the support centre for transpersons (Transtukipiste) gave their comments on the items. A pilot study was then conducted with both youth (n = 5) and adults (n = 5), where the pilot participants gave feedback on the questionnaire. Thereafter, the core research group decided on the final setup of the questionnaire. The questionnaire included several well-known scales, out of which those that were used in this study will be described below.

The questionnaire began with an informed consent assuring that participation was voluntary and confidential and that participants could leave the questionnaire at any time. Respondents were encouraged to take time to answer the questionnaire carefully and due to the length of the questionnaire, respondents were given an option to save responses and complete it later. Respondents were also given information about the aim of the study and its possible fields of use. The research plan was approved by the Board for Research Ethics at Åbo Akademi University.

Distribution

The survey in Finnish was distributed and advertised online; social media and focused target group advertising made up the most important distribution channels. Target groups were also approached through email lists. A link to the survey was spread on Facebook via the networks of the research team and via different groups. Some homepages and sites advertised a link to the survey (e.g., Seta, Qruiser: the meeting site for Nordic LGBT people, Trasek: the peer-support group for transpersons and intersexual persons, DreamWearClub: the peer-support group for transvestites). On Qruiser, the banner was shown only for those in the target group, that is, 15–25-year-old Finnish members.

Since the sample is non-representative, the results cannot be generalizable to the entire Finnish population of sexual minorities and transpersons. The sample is also likely to consist of youth who were willing to share parts of their stories, suggesting that they may have come to terms with their personal life histories to a higher degree than those who decided not to respond or to drop out from the survey.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analysis were conducted using the statistical package SPSS 21.0 for Windows.

Measures

Demographics

The two groups were compared on different demographic measures including age, anatomical birth sex and gender self-identification, as well as current relationship status (single, in a relationship, married, etc.), studies (school, college, vocational school, etc.), occupational and living arrangement (with parents, alone, with flatmates, etc.). For anatomical birth sex, respondents could answer male, female and unsure. For gender self-identification, respondents could choose to identify with one or several of the categories female, male and other.

Relationship Quality

To further investigate the quality of relationships, participants were asked 'How do you consider your relationship to the following persons in your life', and the respondents could choose between the options *good*, *average* (*in between good and poor*) and *poor*. For each relationship, the response option 'does not apply to me' was also included.

The Short Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale

The Short Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS; National Health Service Health Scotland, 2014; University of Warwick and University of Edinburgh, 2006) was used to measure well-being. The measure consists of seven questions measuring mental well-being, including different aspects of eudemonic and hedonic well-being (e.g., I have been optimistic about the future). The scale has been translated by the National Health and Well-being Institution in Finland and used in previous Finnish (e.g., Nordling, 2013) and international studies (e.g., Haver, Akerjordet, Caputi, Furunes, & Magee, 2015). The seven items were answered on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (= *none of the time*) to 5 (= *all of the time*). Total scores range from 7 to 35, with higher scores reflecting better overall mental well-being. For comparison, the mean SWEMWBS score in a population-based longitudinal study in UK (N = 19,168) was 25.3 (SD = 4.4). Although further validations of the SWMWBS are needed, it has shown promising psychometric qualities (Stewart-Brown et al., 2009). The reliability of this scale in the present sample was good; Cronbach's alpha was 0.849.

Results

Demographics

Sociodemographic characteristics are summarized in Table 1. The final sample of 1,613 participants between ages 15 and 25 consisted of 370 transgender and 1,243 cisgender respondents, who were mainly identified as a non-heterosexual. Respondents mean age was 20 years (SD = 2.5); 19 per cent were aged 15 to

Table 1. Demographic Information of Trans(*n*=370) and Cis(*n*=1243) respondents (*N*=1619)

	Trans	Cis		
Variable	No. (%)	No. (%)	χ^2	*P*
Age (Years)				
15–17	70 (19)	232 (19)		
18–21	178 (48)	613 (49)	.18	.92
22–25	122 (33)	398 (32)		
Anatomic sex at birth				
Males, *N*	59 (16)	292 (24)	9.54	<.05
Females, *N*	310 (84)	944 (76)	10.13	<.05
Gender identification				
Male	109 (25)	293 (24)	5.28	<.05
Female	179 (40)	930 (74)	92.79	<.001
Both male and female	23 (5)	2 (0.2)	68.52	<.001
Other	135 (30)	26 (2)	365.41	<.001
Currently in relationship	148 (40)	489 (39)	0.07	.79
Currently studying	286 (77)	984 (80)	0.98	.32
Currently employed	33 (9)	174 (14)	6.58	<.05
Current housing status				
Living with parents	161 (38)	512 (38)	0.63	.43
Living alone	93 (22)	295 (14)	0.31	.58
Living with partner	54 (13)	190 (22)	0.11	.80
Living with roommate/s	46 (11)	175 (13)	0.65	.42
Other living arrangement	70 (17)	188 (14)	3.91	.42

Source: The authors.

17 years, 49 per cent were aged 18 to 21 years and 32 per cent were aged 22 up to 25. The transgender respondents did not differ significantly from the cisgender respondents in terms of age group representation, living arrangements or relationship status. The most common housing arrangement was living with parent/s (38%), followed by living alone and living with a partner. The clear majority of the respondents were anatomically female at birth. As expected, significantly more transgender youth than cisgender youth crossed gender categories by identifying as both male and female (5%) or as something else (30%). Those who identified as something else were identified as gender unsure, genderqueer, gender fluid, gender neutral, gender bender or non-binary, to name a few. The majority of all respondents were students (see Table 1). While there were no differences in the proportion of students in each group, cis-participants were employed to a larger extent than transgender youth. Moreover, significantly more trans youth reported being unemployed or laid-off. Approximately 40 per cent of both transgender and cisgender participants were in an intimate relationship.

Mental Well-being

As indicated by their lower scores on SWEMWBS, trans youth reported significantly less well-being ($M = 21.6$, $SD = 4.9$) than cisgender youth ($M = 23.2$, $SD = 4.7$), $t(1,581) = 5.55$, $p < 0.001$.

Relationship Quality

As shown in Table 2, there were significant differences between how transpersons and cispersons rated their relationship quality to mothers and fathers. Relationships to fathers were more often rated as poor than relationships to mothers for both transgender and cisgender youth. The most used response category for all relationship types was 'good' (see Table 2). However, transgender respondents used the categories 'average' and 'poor' more often than did cisgender respondents. There were no significant differences in how transgender and cisgender youth rated their relationships to best friends, other friends and partners.

Interactions Between Relationship Quality, Gender Self-identification and Mental Well-being

The results regarding the reported quality of the relationships studied, depicted in Figure 1, suggests that for all relationships, better relationship quality was associated with higher well-being. There were no interactions between gender self-identification (trans or cis) and well-being for any of the relationships indicating that relationship quality had a similar association with well-being for transgender and cisgender youth. The effect size for relationship quality on well-being is descending in the order of mother, friends, father, partner and best friend.

Table 2. Relationship Quality

		N%	Poor (%)	Average (%)	Good (%)	χ^2	*P*
Mother	Trans	98	10.7	25.9	63.4	22.89	<.001
	Cis	98	5.7	18.9	75.4		
Father	Trans	95	18.2	36.2	45.6	13.21	.001
	Cis	94	14.0	29.5	56.6		
Best friend	Trans	82	1.3	8.3	90.4	3.01	.22
	Cis	88	0.5	6.6	92.8		
Friends	Trans	95	1.7	24.1	74.2	5.76	.06
	Cis	97	1.3	18.6	80.1		
Partner	Trans	42	1.3	6.5	92.2	0.09	.99
	Cis	40	1.6	6.7	91.7		

Source: The authors.
Note: *N* in the first column refers to number of respondents who responded that they have such a relationship. Excluded are respondents who replied does not apply to me'.

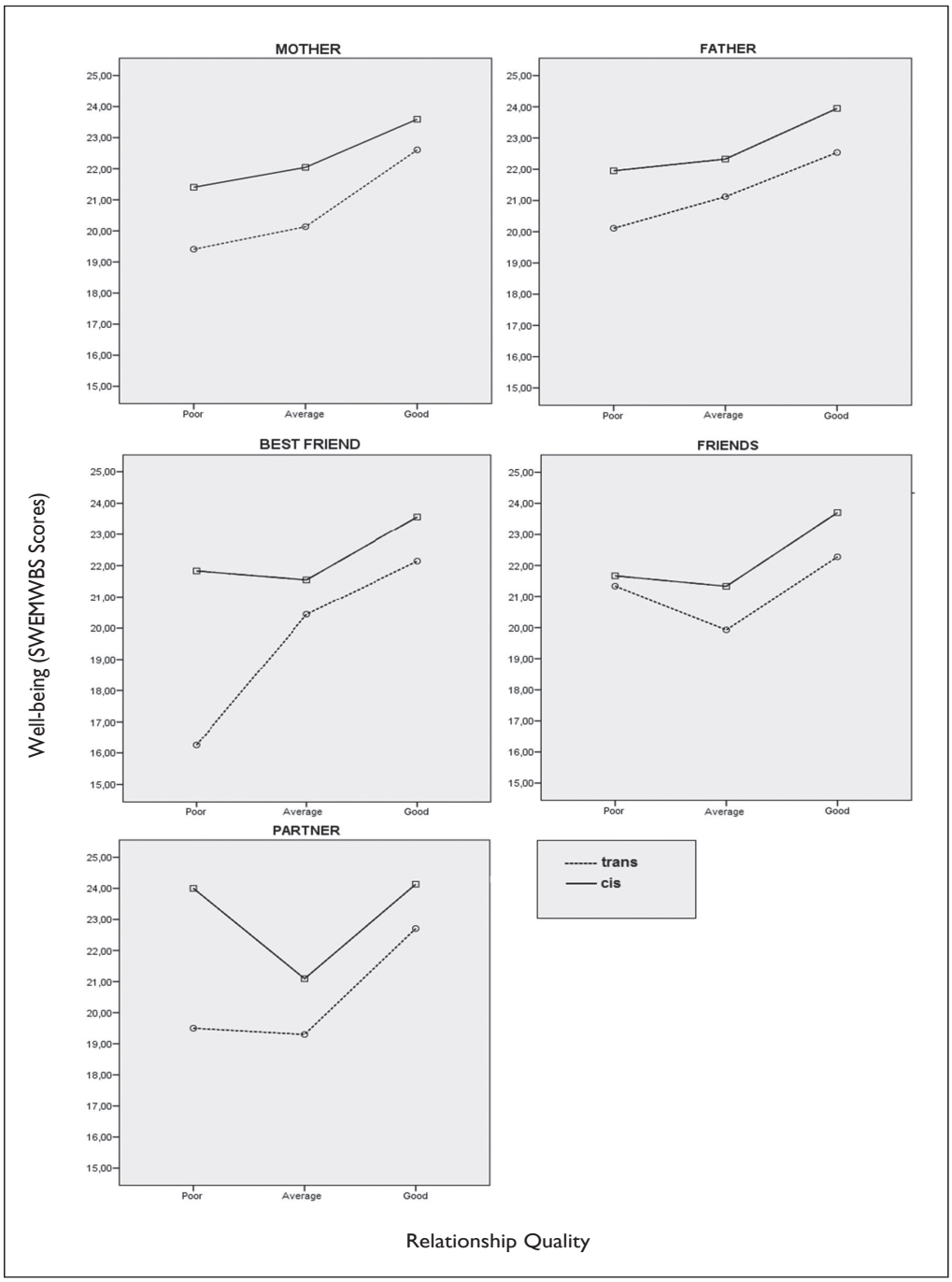

Figure 1. Interactions Between Mental Well-being, Relationship Quality and Gender Identification

Source: The authors.

Relationship to Mothers and Well-being

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a significant main effect of relationship quality with mother on well-being, $F(1, 1{,}551) = 27.41$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.034$. Youth with better relationship quality scored higher on the mental well-being scale (SWEMWBS). No significant interaction effect was found, $F(1, 1{,}551) = 1.24$, $p =$ n.s., $\eta_p^2 = 0.002$, meaning that transgender youth and cisgender youth responded similarly to having good relationships to their mothers. However, a transgender youth who reported good relationships to their mothers scored higher on well-being than cis-youth with poor or average relationships to their mothers.

Relationship to Fathers and Well-being

The relationship quality with fathers had a significant effect on well-being, $F(1, 1{,}488) = 20.61$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.027$, so that a better relationship with fathers was associated with higher well-being. Transgender participants with a good relationship to their fathers scored higher on well-being than cis-participants with poor or average relationships. However, no interaction effect was found, $F(2, 1{,}488) = 0.75$, $p =$ n.s., $\eta_p^2 = 0.000$.

Relationship to Friends and Well-being

Eighty-two per cent ($n = 1{,}381$) of all respondents had a best friend. Relationship quality to best friends had a significant main effect on well-being, $F(1, 1{,}375) = 8.47$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.012$. Better relationships were associated with higher well-being. Transgender youth reported higher well-being when the relationships to their best friends were good than cisgender youth with average or poor relationships did. No significant interaction effect on mental well-being was found between relationship quality with best friends and gender identity status, $F(2, 1{,}375) = 1.01$, $p =$ n.s., $\eta_p^2 = 0.001$. It should be noted that only 10 persons in total reported having a poor relationship with their best friend.

A significant main effect on well-being was found for the relationship quality with other friends, $F(1, 1{,}534) = 25.19$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.032$. A better relationship quality was generally associated with better mental well-being. Transgender youth with good relationships to other friends reported higher well-being than cisgender youth with average or poor relationships, although no significant interaction effect on mental well-being was found, $F(1{,}153) = 0.89$, $p =$ n.s., $\eta_p^2 = 0.000$. It should be noted that only few participants rated their friendships as poor ($n = 21$).

Relationship to Partners and Well-being

Of the respondents, 40 per cent had a partner. Results indicated a significant main effect for the relationship quality with partners on well-being, $F(1, 631) = 7.46$, $p < 0.005$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.023$. Better relationships were associated with higher well-being. Transgender youth with good relationships with their partners scored higher on the well-being scale than cisgender youth with average relationships, the interaction

however not being significant, $F(1,631) = 0.38$, p = n.s., $\eta_p^2 = 0.001$. However, the result should be interpreted with caution, because only few rated their relationships with their partner as poor (2) or average (10).

Discussion

Earlier studies indicate transgender people make use of both universal and transgender-specific factors to cope with stressful events and to increase well-being (Alanko et al., 2018; Grossman et al., 2011). Previous studies show that relationships both support and discourage the identity acceptance of transgender youth. The purpose of this study was to examine how relationships to parents, peers and partners affect the well-being of Finnish transgender

Overall, previous research indicates that good relationships have a buffering effect on the psychological well-being of transgender youth (Grossman et al., 2011; Ryan et al., 2010; Vanderburgh & Forshée, 2003). It has also been suggested that young people who grow up in contexts where gender identity and gender-related behaviours are accepted are also more supported in their identity exploration and psychosocial adjustment (Olson et al., 2016). In the current study, both transgender and cisgender persons' well-being was predicted by the quality of close relationships. Although transgender youth reported less well-being overall, their well-being was significantly improved when relationships were good. A significant finding was that when transgender youth reported good relationships, the level of well-being was as high as the level of cisgender youths' well-being. An implication of this finding is that poor relationships appear to contribute significantly to poorer health in transgender youth. Youth living with their parents rely on them for safety, shelter and economic security (Alanko, 2013). The risk of losing their securities, in addition to having fear of parental reactions and attitudes, is likely to contribute to the mental health issues among transgender persons which have been reported in previous studies (e.g., Grossman et al., 2011). Safe, close relationships help young people stay resilient when encountering hardships in life. Good relationships in this study were associated with higher well-being contributing to the understanding that children and youth supported in their gender identities and gender identity expressions fare much better (see also Mustanski & Liu, 2013; Olson et al., 2016) than trans youth not supported in their relationships.

Parental Relations as a Source of Support

For all youth in this sample, good relationships to mothers and fathers contributed significantly to the well-being of the participants. Good relationships to mothers were reported more often than good relationships to fathers. Effect sizes indicate that the quality of relationships to mothers was the best predictor of well-being, followed by relationships to friends and fathers.

While good parental relationships contribute to transgender youth's well-being in several ways, relationships can also be a major source of stress (e.g., Carver et al., 2003; Cohen-Kettenis et al., 2003; Leibowitz & Telingator, 2012; Testa et al., 2012). Because parental relationships in this study were the only relationships

which transgender youth rated as poorer significantly more often than cisgender youth did, it is likely that especially poor parental relationships could contribute to the lower well-being among transgender youth. Moreover, given the importance of family support for the well-being and gender identity acceptance of transgender youth (Ryan et al., 2010; Leibowitz & Telingator, 2012), it is concerning that only 11 per cent of the transgender youth in our sample reported direct gender identity related support from parents and 12 per cent by siblings (Alanko, 2013). Reactions and attitudes that reflect parental prejudice towards gender variations are likely to affect a youth's well-being negatively (Leibowitz & Telingator, 2012; Grossmann et al., 2011). These negative attitudes contribute to some transgender youth hiding their transgender identities from their families in fear of risking their relationships, shelter and safety, or of being physically or verbally victimized (Grossman et al., 2006; Vanderburgh & Forshée, 2003). These fears are unfortunately realistic for many transgender youth (Garofalo et al., 2006; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006, 2007) in which case hiding one's gender identity is necessary for maintaining safety.

In another article using the same sample as this analysis, Alanko (2014) found that only 31 per cent were open to all in their family about their gender identity and that more openness was related to better well-being and self-esteem. Those unsure about being transgender were even less open about their gender identity (Alanko, 2014). Many transgender people are not open about their transgender identity in other contexts either since they expect negative reactions (Budge et al., 2013). Thus it is possible that fear and internalized stigma, rather than actual experiences of stigma, are hindering transgender youth from seeking and accepting support from others (Fitzpatrick et al., 2005).

Friends and Partners

Previous studies have indicated that friends and partners can help transgender youth achieve a congruent gender and body identity (Alanko et al., 2018) and can be a powerful source of support (Garofalo et al., 2006). In this sample, relationships to friends and partners were generally described as being good. Good relationships, especially to friends, could also predict better well-being. Nuttbrock et al. (2002) suggested that transgender people are likely to try to find friends and partners with positive attitudes towards transgender people and their lifestyles. Transgender youth have also been found to be most open about their gender identities to friends (Alanko, 2014). Having at least one supporting and good relationship may make it easier to cope with other relationships that offer less support and more rejection (Grossman et al., 2006; Nuttbrock, et al., 2002).While 40 per cent of trans-identified participants in this study had a partner, roughly 25 per cent experienced past or current partners as supportive. While a partners' validation appears to contribute to mental health, the fact that not all were supporting could reflect that many are not ready to accept an unexpected gender change in their partner as suggested in previous studies (e.g., Nuttbrock et al., 2002) or that transgender youth are not openly expressing their transgender identity in their intimate relationships.

The results indicate that 5 per cent of transgender youth did not have any friends, compared to 3 per cent of cisgender youth. In a study of the same sample, transgender youth reported being less content with their relationships than cis-youth

(Alanko, 2013).Because participants who did not have a certain relationship (i.e., those who answered 'does not apply to me') were not included, it is unclear how this affected their well-being. Youth without any relationships may be the least well-being due to the lack of social support (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Nuttbrock, et al., 2002). In conclusion, the results of the present study reflect the importance of each relationship for the well-being of transgender youth.

Some limitations of the study should be recognized. This study used a non-representative sample in order to access a large number of respondents from different parts of Finland. It should also be noted that the cisgender reference group mainly consisted of respondents identified as non-heterosexual, thus making the control group also a minority group at risk for higher levels of, for example, problematic relationships and poorer well-being than a mainstream youth group (Alanko, 2013). Moreover, because the sample had a significantly higher representation (~80%) of participants whose anatomic sex at birth was female, the sample is not assumed to be representative of the general transgender population. Although it is not uncommon that females are overrepresented in studies overall, male to female transgender persons are generally more studied than female to male (Wren, 2002). Previous studies have found that transgender females and males differ in terms of psychological well-being (Bockting et al., 2013; Grossman et al., 2006) and in terms of how accepted and supported they are by family and society (Budge et al., 2013). Further on, examining variations within the group of transgender respondents should be a focus.

Internet-based recruitment and data collection are beneficial for reaching marginalized, geographically disperse minority populations. However, it is impossible to verify whether participants were truthful in their answers and how the terminology in the questionnaire was understood, as, for example, terms relating to identity might be unfamiliar. For instance, it is possible that some participants did not understand the somewhat complex question of being transgender or not, although a definition was given. Also, although the extensive length and the lack of incentive may reduce the bias of non-serious respondents, it is possible that some (e.g., those who were depressed) may have not had the energy to complete the questionnaire (Alanko, 2013).

Incorporating both subgroups was useful for the statistical analysis, but some important variance may be lost by including transgender identified and gender unsure youth under the same category. Gender identity unsure youth may not go through the same identity process and have the same 'identity goals' that youth more certain of their transgender identity have. The well-being and identity process of gender identity unsure youth could be a focus of future research.

Conclusions

The results of this study indicated that good relationships are vital to all LGBT youth. Because of their buffering effects on well-being, supportive relationships may be of even greater importance for youth who are at risk of mental health problems due to the social stigma and harassment. Relationships should, therefore, be

among the first things to be considered in any action to support the well-being of transgender youth. To offer more support to transgender youth with poor or non-existing relationships should be a priority followed by offering the relatives of transgender youth information and opportunities to correct harmful misconceptions.

Much needs to be done in order to increase the public's knowledge about gender non-conforming identities, debunk transgender myths and address polarized views of gender. The injustice that transgender people face should not keep transgender youth from addressing and emphasizing the positive and empowering aspects of having a transgender identity.

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Technology and queer education: Subversions and educational resistances

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Abstract

In this article, we look at educational forms from the point of view of queer theory. We understand educational forms as techno-scientific practices in the sense defined by Donna Haraway (1997, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium. FemaleMan_Meets_OncoMouse*. Routledge). We contemplate the eminently subjugating nature of educational institutions in industrial and post-industrial societies. Our work is based on the introduction of queer theory into the social sciences and its influence on pedagogy, promoting the avoidance of normalising and exclusive subjectivities. We propose a use and understanding of *queer* that goes beyond the strictly sexual, in order to go as deeply as possible into a critique of bodily abnormality as a form of construction and remission. We also analyse the role that technology plays in building normality and/or making subversions possible, as well as its consequences for bodies and subjectivities in our modernised society.

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Keywords

Queer theory, queer pedagogy, social construction of normality, subjectivity, body, technoscience

Technology and Pedagogy: Education as a Techno-scientific, Subjectivising the Practice

The appearance of educational institutions as we know them today, coincided with the emergence of a new form of society, which began to forge itself between the 16th and 18th centuries, and which ultimately resulted in the forms of organisation and production, characteristic of the industrial revolution. In this period, the relationship between power and the establishing of subjectivity was based on control mechanisms of a disciplinary nature (Foucault, 1999). New mechanisms of control and surveillance emerged and acquired considerable importance due to the needs imposed by the new social system. The body had to be disciplined to pre-established timetables and routines, a basic requirement for the functioning of an industrial society. Schools played a fundamental role in this process, as Michel Foucault suggests: 'We see in the army, the colleges, the workshops, the schools, a growing domestication of the body, that is the domestication of the useful body. New processes of surveillance, control, distribution of space, marking, etc. emerge. There is a total investiture of the body by mechanisms of power in an attempt to make it both docile and useful. There is a new anatomy of the body.' (Foucault, 1999, p. 123)

In this period, various institutions were imposed that functioned as disciplinary devices. These included the school, and the nuclear family itself, both of which inculcated into children the habits necessary to turn them into future 'good workers'. Nevertheless, in the fields of both politics and social sciences, there seems to be a widespread acceptance of the fact that we currently find ourselves in a new social and historical context, qualitatively different from that of the previous so-called Industrial Society. Many names have been given to this new context: post-industrial society, information or knowledge society, globalisation, post-modernity… these are, however, but symptoms of the many thorny problems that make up the current context: the impact of the New Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), new configurations in economic relations, different concepts of the political and the cultural… The different effects of these changes can be seen, to take an example

from the economic sphere, in the move from an industrial to a consumer society, or in the labour market, where, owing to technological development, productivity is increasing in inverse relationship to the number of jobs on offer, meaning that employment opportunities in the secondary sector are noticeably reduced. Both the decline of the industrial sector and the growth of the service sector have altered the characteristics required of the workforce.

Educational institutions were not left untouched by these changes. In some societies, there has been a move from discipline in the classroom, the teacher as transmitter of knowledge and the exam as a method of evaluation, to the student as the principal focus of learning, the acquisition of competences and management of resources as a form of control. We no longer need educational itineraries that lead to a professional career, linking identity and work. We need people who are adaptable and capable of taking advantage of different resources in different contexts. In the same way, in this personalised learning, we also find the fundamental individualisation necessary for a society based on consumer capitalism.

ICTs have also played an important role in this series of changes so that in many ways we can talk about a real technological revolution (Castells, 1994). In this sense, while the advent of writing, the printing press, or more recently mass media, revolutionised ways of thinking and processes of human relations, new ICTs have brought about changes, not only at an organisational and cultural level, but also at a symbolic one.

In this sense, ICTs have played a definite role in current changes in educational activity. They make it possible to focus attention on learning and on the student, rather than on teaching and the teacher, and they are tools *par excellence* when it comes to managing resources. Technology also plays a fundamental role in current discourse about the body and its relationship with normality and abnormality. From a performative and technological perspective, ICTs enable the breaking of the ontologies that place subjects into binary categories of normality/abnormality.

It is pertinent to revisit Haraway's proposal (1991), as her metaphor of the cyborg shows technology to be the ultimate component of what hybrid identities mean, beyond any category, linking together the body, the material and the semiotic, and showing itself to be a subjectiviser, but also as presenting possibilities for resistance. At the same time, it is interesting to use her definition of technoscience (Haraway, 1997), according to which technology, science and society can no longer be considered separately. According to Haraway, techno-scientific practices create new symbols and ways of understanding science, technology and subjectivity. The relationship between science, technology and society is currently

such that it produces a mutation in the historical narrative, in which the symbolic and the material interlink in different ways, creating a *techno-bio-power*, and with it new forms of subjectivity. These practices and discourses incarnate themselves in complex subjects, hybrids that are 'subjected'—in that they are direct products of the social order—yet at the same time, present possibilities for transformation and resistance. In the same way, we argue that this hybridisation currently produced between technology and pedagogy turns the latter into a techno-scientific practice, producer and regulator of open and fluid subjectivities that break down the habitual notion of the person to build others that deconstruct the normality/abnormality binomial.

Educational institutions born of this disciplinarian society, have, until recently, been educational agencies enclosed within themselves, establishing themselves as a kind of institutional ankylosis, as social guarantors of the forms of normality, as well as participants in measures of social control, disciplining bodies and excessively perturbing subjectivities. However, this closed-mindedness has led to a certain overflow of styles and ways of assuming and collecting new discourses and pedagogic practices. In this article, we echo and revise the introduction of queer theory into the discourses and pedagogic practices, and we position ourselves with a new emerging form of pedagogy as a technoscience for resistance and subversion.

The Queer in Pedagogy: Pedagogically Deconstructing Bodily Abnormality

Queer pedagogy breaks with the universalist, dualist and heteronormative rules. From the binarisation of reality into hetero- and homosexual, it is easy to deduce that the category *heterosexual* is complemented with the adjectives good, normal and natural, while the category *homosexual* goes with the adjectives bad, abnormal and denaturalised. The first group receives benefits and recognised status, while the second is stigmatised and are left with devalued roles and attempts at embodiment regulation.

To speak of queer in terms of pedagogy therefore brings us inherently to refer to the terms normal/abnormal or normality/abnormality. Through a subtle exercise, those subjects that do not fit into the definition of normal are sent to the new *ab*-normal category. We do not only find subjects with given sexual tendencies. This group also increasingly includes a significant number who "escape" from the definition of normal, because

of too many different factors[7]. In fact, as Judith Butler (1990) comments, it is not so important to look at the exclusions produced by a given social order, as to look at the exclusions on which our symbolic order is based and which make the production of that symbolic order possible. Apart from gender and its rejection of homosexuality, she herself demonstrates the existence of other vectors and other exclusions, which make up what may or may not be said in a given social order, for example, race, disability… essentially, everything cyborg. The focus we give in this research is not so much determining what specific types of exclusion form the basis of our social order, as becoming aware that the construction of normality involves the repudiation of some aspects, and the restriction of others.

GLBTI Education

The objective of queer pedagogy is not confined to nor exclusively focussed on topics linked to the experiences of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Queer, Transsexual, or Intersex identities. It is true that the need and the ways in which pedagogy creates bodily norms, in terms of sexuality, have led pedagogues, teachers and youth workers to rethink what they do, how they do it and what they produce in their praxis, in relation to sexual themes. The publication of Butler's work *Gender Trouble* (1990) provided a starting point for reflection and for conceiving of another form of pedagogy of gender and sexuality. The basis for this encounter between pedagogy and queer can be found in a reflection made by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak that we should think about the form in which institutional education or the combination of discourses and practices is linked to the self-determination of the world's subordinate populations and to their subordination (Spivak, 1992). This reflection is supported by the questions posed by Deborah Britzman: 'Is it possible that the educative project one day becomes a hub of deconstructive revolt? Could pedagogy provoke ethical reactions that were capable of rejecting the normalizing conditions of origin and fundamentalism, reactions that reject submission?' (Britzman, 1998, p. 62).

However, what queer pedagogy is really looking for is the destabilisation of the normal/abnormal binomial, just as Butler proposes. Britzman clearly confirms this:

> 'All these practices awaken our curiosity about the way in which normality becomes an imperceptible element in the classroom and about how pedagogy

> itself can intervene to make the limits and obstacles of normality perceptible' (Britzman, 1998, p. 67).

From the constructionist position, queer pedagogy does not allow the definition of 'normal' people or situations to which the rest should be able to aspire or imitate. In this sense, Britzman's work revolves around the concept of normality, and the theories and praxes that can deconstruct it. From queer theory, psychoanalysis and pedagogy, a proposal for a 'transgressive' pedagogy emerges. It aims to break with the idea of the 'other' as a suspicious, dangerous, frightening, infectious and worrying subject, constantly threatening the rest of the population. There is no 'pedagogic instruction manual'. It is necessary to base this entirely on hermeneutics, on the interpretation of the discursiveness. Using language, this discursiveness constructs and deconstructs the line that separates normality from abnormality.

Binary Position in Educational Practices

The binary position between the normal and the abnormal needs to be deconstructed. However, this is not done through the reconditioning of the subjects placed in the 'abnormal' category, but through what Robyn Wiegman proposes: 'the exploration of a new political imagination within which diverse alliances can be forged - between people who do not reproduce themselves, the gender eccentrics, the bisexuals, the gays and lesbians, the non-monogamous – alliances that can begin and innovate the forms of social and intellectual discipline of the academy.' (2002, p. 177)

Queer theory moves away from victimisation and normalisation. As has already been said, despite it appearing paradoxical, winning rights is not the main concern. Rights are, by definition, heteronormative. The main concern is the elimination of the discourses that maintain certain power relations. The desire for normality vigorously rejects subjective particularity itself and reinforces a submissive position. The destruction of certain categories (fundamentally those of identity) and all the practices that go with them (associationism, identity groups, etc.) brings with it a series of risks that should be taken into account. The queer proposal distorts the concept of identity in such a way as to endanger the struggle of the gay and lesbian movement. It questions the homosexual collective itself in a way that takes strength away from the political struggle. Essentially, it calls the political usefulness of sexual identities into question.

It is possible to say that being queer does not require attachment to any label. Queer behaviour confuses the concepts of sex/gender and identity. In fact, under the queer gaze, identities are left completely unhinged: they are fluid and changing. They become kind of 'non-identities'. The queer proposal is dedicated to continuously deconstructing the traps laid by identity. In this sense, provocative identities work to interrupt the discourses that limit human beings.

Political Bodies

Nevertheless, identities have their usefulness: embodying a political struggle with the aim of achieving legitimate rights. However, this activist logic must come into conflict, as we already said, with one of the central aims of queer theory: that of dissolving identity categories. The argument is that sexual identities are historical and social products, and that fixing these identities is fundamentally linked to social control. For Butler, therefore, politics should be based on provisional coalitions that are not based on an identity assumption:

> 'Without the presupposition or the aim of "unity" (…) provisional unities can emerge in the context of specific actions, the purpose of which is not the creation of identity. Without the obligatory perspective that feminist actions should be based on a stable, unified and agreed identity, these provisional unities could form faster and seem more acceptable to some "women" for whom the meaning of the category is always in dispute. (Butler, 1990)'.

The man/woman binomial and obligatory heterosexuality exclude other possibilities and, by definition, deny the constructed nature of sexuality itself. The world, and with it, the institutions, are constructed according to this logic. In this way, the rules, definitions and social organisations are based on this supposed binary. As Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner remind us, 'Heterosexuality implies so many non-sexual practices, that a world in which this collection of hegemonic norms is not dominant is currently unimaginable.' (Berlant & Warner, 1989). We can say that the queer position questions most educational and social resources imposed under this heterosexist logic. To be included or excluded, to be educated or illiterate, to be normal or abnormal: all these dichotomies lose their power under the queer gaze. Fundamentally, they represent repressive situations. In this way, the idea of education itself is a product of that control which perpetuates situations of oppression under fixed categories. In which case, is an idea of institution and education possible using queer parameters?

In our reality, it is about being something, but being something that adjusts itself to the established categories means *being inside* or *being outside*. Queer politics is not only opposed to the idea of normality, but to the very concept of normal behaviour. Queer subjects do not want to be normal, and they do not want to be *inside*. The dynamic of 'or this, or that', the idea that 'you are gay or you are heterosexual' is yet another question linked to the heteronormative nature of institutions. Identities are fluid and changing, categories are social and historical. Kate Bornstein reminds us: 'Do we, perhaps, distinguish a man from a woman by their anatomy?' (Bornstein, 1995).

Nevertheless, the acceptance of homosexuality is not what concerns us, nor does it interest the queer discourse. Instead, we are concerned with the deconstruction of the hetero/homo code and its relationship to the reconstruction of the normal/abnormal code. The central and transcendental question would be to ask ourselves: Why does this choice of *aim* create such anxiety? For Butler (1997), the response lies in that it is precisely in the rejection of homosexuality that the possibility of making the subject intelligible is found. The fear of not existing underlies homophobia. Based on a psychoanalytical and Althusserian reformulation of the Foucauldian concept of subjection ('*assujetissement*'), Butler demonstrated how, on feeling ourselves questioned by gender categories (categories that are strongly outlined by obligatory heterosexuality) and in responding to this questioning (turning around when the Law calls, as Louis Althusser mentions, 1976) we move towards a founding moment in the creation of subjectivity. It is in this sense that the rejection of homosexuality relates to the fear of not existing; nevertheless, as we have already mentioned, and as Butler herself recognises in an earlier work (1993), there are other exclusions that allow the subject to be understood. Extrapolating from Butler's conclusions to other dimensions fundamental to the construction of the body and of subjectivity, such as race and disability, as Jacques Derrida proposes, it is in radical otherness, in that which we find socially aberrant, that the fear of not existing is produced: 'The being and the other are seen as totally external, totally separated, totally other. And when subjects position themselves in the absolute exterior, phobias are born.' (Morris, 2000).

The Body as an Element of Confluence between Queer Pedagogy and Technoscience

We have seen how pedagogy can be understood as a techno-scientific practice, which produces and regulates subjectivities. We have also seen

the different characteristics and elements that make up the essence, discourses and praxes of queer pedagogy. In this relationship between pedagogy, technology and power, the body has become a central theme, and we believe it is necessary to ask ourselves: what brings pedagogy of this sort to base its discourse on corporeity?

As we have deciphered it, the body has been an object of submission, imposition, domestication, quashing, denial, humiliation, ignorance, politicisation, pedagogisation, etc. As we have already commented, the body also emerges as the focus for the exclusion that makes intelligibility possible. It therefore seems logical to start with a pedagogy that understands this role of the body in subjectivities and which is aware of the subject's bodily experiences. The bodies of 'normalised' subjects can easily become 'cannon fodder'; their flesh is used as 'bait' for the rest of the society. Without the existence of the rejected body, there is no possibility for an accepted and meaningful body. However, technology explores new understandings of the bodily concepts that transgress the normal-abnormal binomial and offer new possibilities and meanings to the topic of the body. In tune with this reassignation of meaning to the body in pedagogy, we offer a range of different visions of the body in pedagogy and the ways in which queer can bring a disruptive and transgressive vision to the construction of a diversity of 'bodies that matter'.

Bodies in Technology

The relationship between body and technology is fundamental, given that ICT-based prosthetics, fundamental to fields, such as medical practice and disability call the intelligibility and limits of the body into question. Beyond this approach, and following the proposals made by Haraway (1997), we argue that the new ICTs have formed part of biotechnologies of bodily production and reproduction. Furthermore, we argue that technology can function as a bio-political inclusion and social domestication device within pre-existing normalising categories. However, it can also be a disruptive element in this orthodox construction of bodily normality (Ihde, 2002).

In the relationship between technology, body and (ab)normality, the concept of prosthetics has historically been fundamentally important. We understand this, in the sense given by Beatriz Preciado (2002), as a tool or basic apparatus in the relationships established between body and machine. We argue that these relationships form part of a bio-power that

disciplines docile bodies into the service of the *status quo* at the same time as forging new material natures and spaces for resistance.

ICTs can therefore function as powerful bio-political tools for social inclusion and domestication. The non-standard body is normalised and integrated into a normative order through prosthetics based on ICTs. Thus, we show how in situations of bodily vulnerability, such as disability or acute or chronic illness, the relationship between ICTs and bodily normalisation is clear. In a society of producers (Bauman, 1998), extension prostheses that alleviated the vulnerability of an unproductive or disabled body were a common occurrence. In the information-and knowledge-based society (Berardi, 2003), prostheses are based on the processing of information about the vulnerable body. The screen reader for the visually impaired or the transmission of diagnostic images in medicine, which establish a new geometry of the body and a renaissance of clinical medicine in the sense given by Michel Foucault (1963) provide some examples of this. At the same time, the questioning by technology of the body's limits also enables strategies of resistance and subversion of normalisation in the dynamic of bodily production generated by biotechnologies. In some ways, prostheses can result in proposals for the appropriation of repudiation, converting rejection into attraction, strangeness into the possibility of seduction and ambiguity into a new form of eroticism.

The Contributions of Queer Pedagogy

Starting from these new concepts of the relationship between technology, biology and the body, we ask ourselves, how has pedagogy been related to the body, the sexual, the normal and the abnormal? Moreover, what contributions can a queer pedagogy of subversion and resistance make? This points us to different pedagogic discourses, which we look at in more detail below:

a) A first line of discourse comes from the pedagogues, teachers and youth workers who have experienced situations of oppression in their own bodies. Their own experiences are the principal fount of knowledge that allows them to kick-start the production of a queer discourse. A significant number form part of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Queer, Transsexual and Intersex collectives, as can be deduced from Kevin Jennings (1994), when he found that approximately 10% of the faculty studied (Boston) were lesbian or gay, and the work of Madiha Didi Khayatt (1992)

on the invisible presence of homosexual teachers in the classrooms of education centers in the United States. However, it does not only relate to educators linked to queer positions, but also to people who may have suffered oppression due to their skin colour, or for being a woman, speaking another language, thinking differently, having a disability, etc. A sector of the queer pedagogues is made up of people who are 'different' and who openly exercise that difference.

b) A second line is part of the hypothesis that abnormalised subjects have become hyper-embodied subjects (or, if you like, 'hyperbodies'). The body has taken on an unbridled relevance and the subject has been 'objectified' and is now, above all, a body. As Marcel Hénaff shows us: 'libertine torture advances the logic of anatomic/surgical reduction of the body, postulated by science, and takes it to the extreme' (Hénaff, 1980, p. 29). It is through the different forms of knowledge (among which we find pedagogy) that the subject becomes nothing more than a body, annulling his or her personality, history and identity. This would include intersexual bodies, some of which have suffered the aggression and violence of normalisation in their flesh. Intersexuality calls the binary situation of man/woman into question. However, the techno-scientific, heteronormative matrix, with its devices of medical power, is responsible for restoring and maintaining those criteria of normality. In this sense, if one does not fit inside the man/woman dichotomy, one is made to fit by force.

Thus, through drastic surgical measures, one is assigned a sex. We are facing systems of surgical removal of those clitorises that are not of the size considered standard. This means that, due to questions of technical difficulty, the majority of sexual assignations end up being feminine. They produce sexed bodies and subjects who are normatively genderised through violent acts. Intersexuality, by definition, short-circuits the heteronormative systems of sex, gender and sexuality. This is why it generates a more than noticeable discomfort among those subjects who subscribe to the rules. Intersexuality or hermaphroditism is conceived as a situation of disorder, of a false, or sexually abnormal nature. In essence, the desire to eliminate this situation of ambiguity is linked to a sexist education and the heteronormative weight of constituting

reduced to a physical body, we should consider a pedagogy that recovers its symbolic dimension.

c) The third line understands the body as a space/territory of subjective resistance. We have seen how technology builds devices that violently mutilate bodies in order to fit them into the normative categories, but also questions the limitations placed on the vulnerable or disabled body. The body in its relationship with technology presents a double perspective: space of imposition of power and space of resistance. From the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Queer, Transsexual and Intersex collectives, to many other groups that propose reclaiming bodies as spaces of subjective involvement, there is a call to speak about *resistance*. Peter McLaren has studied the resistance of the body in terms of pedagogy and he bases his view on the idea that 'it is important to understand resistance to the dominant modalities of subjectivity, production and desire, especially if that resistance is somatically connected with the shaping of will and the construction of meaning' (1994). The option is one of understanding ourselves not as simple products, but as producers of subjectivity, and this action necessarily passes through rethinking and revising the space occupied by our bodies in social spaces. The body comes to be understood as a space of struggle (we define ourselves, bodily, by being different from the rest), of conflict (the other does not always appreciate our bodies, our bodies can produce many different reactions in others) and of contradictions (we are not made up of monolithic bodies, but can be interpreted from many different perspective). For McLaren, the task of pedagogy in relation to bodily resistance is to increase our self-awareness, to remove distortion, to discover forms of subjectivity that are consistent with the capitalist body/subject and that assist the subject in his or her historic recreation (1994). The bodies that resist try to find meaning beyond the politics of bodily normalisation and they do this by breaking the structures and binary discourses.

Conclusions: On the Peculiarity of a Pedagogic Proposal and its Ways of De-educating

Queer ideas are positions that go beyond heteronormativity and normality as elements of pedagogic stability. This supposed stability is made up of

regulatory declarations that are not made the objects of reflection. In this sense, education maintains a certain attraction to pure truth and stable identities, repeatedly ignoring the contradictions. Outlining a transgressive pedagogy based on technoscience, concerned with its productive nature and with avoiding normality, allows the construction of alternative zones of identification and criticism necessary in order to recognise the dominant structures and to create new desires (Britzman, 1998).

Queer pedagogy distances itself from integration; that is to say, it is a long way from the inclusion of marginalised groups in educational programmes. This type of focus has been fundamentally based on offering information and a change of attitude. For the hegemonic group, the general idea has been to work to promote a certain tolerance of difference, and, for the excluded group, it has been to work to promote their own self-esteem. However, as Britzman points out, the cover up has been: *to what extent can people be different, and at the same time be perceived as normal?* In fact, this question demonstrates the perversion of the integrationist currents. Essentially, the effects of inclusion are a more obstinate version of uniformity and a more amenable version of otherness (Britzman, 1998).

Queer theory assumes a triadic presumption of sexual identities, a break with the dichotomous modernist notion of exclusion and otherness: a mental and topographic change that places us in a different arena. In this way, 'the important differences' acquire more force, in the sense mentioned by Butler (1993). Queer pedagogy, as a techno-scientific practice, can construct itself based on differences and these are in a constant process of invention, tirelessly emerging, constructing and reconstructing bodies.

The readings of sexualities have, to date, followed this dichotomous approach. Thus we find what we can call model A, heterosexist, based on the patriarchal system, structured according to the classic model of the family, misogynist and phallocentric. The model B, despite attempting to create new openings, is a negative copy of model A. Sexuality continues to be constructed using the same parameters. Homosexuality is nothing more than the opposite of heterosexuality, maintaining the same heterosexist matrix. Apart from this apparent relationship of opposition and symmetry between A and B, in fact, they subsist in a dynamic in which model B is subordinated to model A. On the other hand, the meaning of model A depends on model B. So, the latter is made internal as well as external to the former, structuring itself in a relationship of mutual subjugation (Sedgwick, 1990). These relationships should therefore be understood as unstable and dependent. Model C, or queer, represents

liberation from the binary prison that can lead to a state of infinite expansion. It deals with migratory sexualities, in constant construction, permeable and fluid. This third concept nourishes pedagogy, reconsidering spheres and institutions that are fundamental to education.

From model A, corrective pedagogies have played a leading role with a recurrent insistence on normalising the abnormal. From model B, the informative pedagogies have failed, because knowledge of the facts does not provide any access to reality or truth. This discourse aims to construct compassion and tolerance as the correct subjective position. However, in reality, it ends up reinforcing the binarism of 'them and us'. Alternatively, a queer pedagogy based on model C should explore the different ways in which the experiences of 'different' people are imagined; examine the rules of everyday life, and come back to thinking of this everyday life as providing the basis for surprise and for new forms of ignorance (Britzman, 1998).

As we commented at the beginning of this article, normalising judgements are a constant in pedagogy. Its subjectivation devices sometimes reveal comparisons based on individual actions that are cited as a reference that we should follow. This reference, beginnings of a rule to follow, constitutes the educational act. That is to say, reference to the rules is a common characteristic of pedagogy. The subjects are invited to follow a given rule, which is quoted, announced and repeated incessantly. Nevertheless, a queer pedagogy should not include any sexual examples, or any rules to follow, because the mere existence of a comparative reference point leads to the exclusion of legitimate bodies and practices.

Exclusion represents the dark side of normalisation, the definition of the pathological. Exclusion defines difference, borders and zones. As we have already commented, the techniques of exclusion are constant in pedagogy; individuals, identities, practices and ways of constructing knowledge are all excluded. What reference should guide pedagogy? A pedagogy that does not set limits, that does not normalise or pathologise, is almost unthinkable. However, once we get out of these perverse discourses, we find the possibility of giving all the credit to self-representations of sexual difference. Denying or alienating anyone's authority to describe or name their own sexual desires is an act with terrible consequences (Sedgwick, 1990). 'Can pedagogy recognise the impossibility of thinking about normality and the way in which normality is established time and time again?' (Britzman, 1998, p. 62). It seems there is a limitation to technocratic or critical pedagogic practices to overcoming the exclusion in their discourses. Does the task of educating limit the very possibilities for intervention? Alternatively,

perhaps it is a question of redefining or reconfiguring the very notion of education, as a techno-scientific practice that forms part of the production of open, fluid and transgressive subjectivities.

Homosexuals, the mad, the poor, drug addicts, the disabled and immigrants have all circulated, throughout history: labels that are negative and all-encompassing. It is a question of entities with shared origins. The pathologisation of their behaviour and the radicalisation of their bodies as absolutely alien to humanity: as bodies that do not matter.

This pedagogic discourse is precisely about peculiarity: 'we are strange, here we are'; about surprise, foreigners in their own lands, émigrés from sexuality itself; disturbing differences, silences, appropriations; marginalities and otherness. However, above all, it is about educations, about the de-educating possibility of subjects, of dynamics that de-identify, of constructing another education, or in any case, of definitively forgetting the pedagogising function, that has, to date, been linked to a normalising authority and a dynamic based on binarisms, some of which (nature/culture) are difficult to divorce from the more genocidal networks of thought in relation to different subjects.

To summarise, queer pedagogy allows a re-reading of education. New techno-scientific practices, as well as new queer forms, offer the possibility to epistemologically find a new pedagogy; a pedagogy that we could call *peculiar*, the function of which is de-education, if we understand education in the classic, disciplinarian sense of the term.

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The emergence of a transgender community in Manipur

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Article

The Emergence of a Transgender Community in Manipur: The Case of the *Nupi Maanbis*

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Abstract

Transgender subjects in Manipuri society have experienced cultural legitimacy as well as prejudice and therefore have had an ambiguous status from early to modern times. From their early prototypes, *pheitas*, to their modern counterparts, *nupi sabis*, transgender subjects have played vital roles in the administrative, cultural and artistic life of Manipuri society. Legitimacy as well as stigma marked their participation in social and economic life. This article traces the emergence of the *nupi maanbi* community, a community of man-to-woman transgender subjects and argues that the current *nupi maanbi* identity, embedded in this distinct community, is firmly located in the economic niche that the subjects inhabit as professionals in the increasingly popular fashion and beauty parlours in contemporary Manipur.

Keywords

Pheitas, *nupi sabi*, *nupi maanbi*, transgender, identity, Manipur

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Introduction

The term *nupi maanbi* is a combination of two words – *nupi* and *maanbi*. According to *Manipuri to Manipuri and English Dictionary* (2004), *nupi* means female, lady, woman and also means 'wife'; *manba* from which *maanbi* is derived means 'similar'. Therefore, *nupi maanbi* etymologically means 'resemblance to a woman'. The article deals exclusively with man-to-woman transgender persons or nupi maanbis in Manipur, a state located in North East India. Though transgender subjects have been a part of Manipuri society for centuries, *nupi maanbi* subjects came into prominence as a distinct social group only by the beginning of the 21st century. Even the term *nupi maanbi* is a relatively new one that has become popular only in the last five to six years. Prior to this, across all sections of Manipuri society, man-to-woman transgender persons were widely called 'homo' or *nupi sabi*, which is a combination of two words, *nupi* meaning woman/female and *sabi* meaning to mould, to make, to imitate.[1] While 'homo'[2] is considered a pejorative term conveying insult and mockery, *nupi sabi* is considered an innocuous way of referring to such transgender persons. Both terms continue to be extensively used by Manipuris despite the fact that the *nupi maanbi* community considers them to be incorrect and offensive.

This article attempts to trace the emergence of the *nupi maanbi* community in contemporary Manipur. I begin by looking at various contexts in which transgender subjects have existed in Manipur. Beginning with evidence from early and medieval Manipur,[3] I consider the existence of the subjects in modern Manipur bearing the identities of *nupi sabis* and 'homo'. Both identities have subsequently been challenged by the emergence of the *nupi maanbi* community. I look at the emergence of the *nupi maanbi* community in Manipur by the turn of the 21st century as a response to the existing discourses on transgender subjects, notably the medical discourse of AIDS. Nupi maanbis are concentrated in increasingly popular *nupi maanbi* beauty parlours which have proliferated recently and are both social and economic units for those working in them. I also consider here the relationship of *nupi maanbi* subjects with their natal families, as well as the contemporary concept of an 'acceptable' and 'normative' *nupi maanbi* individual who can co-exist in harmony with family and society. Fieldwork was carried out in Imphal East and Imphal West districts from early 2012 to mid-2014.

Prototypical Transgender Persons in Early Manipur

In this section, I will provide a brief sketch of prototypical transgender subjects in the past to situate transgender identity in traditional Manipuri society. If we look into some of the traditional texts written on the roles of the various administrative departments of Kangla, the ancient capital fort of the Meitei kings, such as *Mashil*, *Shung Panabgi Mashil*, *Loiyamba Shilyen*, and other texts which are historical in nature like *The Court Chronicle of the Kings of Manipur: Cheitharon Kumpapa*,[4] it is amply suggested that during the times of early and medieval kings, prototypical transgender subjects were a part of the administration of Kangla. A department of Kangla called *Pheita Loisang*[5] employed a group of individuals called *pheitas*, who were prototypical transgender subjects. Modern dictionaries like Singh's *Manipuri to Manipuri and English Dictionary* (2004) and *Ariba Manipurigi Longei* (2012) define *pheita variously* as 'eunuch', '*napunshak*' (a Sanskrit term meaning eunuch), '*nupa nupi marak*' meaning in-between man and woman, and '*loisang amagi ming amashung aduda kaba mee'*, indicating both the name of an office and those who hold the office. The different meanings broadly refer to *pheita* as individuals embodying inflections of eunuch identity in the context of traditional Manipuri society. However, *pheita* is a referent that attracts many other gender and sexual identities and attributes, such as transgender, hermaphrodite, men and women who cannot establish sexual relationship (with members of the opposite sex) (Chandrasekhar, 1997). However, there is no suggestion that *pheitas* mentioned in these sources also include biological females. Hence, my discussion of *pheitas* pertains only to those subjects born male. Whether the term *pheita* was derived from the sex or gender identity of these individuals or from the name of the *loisang* (department) is not clearly mentioned in the sources. It is important to note that *pheitas* mentioned in the sources are those employed in the affairs of Kangla, and hence one does not have adequate information about *pheitas* who played no role in the administration of the kingdom. Another important limitation of the sources is that they exclusively deal with the administrative roles of *pheitas*, and there is little mention in these sources of their sexuality, gender identity, family and social life. Hence, it is difficult to get a complete picture of the *pheitas* from these sources.

The location of the pheitas in Kangla bestowed upon them a powerful role in the administration of the Meitei kingdom. Kangla, a closely

guarded space, was not only an administrative site but also a symbol of sacredness and the political ascendency of the Meitei civilization (Singh, 2009). *Pheitas* had access to intimate spaces of Kangla, such as the royal ladies' quarters and the king's nocturnal chamber. Moreover, they were the guards who closely attended the king during his daily personal routine when bathing, being groomed, having his hair cut and so on. They also undertook many quotidian tasks that were inextricably bound to issues of safety and security of the royal figures. The pheitas had a high status, power and privilege in the social and cultural life of Meitei society. They were not scattered and marginalized subjects but a community of workers integral to the safety and smooth running of the royal palace and household. It is intriguing to ask if this grouping was based on gender identity. In this context *Loiyamba Shilyen* provides a crucial insight into the gender identity of *pheitas*: 'like insects that keep their sting hidden by biting [it] inside the mouth, *pheitas* perform all duties towards the king' (Chandrasekhar 1975, p. 35). The metaphors of obedience and harmlessness emphasize the pheitas' temperament of submissiveness. Further the same text asserts, 'No man can enter the interior (of a certain quarter) of the palace. This says that *pheitas* are women' (Chandrasekhar, 1975, p. 35). The conjugation of submissiveness, indicated by the *pheitas'* obedience to the king and their free and trusted access to the interior spaces of Kangla, identifies the *pheitas* with the traditional domain of the feminine gender. It can be said that the location of *pheitas* in the sacred sphere of Kangla establishes the cultural legitimacy of prototypical transgender persons in the past. In this scenario, it is not likely that the subjects experienced any kind of social discrimination.

Notwithstanding such a powerful tradition of cultural legitimacy in the past, *pheitas* are no longer an active means of understanding gender in the present. Also, one might say that the term *pheita* is no longer in usage among the multitude. How and why *pheitas* disappeared from common knowledge is not conclusively established in studies so far. Future research in this field has to be galvanized with adequate historical acumen in order to establish perspectives on the disappearance of *pheitas* from popular memory and contemporary traditions.[6]

This brief review shows that transgender subjects are not the novelty they are in contemporary times. They were well known in a powerful legitimate tradition in the past. From here, I will make a huge leap to the modern period where we find the rest of the evidence regarding transgender persons in Manipur.

Phenomenon of Transgender Subjects in Modern Manipur

In modern Manipuri society, expressions and phrases referring to the transgendered identity have found a certain degree of legitimacy and acceptance. In this scenario, male transvestite artists of Manipuri Shumang Leela, one of the most cherished performative arts in Manipur, called *nupi sabis*, are important figures in the social history of transgender subjects in Manipur. Shumang Leela has been in existence in its rudimentary form since the time of king Chandrakirti (1850 CE–1886 CE). Shumang Leela is of two types: all-men Shumang Leela and all-women Shumang Leela. The all-women Shumang Leela emerged in the later half of the 20th century, and its male impersonators were called by a different name, namely, *nupa saba*. Nupi sabis are patronized by Manipuris and are held in high esteem as erudite artists in Manipuri art and culture (Sashikumar, 2009). There is no stigma and sense of 'deviance' attached to the person of a nupi sabi artist whose gender transgression is legitimately confined to the temporal and spatial stage of Shumang Leela and the basic qualification of a nupi sabi artist is the ability to act on stage, in the mimetic guise of a woman. Hence, a male born artist, whether 'he' is a homosexual or a transgender 'woman' or a cis man can become a *nupi sabi* artist.

In theory, nupi sabi artists as transvestite artists are not seen as transgressing actual gender/sexual boundaries but are widely perceived now by Manipuris as crossing conventional gender boundaries even beyond the performative space for, interestingly, many of the nupi sabi artists in the past and the present are known to have been and to be from the transgender community. Such individuals might find legitimacy in their stature as an artist, in addition to finding fulfilment in the very act of gender transgression at three important levels – sexuality, accoutrements of gender, and audience appreciation. It is also important to note that one cannot extend the gender queerness of nupi sabi impersonators to the other male actors who play the male roles, although many of these actors, who are seen usually as heterosexual men, are known to be engaged in homosexual relationships with some of their fellow nupi sabi artists. It is widely believed by viewers that there is a surreptitious sexual relationship, exploitative or consensual, between male actors and *nupi sabis* artists of various Leela troupes It should also be noted that the widely dispersed queer community in Manipur comprises diverse identities—transgender men, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, etc. The nupi maanbi community, however, is the most visible among these identities.

As suggested earlier, *nupi sabi* artists who are also transgender persons in real life establish an important connection between gender identity, sexuality, and the act of spectatorship. In other words, a few *nupi sabi* artists can establish a homosexual identification with a certain section of the male audience who direct an erotic gaze towards *nupi sabi* artists' 'enticing' femininity. In this context, a 62-year-old-man said, 'Once a *nupi sabi* winked at me, during a performance. He was giving me a signal that he was available.' Overall, it transpires that many transgender subjects who have talent and prowess in acting are capable of establishing their legitimacy within the cautious walls of Shumang Leela.

In the second half of the 20th century and early years of the 21st century, transgender subjects were referred to as *nupi sabis* (even outside the context of Shumang Leela), and the term has provided a framework for the articulation of an identity to transgender persons. In these circumstances, transgender subjects appropriated the term *nupi sabi* as a desirable alternative to 'homo'. Shumang Leela provides a space for queer fulfilment by making possible a legitimate identification with a queer identity. Nevertheless, apart from the parallel that exists between some *nupi sabi* artists (in the context of Shumang Leela) and transgender subjects, it will be erroneous to identify *nupi sabis* with transgender persons in the wider continuum of gender identity.

In recent years, transgender subjects gradually started resenting the term *nupi sabi* as it conveys a sense of imitation and inauthenticity of identity; it is useful to reiterate that *nupi sabi* etymologically means 'imitating woman(liness)'. Transgender subjects are desirous of asserting an identity that goes beyond the temporal and spatial parameters of Shumang Leela. In this sense, *nupi maanbi* identity suggests a gender subjectivity that defines a person's sense of the self, 'inner feelings' and 'inner identification with femininity', which comprise the current preoccupation of transgender movements. It takes into account 'innate femininity' and the right to live it, the two concerns which are not within the purview of the highly aestheticized realm of theatrical impersonation. It follows that any casual attempt to identify nupi sabis with transgender subjects needs to be problematized while acknowledging that nupi sabis have an identity-defining association with *nupi maanbis*.

A nupi maanbi has a politicized, historicized identity as its prototype has been in existence for a long time. Having located transgender subjects along the spectrum of identity politics, we need to look at the emergence of a distinct community space for nupi maanbis in Manipur today. This is a necessary exercise since the location of identity is followed and strengthened by a strong sense of community. The discourse surrounding

the laws applicable to transgender subjects in India including Manipur has facilitated the emergence of this community.

Emergence of the *Nupi Maanbi* Community in Contemporary Manipur

Many factors and events mark the emergence of a nupi maanbi community alongside the sealing of a *nupi maanbi* identity in Manipur—the medical attention given to HIV/AIDS in the 1990s, the formation of various community based organizations *for* nupi maanbis, such as Maruploi Foundation, Nupi Sabisingee Tenbang Lup and notably All Manipur Nupi Maanbi Association, the backlash against AIDS research to self-sustaining economic enterprises that individual nupi maanbis established to improve their 'socio-economically backward' situation, the movements for the inclusion of nupi maanbis in various social arenas and legislation concerning transgender subjects in India

In the 1970s, the visibility of queer subjects was limited to urban cohorts in a few sites of Imphal City like Polo Ground and the vicinity of Paona Bazar. Oral accounts provided by a few contemporaries of nupi maanbis of earlier days testified that some nupi maanbis living in urban areas had left their native villages, and even mentioned that they led a 'joyful' life in the open atmosphere of urban centres. A man in his late 60s said, 'The moral atmosphere of the rural areas will not allow them to be free. They wanted to be liberated in the anonymous city crowd'. It should be noted that there are many transgender subjects whose lives have not been fully accounted for in the sources I have traced in my fieldwork. Rural areas are significantly missing from the narratives I have studied. It is more than probable that the orthodoxy and more communal lifestyle of the rural areas, where families are known to each other, work against the unconventional life choices of transgender persons. Not surprisingly, an 82-year-old man (who is known to his neighbours as a nupi maanbi in his youth) confirmed this, 'The rural atmosphere did not suit those people (nupi maanbis). They have a different lifestyle that would not be allowed in rural areas'.

During the 1970s, transgender subjects were mostly called 'homos' and nupi sabis. Some of these queer subjects, who were married, were known to have male (non-nupi maanbis) partners. Male informants who socialized with them in the 1970s often said that nupi maanbis of those days wore makeup and feminine clothing to attract men, 'The Paona

Bazar area was infested with nupi sabis (nupi maanbis) looking for their prey', said a 69-year-old man. They were also called amorous and licentious, and seen as attracting men's attention for sexual activities. Moreover, those who were observant of the subjects inadvertently or consciously associated nupi maanbis' open expression of erotic desire with prostitution. Association with prostitution and luring of men into erotic relationships were attributed mainly to nupi maanbis inhabiting urban zones like Awang BOC (present day North AOC, an urban area notorious for drugs and sex work). Nupi maanbis in such sites were known to the male informants I met during my fieldwork who said nupi maanbis were more interested in men than money. In this sense, sex work among nupi maanbis was not considered as much an economic imperative as it was a 'pleasure seeking' activity and an expression of 'desire for men'. In fieldwork I came across nupi maanbis who made references to the search for sex per se, not as work. A young nupi maanbi in her 20s, referring to another nupi maanbi, said, 'She wears a lot of makeup and hangs out at Andro Parking [an urban zone in Imphal East district] to find men'. The extent of sex work among nupi maanbis at present is not within the scope of the present research, mainly owing to the methodological challenges and sensitive nature of the topic. (Nevertheless, *nupi maanbis'* association with sex work during the 1970s and beyond demands an extensive study.) In the imagination of many, nupi maanbis of those days were associated with a 'sordid lifestyle' associated with urban centres. Even at present Manipuris see *nupi maanbis* as spending money as a way to bait men into sexual and emotional companionship. This is a different scenario from sex work among hijras as a significant source of earning income (Nanda, 1999).

The generation of *nupi maanbis* which came of age in the late 1980s and the 1990s showed different patterns of relationships with city space and natal families. Many of them lived with their natal families alongside the near impossibility of socializing with other nupi maanbis. They hid their secret lives from their families as they did not want to face familial rejection, if discovered associating with them. As a 42-year-old *nupi maanbi* said, 'There was no possibility of openly embracing nupi maanbi ways – no makeup and no open friendship with other *nupi maanbis'*. In fact they could not openly acknowledge each other in public, 'During those years, we were afraid to greet each other in broad daylight, we just exchanged familiar glances', said a 39-year-old nupi maanbi. They had clandestine meetings in urban places such as Aloo Galli and Kangla Park, after dark. Many nupi maanbis of this period might have entered into heterosexual married life and started living a more 'normal' life, their

transgender identity got hidden from the public view. Gradually, since the 1990s, nupi maanbis progressed from their inability to recognize each other in broad daylight in public to moving about in small groups in markets and other public areas. Even without coming out into the open as a community, nupi maanbis who were widely scattered recognized each other and sought out others like themselves to meet secretly, spend time with and share their sense of discrimination. The bolder ones followed their 'own instincts', wore make up, dressed up (as women) and went to public eating places together, scandalizing members of the public.

In the late 1990s, HIV/AIDS was found to be spreading widely among male couples of whom nupi maanbis formed a significant population. With the onset of HIV/AIDS, and advocacy among the *nupi maanbi* sub-population, various governmental and non-governmental stakeholders combating the disease started categorizing nupi manbis as 'men having sex with men' (MSM), and placed them in the High Risk Group. Prior to the development of AIDS research, *nupi maanbis*' existence at the margin of society was largely invisible; in this connection a 32-year-old woman, an employee of a non-governmental organization (NGO) working for the prevention of HIV/AIDS among MSMs said, 'Initially it was extremely difficult to meet nupi maanbis to collect data. One of our senior workers had to disguise himself as a nupi maanbi to meet other nupi maanbis, who were mostly hidden at that time'. Marginalization and prejudice had discouraged them from declaring themselves and coming into public view. But medical scrutiny of groups at risk of AIDS led to their recognition as a distinct social group and finally to the organization of scattered and hidden members of the transgender population. Unfortunately, as a result, nupi maanbis have been linked to the spread of HIV/AIDS in the perception of the public. Also, their inclusion in the category of MSM had far reaching consequences for them in subsequent years.

The younger generation of transgender subjects reacts sharply against the continuing inspection of nupi maanbis only through the lens of HIV/AIDS. They continually express their disillusionment with non-governmental stakeholders that mostly concentrate on HIV/AIDS at the cost of overlooking their special socio-economic problems. 'They (non-governmental stakeholders) promise a lot but our backwardness remains', said a 21-year-old nupi maanbi. The attention given by both the medical fraternity and NGOs to their sex lives was a source of great irritation. Commenting on this, a 37-year-old nupi maanbi said, 'They (HIV/AIDS researchers) asked me about the number of sexual partners I had. I was annoyed'.

The emergence of the nupi maanbis as a community has been accompanied by the flow of national and international funds to help the community based organizations run by the nupi maanbis themselves. Although many of them question the effectiveness of these organizations intended to work for the collective good of their community, the existence of these organizations helps to raise the awareness of the need to establish their civil rights. The All Manipur Nupi Maanbi Association for example has been voicing the concerns of transgender subjects in Manipur today. Many nupi maanbis feel that despite formal recognition of themselves as a community, their needs have not been adequately addressed, especially their socio-economic plight. It is in this context that the emergence of beauty parlours run by *nupi maanbis* in contemporary Manipur acquires a special significance.

Rise of *Nupi Maanbi* Beauty Parlours in Manipur

Most *nupi maanbis* often cite their low educational attainment as the chief cause of their general backwardness. In the words of a 22-year old *nupi maanbi*, 'Education and schooling are very important, but unfortunately our community significantly suffers from lack of education. This is the reason why we don't see *nupi maanbis* in higher sectors of employment'. Poverty, lack of sympathy for them in schools, and their own lack of interest in studies are cited by many *nupi maanbis* as the main causes of their failure to obtain an education. It can be reiterated that poverty is one of the main reasons why many young nupi maanbis are deprived of the opportunity to continue their education; as a 25-year-old nupi maanbi said, 'I couldn't complete my high school degree, I did not have money to fill the examination form'.[7] It is quite clear that entry into many fields is limited by their low levels of education, and thus their choices are limited not to mention non-availability of jobs due to widespread societal prejudice against them.

One sector which they have been able to enter and prosper in is the beauty business which is informal and does not demand high educational levels. While getting a job in the governmental sector or in any other equivalent sector requires educational/vocational qualifications, a job in a parlour does not require a formal degree or a school education up to any particular level. Training in beauty culture is possible in the parlour, and, with experience skills to make a living could be perfected. The work is particularly suited to nupi maanbis as they are very interested in the

feminine arts of makeup and beautification. A 22-year-old nupi maanbi said, 'Since we are feminine, we love doing parlour work. Makeup and beauty excite us'. Most nupi maanbis believe this occupation suits their feminine identity. Parlours are a composite space for styling, costume design, makeup, and related skills.

The proliferation of beauty parlours run by nupi maanbis[8] (henceforth parlours) around the early 2000s has gone a long way to raise their economic status. Inversely, the number of such parlours is a vital factor in the visibility of the transgender community. The parlours have significantly contributed to alleviating the community's 'socio-economic backwardness' by providing an economic opportunity in the absence of education and barriers to employment in other fields. Establishing parlours became a movement and many such parlours sprang up in many urban and town centres of Imphal East and Imphal West. Many nupi maanbis who come from economically privileged families are able to establish parlours of their own, while many others are able to pay for their education by working in parlours. Many economically independent *nupi maanbis* in Manipur today are working in these parlours which have since become very popular.

Parlours are not only a stable source of income but a source of support. As parlours are staffed by nupi maanbis they find friendship and sympathy among their colleagues. They bond amongst themselves like a family and, and are freer to articulate the experience of oppression. Besides being a business unit, a parlour is a friendly zone and refuge from familial rejection and violence. As a young nupi maanbi said, 'We are not formal at work. My friends come and [we] work together. I also let a 13-year-old *nupi maanbi* join my parlour. She has nowhere to go, since her family is not kind to her'. But closeness and support do not exclude business rivalries, jealousy and conflicts.

Many *nupi maanbis* believe that parlour work suits their feminine identity. In terms of advancement most of them veer towards the sector of beauty and fashion. A 17-year-old nupi maanbi student said, 'I will complete schooling first. After this I will choose fashion as a stable career'. Those who spend considerable time working in parlours are likely to choose fashion as a future career option, their environment clearly influencing their choices. The association of nupi maanbis with beauty and fashion is underlined by their reputation as stalwarts of fashion. Their increasing presence in film makeup, costume design, fashion events and wedding planning, is proof of their success in their chosen line of work. However, it would be erroneous to identify the nupi maanbis solely with beauty and fashion. They are also visible in other

sectors such as agriculture, weaving, poultry farming, and sometimes in the Shumang Leela. Sometimes, a nupi maanbi may work in a parlour as well as at the loom.

Such a diversity in occupation creates a heterogeneous population of *nupi maanbis*. Differences in class or occupational status create diversity as well as divisions. Many nupi maanbis complain that those who are absorbed in Shumang Leela feel superior to others, 'What if they are artists? We too earn money', said an 18-year-old nupi maanbi. Conflicts and rivalries often surface among nupi maanbis of varied backgrounds.

Bonds of Family Among *Nupi Maanbis*

In this section, rather than reflect on the structure or changing notions of family I look at the experiences of nupi maanbis in their natal families. For the nupi maabi the family is not a 'haven in a heartless world' (Lasch, 1977). One 18-year-old said, 'I love my family but the atmosphere in my family, with my brothers' disapproval of my ways, suffocates me'. Expressing the extreme discomfort in the familial atmosphere a 19-year-old said, 'My father's ire makes it impossible for me to stay at home'. In many cases family turns out to be a foreign territory in which selfhood and a different expression of gender has to be kept caged. Parlours have emerged as spaces of protection, but the family does not become altogether irrelevant. Blood ties and common space shared with parents and siblings continue to be valued.

Prior to the present decade, many *nupi maanbis* who were rejected or opposed by natal families did not have the option of leaving their natal family, since leaving home entailed uncertainty of every kind. Expressing such a difficulty, a 38-year-old *nupi maanbi* said, 'Where else would I go? At least I had a piece of land'. With the expanding number and increasing popularity of beauty parlours, nupi maanbis who experience conflicts in the family start finding affection and support in the space the parlour provides, and above all, compensation for familial protection that they have lost in the process of asserting gender identity. Many left natal families to live in parlours; many of these parlours have living quarters for the nupi maanbi staff. In this domestic space, *nupi maanbis* live together, eat together, and share each other's trials and tribulations of love, familial rejection and social aspirations. Parlours create an intimate space where interpersonal relationships among *nupi maanbis* can flourish; and through friendship and bonding the subjects try to

create a home away from home with others like themselves to form an alternative family unit.[9]

Parlours as a familial zone of love and protection, and as a space which provides all the benefits of living in a community draw our attention to the similarities and differences between nupi maanbis and the hijra community of north India and south India (Nanda, 1999; Reddy, 2005). Hijras live in communal households that are based on strict regulations to be followed by all members, especially the younger ones. The function of hijra households as both residential and economic units (Nanda, 1999) is thus similar to the function of parlours as both economic and social units. However, the interpersonal relationship between the members of parlours and that within hijra households is different. In the former, the relationship between members is not necessarily based on seniority and strict hierarchy. Members can leave the unit at will. Expressing this flexibility, a 42-year-old nupi maanbi said, 'Many nupi maanbis have learnt [work] in my parlours. They have their own parlours now'. However, conflict could arise between senior and younger nupi maanbis. Narrating an instance of conflict, a 23-year-*old nupi maanbi* said, 'My former employer (a *nupi maanbi* beautician) did not want me to leave her parlour. But why would I be obliged to stay there! I have learnt the skill, and now I have my own parlour'. Among hijras, an interpersonal relationship based on the principle of hierarchy exists where gurus control the work of the younger hijras. By virtue of 'ownership' of the household gurus act as the employment agents of the younger hijras as well (Nanda, 1999).

In recent times, rejection or acceptance of nupi maanbis by natal families has become more complicated and less final. Sometimes, the movement away from home is not the end of the journey, and many nupi maanbis go back and are accepted by the same families which rejected them earlier. In many instances acceptance is very complex; in such cases nupi maanbis live in perpetual tension with family members despite sharing the same familial space. Many nupi maanbis living in the intimate space of the parlour also maintain a close relationship with their families. In some cases, where nupi maanbis are accepted by natal families they live in the parental house, while working and sometimes living in parlours. Reflecting on this pattern, a 25-year-old nupi maanbi beautician said, 'My family members advise me to behave well. I do not have any problems with my family now. At the end of the day I go back home, I do not have to always live in a parlour'.

Families make compromises and adjust their moral stances, caught between their authority and powerlessness; this results in a cautious acceptance of the nupi maanbi *in the family.* There are two main reasons for this:

first, a certain level of understanding comes about that ultimately averts conflicts at home: second, the family finally accepts the 'impossibility' of reorienting their 'sons' into 'normal manhood'. However, conflicts may arise once in a while in both cases. It is also important to note that many nupi maanbis are the key income earners of their families, fulfilling their duty by undertaking financial responsibility for their families. Acceptance in these cases is not free from ambiguities. For many nupi maanbis, such cautious acceptance happens after a long struggle with familial rejection and disapproval.

The fact that the natal family continues to be of great importance for *nupi maanbis* brings us to other questions: Has the stigma of gender difference been eroded in the past few years? Has the understanding of the family been transformed into acceptance of what is seen as an aberration? Or have the previously scorned *nupi maanbi* subjects acquired a social identity that is endorsed by society?

Perceptions of *Nupi Maanbi* Identity and Social Values

Many nupi maanbis who find familial acceptance often talk about the importance of the financial security they provide to their families. Their financial independence influences familial disapproval or approval; commenting on this, a 37-year-old nupi maanbi said, 'I make financial contributions to my family. I make compromises, otherwise why would they tolerate me!' Financial autonomy also helps nupi maanbis in establishing a responsible identity through a social role, for example, by working as a beautician. Many nupi maanbis claim that fashion and beauty are their community's contributions to Manipuri society today, and hence they are not 'idle', 'useless' and 'lost'; in fact nupi maanbis are a class of fashion arbiter. Assertion of a social role and financial independence help many nupi maanbis to successfully stall familial pressure to get married. Additionally, their social and economic success in a society where unemployment among the youth is an acute problem, which goes a long way in eliminating the connotations of shame (*ikaigaba)*,[10] but they are not totally exempt from censure. Sometimes, even their financial independence cannot erase traces of shame felt by the family. The relationship between *ikaigaba* and *nupi maanbis*' social success shows the limits of *ikaigaba*, its relevance and irrelevance. One may ask, is there a relationship between 'good morals' and socio-economic independence, and if *ikaigaba* can be

veiled by the latter? Indeed, should a nupi maanbis be considered good if he/she is economically independent? The terms 'good' and 'economically independent' are often conflated because in the common perception of Manipuris, investing in productive work keeps a nupi maanbi away from drugs, sexual promiscuity, and other forms of wasteful activities (*ngaoshanaba* or wantonness). Nupi maanbis and non-nupi maanbis have often said that, 'a good *nupi maanbi* does not engage her time in bad things; she is obedient, she earns money and helps herself and her family'. Ironically, such an understanding of a good nupi maanbi is similar to the societal construct of 'a good man', one who is competitive, capable of self-restraint, independence and guardianship (of another), which are altogether summed up in the Manipuri expression *nupa thokpa* (which translates as 'masculinity').

The importance of financial independence and a social role (and identity) in constructing a good, 'normative' nupi maanbi is summed up in a famous dialogue from a popular Manipuri language film, *Ang Tamo* (2012),[11] in which a character, a nupi maanbi beautician says,

> In my youth I have spent a lot of time and energy in love and desire for men. Now, I am mature. I know that these concerns about men and dreaming about men accepting us are all futile. That is why I have concentrated my energy in my parlour. It is this thing that will reward us and make us valuable to society.

The parlour economy is deemed an activity that sublimates *nupi maanbis*' energy towards fruitful endeavours and social acceptance, which in turn makes them respectable in the current socio-economic situation in Manipur. In these circumstances, one might be tempted to ask—have nupi maanbis been substantially accepted in Manipuri society? As indicated earlier, such 'acceptance' is cautious for the *nupi maanbis* have not been fully integrated into Manipuri society so far. Their toleration in family and society predominantly comes from their roles as beautician, fashion designer, actors, weavers, etc. Despite the fact that transgender subjects of India are endorsed and protected by legal statute in some ways, nupi maanbis are still subjected to societal prejudices and harassments. However strong the law is, the pervading gaze of society constantly plays a role in denying social acceptance to nupi maanbis. Thus, while deliberating on the mutual roles law and society play in hemming queer subjects within the boundary of homophobia in both colonial and post-independent India, Narrain and Gupta were of the opinion that societal complicity in the law's prohibitions provide an answer as to why, so many years after the coming into force of the Indian Constitution, these laws (laws that criminalize

alternate gender and sexuality like section 377)[12] continue to exist on the statute books or continue to be a part of living culture of Indian law (Narrain & Gupta, 2011, p. xviii). In 2014, three years after Narrain and Gupta articulated the complicity between law and society in censuring queer subjects, the Supreme Court of India bestowed the appellation of 'third gender', giving a legal status to the transgender communities of India (Lawyers Collective, 2014); and in 2015, the Rajya Sabha passed the Right of Transgender Persons Bill which aims at 'reservation in education and jobs, financial aid and social inclusion (of transgender subjects)' (Gandhi & Ramachandran, 2015). Will the current stream of legal opinion help in eliminating discriminations against nupi maanbis in Manipur? Answers to this question will be seen only in years to follow. Suffice it to say that societal acceptance is a vital role that will define our attitude towards transgendered subjects.

It is crucial to mention that one of the deepest impediments to social acceptance of nupi maanbi in Manipuri society is its refusal to accept transgender subjects as parties to marriage with a male-bodied person, that is, marriage and conjugality are denied them. In life narratives of nupi maanbis, it is this 'impossibility' to live a conjugal life with men of their choice, and rejection by men in favour of a patriarchal, heterosexual married life that constantly make nupi maanbis realize their exclusion from major cultural practices of Manipuri society. Mulling over the denial of conjugality with men, a 29-year-old nupi maanbi said, 'Let's say for a moment that I become a woman through transsexual surgery, will my man marry me? How far will I be accepted as a woman? If he is not willing to marry me, what are the changes for? We are not accepted as wives'. Another 37-year-old *nupi maanbi* complained about heart-breaks nupi maanbis suffer at the hands of men who ultimately choose women, 'Every man ultimately marries a woman. There are cases of nupi maanbis killing themselves for men'. It can be said that it is tolerance and not 'acceptance' that ultimately frames the lives of many nupi maanbis at present. Despite these denials, marginal participation in society by nupi maanbis does redefine some aspects of Manipuri society, for example, in the negotiation of shame mentioned earlier.

The various hurdles nupi maanbis continue to face in contemporary times paradoxically help in making the presence of the community more profoundly felt in many ways. This is particularly discernible in Manipuri popular culture. Although the unconventional nature of their gender debars them from participation in many popular sites of Manipuri culture, the nupi maanbi community has overcome this difficulty by creating an

equivalent space for itself. It can be said that the *nupi maanbi* community is a subcultural space, possessing its own habitus and distinct community praxis. This subcultural space includes *thabal chongba*[13] for nupi manbis, chitramala (dance performances), beauty contests, fashion events and 'hotspots' (exclusive informal gatherings where nupi maanbis meet and socialize). This space is important for nupi maambis: for instance, at beauty contests feminine beauty is redefined for those who cannot otherwise be models of womanhood or objects of beauty according to the standards that apply to ordinary Manipuri women. Such beauty contests also serve the crucial function of educating Manipuris about the social space occupied by nupi maanbis. Indeed, the subcultural space of the nupi maanbi community points to the limits of heteronormative boundaries of Manipuri society. While the community is not homogenous and there are divisions and conflicts and gaps in solidarity, the sense of oneness does exist among them. Moreover, the existence of the community within a well-defined boundary is a political imperative for guarding its interests and identity. In other words, the existence of a platform for the community is necessary to give it a sense of empowerment. Such an ethos is discernible in the remark of a 42-year-old nupi maanbi 'When we are together, nobody can slight us. We will tear them apart'.

Conclusion

Transgender subjects, not unknown as a community in historical times, flourished under cultural and royal patronage. They might have been at the lowest ebb under the weight of war and dispersion under the Burmese occupation of the Manipuri kingdom, but the community re-emerged in public life on the stage of Shumang Leela in the 20th century and has now finally asserted its identity and rights in contemporary Manipur.

In different historical contexts transgender subjects had different social functions. Here, I have tried to make an indispensable connection between the quality and extent of labour, functionality and validity of transgender subjects. *Pheitas* were an integral part of Manipuri society in early and medieval Manipur. The validity of their existence underwent a crucial transformation in the 20th century in which transgender subjects were rendered invisible outside the ambiguous domain of the Shumang Leela stage. Prejudice and alienation continues in the 21st century, but the transgender identity has rediscovered itself in the *nupi maanbi*, and has emerged out of conflict and disillusionment with AIDS research, the

lack of organizational support for the subjects, and society's tenacious prejudices and discrimination. This strand of self-determination is reinforced by the socio-economic niche of beauty parlours run by nupi maanbi beauticians alongside the current discourse of legal statutes pertaining to queer subjects. In these circumstances, the nupi maanbi phenomenon in contemporary Manipur can be seen as framed by two most vital phenomena—first, the rise of the nupi maanbi community as a socio-economic group acting as arbiters of fashion, and second, the democratic thrust towards the realization of their human and constitutional rights.

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Notes

1. The term *nupi sabi* means 'to imitate women'. Other synonymous meanings for *nupi sabi* are 'masquerading woman(liness'), 'shamming femininity', 'pretending to be women'. These expressions convey a sense of imitation/inauthenticity rather than the state of being natural vis-a-vis the feminine identity.
2. The term 'homo' is pejorative in many senses. The phobia and derision associated with 'homo' principally stemmed from the fact of gender variance that is clearly written on the physical paraphernalia of a male person. Considering the importance given to masculinity both in terms of musculature and in cultural values associated with male virility in Manipuri society, physical effeminacy in male persons is subjected to contempt. The most scornful connotations are conveyed by the expression, *oo-mongool*, meaning ill luck. Thus, it is said that in the past if a person who had just embarked on a journey happened to sight a 'homo', he/she cancelled the journey for fear that it was going to be unsuccessful. Many Manipuris in contemporary times no longer hold onto such a belief, but the scornful connotation associated with 'homo' is still constant.

Homosexuality which might or might not be a part of the 'homo' identity became a concern only in recent times, although it has never been absent from people's imaginary about queer subjects.

3. The periodization of Manipuri history is variable (Laisram, 2009). Here, by early Manipur and medieval Manipur, I mean roughly from the 1st century to the 13th century and from the 15th century to the 18th century respectively.
4. *Cheitharon Kumpapa* is a historical account of the kings of Manipur.
5. The exact period of the establishment of *Pheita Loisang* is not certain. However, the post of *Pheita Hanchapa* established during the time of King Sameirang (518 C.E.–685 C.E.) (Manikchand, 2007) implies that *Pheita Loisang* might have been in existence even before the 6th century.
6. One speculation on the reasons for the disappearance of *pheitas* from history can be the Third Burmese invasion of Manipur and the resultant Seven Years' Devastation (1819 CE–1826 CE). During this period, Manipur 'was depopulated ... The population of Imphal valley was reduced to about 10,000 or about 2000 households only' (Kamei, 2015, pp. 3338–3339). *Pheitas* who were located in Kangla could not have remained in the palace following the devastation of the valley. During the consequent restoration when the new order came, *pheitas* might have lost royal patronage.
7. The older generation of nupi maanbis who are in their mid-30s by the time I met them during my fieldwork usually cite an oppressive school atmosphere as a critical impediment to completing the school degree. While many dropped out of school, many still succeeded in completing school. Achievement of a college degree is rare but a few have accomplished it. The generations of nupi maanbis of the late 20th century and the early 21st century continue to face hurdles in schools. However, this pattern is made complicated by a few other patterns, the most significant being the lack of interest in schooling. Many *nupi maanbis* claim that many in their community are more interested in 'hanging out in parlours' and other forms of social life, including substance abuse in youth groups. Older nupi maanbis try to encourage the younger ones to get an education as it can bring dignity and opportunities for income.
8. In the 1990s, parlours in Imphal City areas were usually run by women. These parlours were frequented by school and college girls, working women and visitors or shoppers.in urban areas. Men did not visit these parlours. Men went to local barbers known as *hajam*.
9. In Manipuri society, kinship is implied by ties of blood, 'The clan or kinship is a continuation of the family unit on the paternal side. Kinship is formed by the union of several families on a particular basis. Any clan or kinship can be traced to a single family. Out of the original family emanates several families, which however are connected to each other' (Chand, 2005, p. 196).
10. *Ikaigaba* has both negative and positive connotations. In the negative sense, *ikaigaba* chiefly means shame/shamelessness; in the positive sense, *ikaigaba* conveys the meaning of bashfulness and shyness.

11. *Ang Tamo* is a Manipuri feature film released in 2012. The film is based on the trials and tribulations that nupi maanbis endure in family and society in Manipur today. Apart from depicting the life of transgender persons, the actor who played the role of the nupi maanbi protagonist is a transgender in real life. The movie is appreciated among the nupi maanbi audience as being the closest depiction of the social life of nupi maanbis.
12. In 2018, the Supreme Court of India read down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code that criminalized consensual sex between same sex couples. The new verdict decriminalizes 'gay sex' (*The Hindu*, 2018).
13. *Thabal chongba* is a traditional, communal dance festival for Manipuri youth in which boys and girls come together to dance in a ring. It is one of the oldest social events in Manipuri society.

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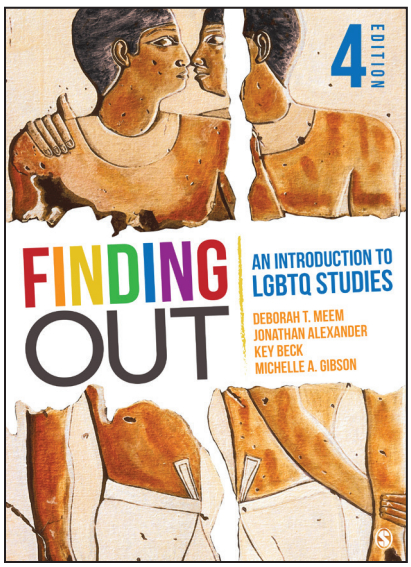

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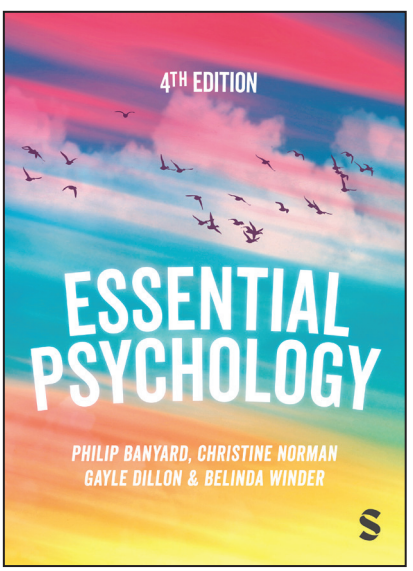

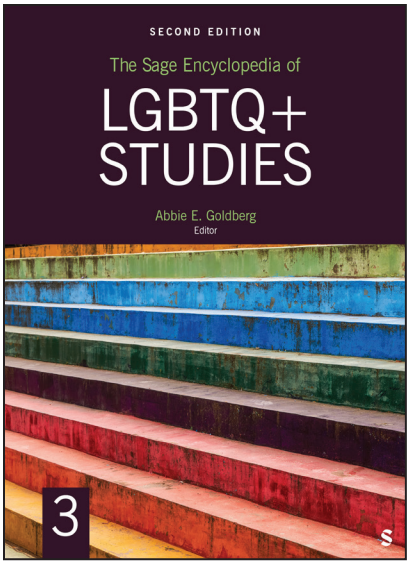

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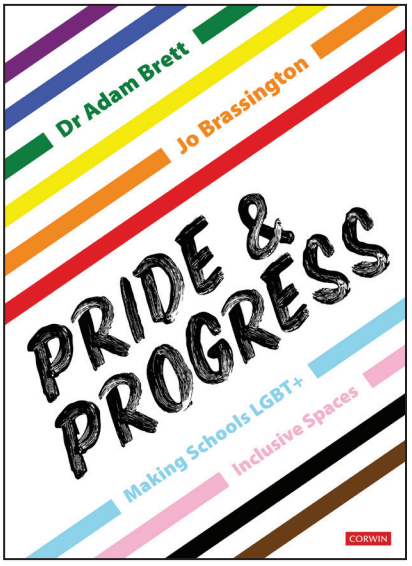

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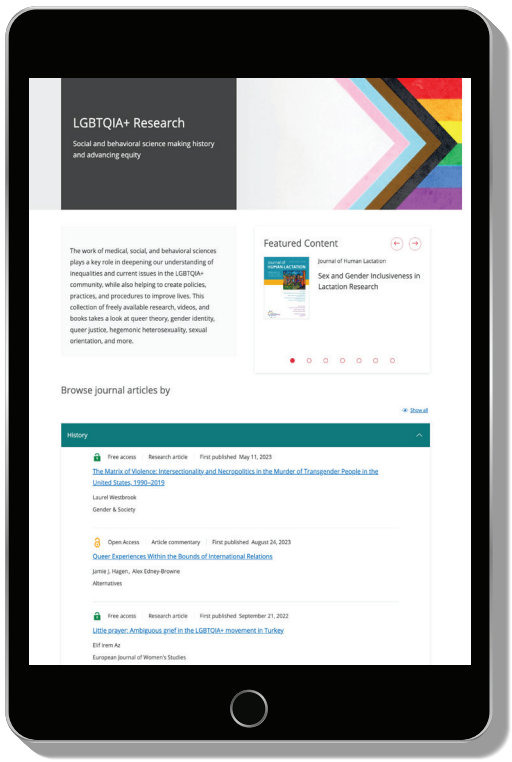

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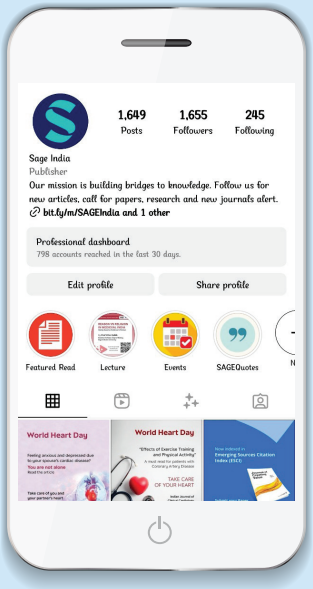

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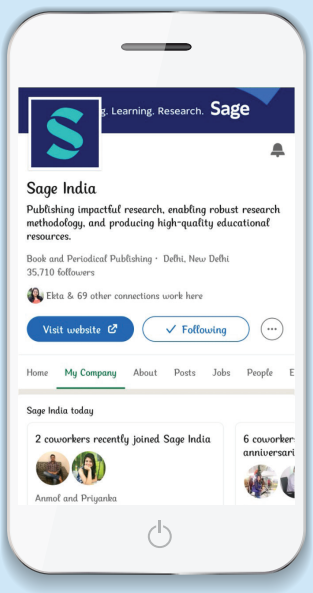

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