Analysis of LGBTQ+ Community Acceptance in India

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ABSTRACT: The LGBTQ+ community has been mistreated socially, economically and politically in India. The discrimination they face stems from homophobic ideals within society that grow due to less education regarding the LGBTQ+ society. Queer people in India encounter issues with homophobia within society. While India's LGBTQ+ related laws are moderately progressive compared to its neighbours, society is not as accepting towards the community. There are a lot of socio-cultural factors that cause these issues including history, religion and general societal norms. Moreover, due to the diverse urban and rural settings in India, the acceptance of the community is very different amongst different locations. The report includes multiple psychological theories in order to understand the reason behind why India has been moving so slowly in terms of accepting the LGBTQ+ community. The paper also explains India's cultural factors to demonstrate how it influences the public. In general, I found that India finds comfort in establishing hierarchy and preserving group relations which is why I believe education and representation will have the most positive impact. Therefore, I proposed that the government implement educational and awareness programs as well as more representation in the media so that Indian society is more informed on what it means to be part of the LGBTQ+ community.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Homophobia is a concept that is common within the Indian society and one that queer people struggle with due to the lack of safety they face. Historically, in Hinduism — the majority religion in India — texts have been largely neutral with only a few antagonist depictions. Many of major Hindu texts (like the Mahabharata) include depictions of transgender Indians or other people from the LGBTQ+ community. The Kama Sutra, one of the most prominent texts in Hinduist literature regarding sex and relationships, speaks about homosexuality from a neutral perspective. Even during the Mughal Empire, homosexuality remained largely common, especially with various sultans establishing romantic relationships with men. Although there were punishments established by the Sharia law, many emperors are theorized to have had relationships with men. Therefore, historically, India has been neutral regarding same-sex relationships. It wasn't until British occupation that laws regarding prohibiting same-sexual behavior came to be. Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code was established in 1861 with laws regarding criminlizing homosexuality. While convictions under this law was rare (after 1947), it was often used to harass HIV/AIDS prevention activists, sex workers, and LGBT groups. In fact, a law criminalizing homosexual intercourse was decriminalized in 2009, re-criminalized in 2013, and then finally decriminalized again in 2018, depicting the conflicting opinions of the Indian population.

After the initial dec iminalization in 2009, sev ral anti-gay rights group arose and many Indians expressed that it was too soon to decriminalize homosexuality as the majority of the public do not agree with this yet or that it was 'unnatural'. While the Central Government emphasized that there is no error in decriminalizing homosexuality, due to the several religious, social and political group petitioning for re-criminalizing homosexuality, India's top court was forced to bring back this law into action. However, soon afterwards, protests against the reinstitution of the law took place across India and several major political parties included support for removing the law. Eventually, the law was once again struck down.

Even with the decriminalizing of homosexuality, most Indian representatives will not talk about the issue openly. In India, the LGBTQ+ community is quite a controversial topic as even though the government has removed the law, LGBTQ+ members still face various struggles in terms of protection and stigma. Due to the cultural stigmas within Indian society, most aggressively discriminate against queer people and the law-force fail to protect them against harm.

In this paper, I will discuss psychological theories that may explain why Indians are unaccepting of queer individuals in order to understand the psychology behind the ostracisation. The main theories that I will discuss in regards to Indian society are the Social Identity Theory, the Social Cognitive Learning Theory, Enculturation and finally, Culture. These discussions of psychology will help me understand the reasons behind the ostracisation of queer individuals in Indonesia and will lead to my discussion of possible solutions. It is important to have these conversations as the LGBTQ+ community in India suffers daily due to the lack of support and discrimination they face. They are unable to feel safe in their communities and homes due to the various stigmas placed against them.

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RESEARCH QUESTION:

What can India do in order to improve the situation for the LGBTQ+ society in Indonesia?

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Social Identity Theory

The Social Identity theory (SIT) is a theory that suggests that individuals will not just have a personal sense of self and rather multiple social selves that depend on group membership, such as racial/ethnic and gender identities (Tajfel et al, 1979). There are four steps to social identity theory. Social categorization which is the process of categorizing yourself and others into groups (Leaper, 2011). Next is social identification, showing the people around you that you are in this specific group and that you are part of a group as you share some same behaviours. Thirdly, social comparison is used in order to compare your own ingroup with others in the outgroup. This usually leads to an ingroup vs outgroup mentality where you favour your own group and discriminate against the outgroup. Lastly, po itiv distinctiveness where peopl will focus on the posi ive aspects of their group and ignore the negative while doing the opposite for the outgroup. This is quite similar to the outcomes of social comparison as it only leads to discriminatory behaviour towards the outgroup.

Tajfel et al. conducted a study to investigate if intergroup discrimination will take place when people are put into different groups right after meeting. The researchers took boys from ages 14 and asked them to rate 12 paintings by Paul Klee and Wassily Kasinsky individually. Afterwards, they were randomly allocated to groups and were told that the grouping was based on which artist they seemed to prefer. They created a test with a point system and asked each boy if they would prefer the rewards to maximize joint profit for all boys (including the other group), only their group or maximizing the profit for ingroup or maximizing loss to outgroup. They found that most participants chose to maximize the loss in the other group. This study supports SIT as it demonstrates how the students instantly started discriminating against each other and wanting the other group to face loss even though there was no previous history between the participants as they didn't know each other. This demonstrates how people will prioritize their collective identity over their personal identity in situations where groups are against each other in order to encourage positive outcomes for their own groups and negative outcomes for the other group even if there is no negative history between both.

We see this in the behaviour between heterosexual people and queer people in India. Heterosexual people feel safety and pride in their group membership while queer people, the minorities, need to hide their membership in the LGBTQ+ community. In SIT, the ingroup is the majority which would be heterosexual Indians and the outgroup, the minority, are the queer Indians. Therefore, we see social categorization in real life, when Indians categorize LGBTQ+ people and Heterosexual people into groups that are 'against' one another. Next, social identification applies when some heterosexual Indians may enforce their preferefences by being overtly homophobic, enforcing a heteronormative society and forcing masculinity and femininity in societal norms. In fact, after speaking to an Indian man that is part of the LGBTQ+ community, he mentions the struggles he faced, especially during schooling, as he was effeminate compared to his other male counterparts. He faced bullying and humiliation by his classmates where they would call him untoward names and sometimes even initiate non-consensual contact. This shows how effeminate males in India are treated because they do not adhere to the traditional roles of masculinity. Thirdly, social comparison relates to Indians comparing heterosexuality with the LGBTQ+ community which can lead to hostile behavior as heterosexual people may percieve the LGBTQ+ community's identity as abnormal. Lastly, heterosexual Indians will highlight positive aspects of their own groups and negative aspects of the LGBTQ+ community in order to increase pride in their own group. While there isn't anything inherently positive or negative about both groups, because heterosexual cisgender people are the majority, they will percieve others as not sticking to the norm. This aspect of sticking with group traits will be discussed further in a section regarding cultural aspects of India.

It can be argued tha qu er people do the sam to th heterosexu l communi y, however, it is the queer community that is being decriminalized against in everyday society and not heterosexuals. Moreover, as a minority and as individuals who grow up in a heterocentric and homophobic society, it is more likely that the queer Indians develop internalized homophobia as a result of seeing homophobic tendencies around them at all times. This leads into the next psychological theory that I will discuss in regards to Indian's behaviour towards the LGBTQ+ community.

Social Cognitive Learning Theory and Enculturation

Discrimination and homophobic tendencies are learnt behaviors. Humans are not inherently homophic and this can be supported by the Social Cognitive Learning Theory (SCLT). SCLT states that humans learn behavior through observational learning (Bandura et al, 1961). This is what leads to possible internalized homophobia within the LGBTQ+ society, and perhaps a large reason as to why queer individuals in India continue to be marginalized. Enculturation is a part of SCLT and explains the development of one's personal identity theory through the observation, learning and maintenance of the necessary and appropriate behaviours and norms of their culture (Dixon, 2017). The reason why knowing about enculturation is important is as India pays a lot of importance to hierarchical structure and therefore, are likely to adapt to behaviors of people in higher positions of power. Moreover, as a largely collectivist country, cultural and societal norms are extremely important and Indians tend to internalize behaviors from their society or community while they are young in order to fit in with their communities and culture.

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Similarly to SIT, SCLT also has 3 main steps that demonstrate how people will learn the norms of their culture and internalize it (Mcleod, 2016). Firstly, the individual must be paying attention to the model. Usually, individuals will pay more attention to models that they feel resemble them or models that they have some sort of connection with. Next, retention is important as the individual must remember the observed behaviour so that they are able to produce the behaviour by themselves. The individuals must be motivated to replicate the behaviour they see.

Odden & Rochhat (2011) conducted a study to demonstrate how observational learning (based on SCLT) led to enculturation. This was a longitudinal study of 25 months on 12-year-old children in a Samoan village. This city had a very large Power-Distance Index score out of 100 which shows that culture depends on instructions by authority figures. The researchers first gave the children a multiple-choice quiz on basic knowledge of Samoan culture and then observed their behavior in the village. They found that children that were just 10 year olds would already start borrowing the fishing equipment from adults to experiment on their own without adult supervision. By age 12, most children were able to fish completely on their own. Moreover, based on the multiple-choice test, most children had a large understanding about the chief system that the village operated on and understood the concepts and rituals of their society. This study demonstrates how the children would pay attent on to the mod ls (parents) and as a r sult, r tain their behavior due o m tiva ion oming from relation to parents. Lastly, after practising what they solely observed, they were able to successfully integrate cultural aspects of their village. Therefore, the study supports the prediction that observational learning, that is explained in the social cognitive learning theory, will lead to one developing their cultural identity.

Another study that specifically relates to aggressive behavior learnt through SCLT is Bandura et al. (1961). In this study, children were divided into three groups: in the first, children watched a model acting aggressively towards a doll, in the second, a model played non-aggressively with the doll, and a control group where children were not given a model. The first two conditions were further divided to show male and female models to each. After about a 10-15 minute interval, all children were taken into a separate tool with various toys and dolls. Through observations, the experimenters noticed that children exposed to the aggressive model chose to play with more aggressive toys and were more aggressive towards the dolls on average compared to children exposed to a non-aggressive model or in a control group. The children were also shown to behave more aggressively when the model was th same-sex. This study demonstrates that aggressive behaviors can be learnt through observation as the children watched how the models behave towards the dolls and imitated it during their 'play-time'. After seeing adults with the same gender behave aggressively with the dolls, the children retained the behaviors and started imitating it towards the dolls because they believed that that is how they were supposed to behave.

Going back to the steps of SCLT, we can predict that most Indians will pay more attention to elder family members or Indian authority figures in their life. Moreover, as Indias have an emphasis on group mentality due to the collectivism within their culture, it is likely that they will work to retain the behaviours of their models. Moreover, It is likely that most Indians will be motivated to repeat these actions as if we go back to the social identity theory, people want to fit in with their group. Therefore, as part of social identification, individuals will be motivated to replicate the homophobic behaviours they see in order to fit in as part of the group. This relates to a sociocultural principle in psychology that states "Humans are inherently social animals who have an innate need to belong." This is because, naturally, humans wish to have a group to belong in. No matter our race, sexual orientation, gender or religion, humans crave to be part of a group where they feel accepted and part of. Therefore, there is natural motivation to replicate the homophobic behaviours, even if the individuals may believe that it is wrong to do so, their need to belong to a group will overrule their conscious. Motivation will also correlate with the consistency of the action; if the individuals see their models consistently repeating the behaviour in certain situations, the individual will also demonstrate that behaviour in those citizens. Therefore, if young individuals constantly see authority figures or 'role-models' in their lived behaving negatively towards queer indivuduals, they will iunconsciously start to imitate these behaviours in order to follow their models and fit in with their groups.

Particularly, in enculturation, individuals will l arn the norms nd behaviours that are eemed appropriate by their cultures using the social cognitive learning theory. This means, that if the norm within their culture is being heterosexual and cisgender, they will internalize these norms and 'appropriate behaviours' and exhibit homophobic behaviour as a result. Therefore, young individuals who learn these norms through enculturation and the social cognitive learning theory will grow up to be as homophobic as the previous generation.

The only way to try and prevent this is to try and educate them in other ways. Education is key to the development of society. If Indians are educated in aspects of discrimination, they will be able to learn how to critically think for themselves and become more resistant to exhibiting homophobic behaviours.

Cultural Index of India

Homophobia is defined as a culturally produced fear of or prejudice against homosexuals that may manifest in legal restrictions, bullying or violence (Anderson, 2011). The term "culturally produced" is extremely important in this definition as it depicts how this stigma against queer people is developed out of sheep mentality and ideologies that come from the general thoughts of homosexuality being 'out of their norms'. Many people continue to use culture as a shield while defending homophobic ideologies. In countries such as India, the ideologies and cultural norms held by society have a major influence on the actions and thoughts of

individuals. As India continue to seek social harmony and comfort in hierarchy, it makes it more difficult to speak out and create safe spaces for queer Indians. Moreover, this stigma against the LGBTQ+ community has been passed down from generation to generation through schemas and general comments. While not all families may outwardly depict homophobic ideas, their passing comments and behaviour towards homosexuality can affect the schemas of their children.

There are 6 aspects that are analysed within culture for each country: Power Distance, Individualism, Masculinity, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long term Orientation and Indulgence. I used Hofstede Insights in order to get objective scores for each country's cultural indexes.

Power Distance refers to how the culture reacts to inequalities in powers between individuals, or more specifically, how people in each culture will react to authorities. It is measured on a scale of 1 to 100; 1 being they are not intimidated in situations with authority figures and 100 being that they are intimidated. India has a score of 77 demonstrating that residents feel security in hierarchy and structure in society and organizations. This means that people put a lot of emphasis on power, knowingly or unknowingly, and tend to agree with opinions and requests more easily. If someone is in a higher position, through wealth or position, the one in a lower position is likely to be more formal and respectful than the other. This indicates a large issue that pushes forward homophobia within the Indian soc ety is that Indians in higher positions, may either be overtly homophobic r no def nd the LGBTQ+ community. Therefore, even if an Indian feels as if some behavior or action is wrong, they may not speak against it because someone in a high position did it. However, this also means that if people in higher positions start to be more open and accepting towards the LGBTQ+ community, it will influence other Indians to start being more accepting as well.

Next, one's score in Individualism indicates how much a culture values social harmony or uniqueness. It is scored on a scale of 1 to 100, 1 being a collectivist society and 100 being an individualistic country. India has a score of 48, indicating a society with equally collectivistic and individualistic traits. As collectivists, their opinions are often influenced by those of their peers and community. There is also a large emphasis on expressing opinions that do not cause any rejection from their peers. Individualism is a part of religious concepts; the majority of the dominant religions in India believe that in the end, it is the individual's responsibility to live a good life in order to reach a peaceful afterlife. Individualism and Collectivism in Indian society shows a struggle as Indians may find themselves engaging in homophobic behavior in order to fit in with their peers, but also may struggle internally due to conflict with doing the right thing. While the country as a whole invests value in pleasing the group and strengthening their social networks, it also believes in holding oneself accountable. In order to target this aspect of their culture, it is important to spread LGBTQ+ awareness in conversations and groups as that is likely to make a larger impact on society.

Thirdly, we have Masculinity in a culture which shows competitiveness in a society. A score of 1 indicates a feminine society where dominant values revolve around caring for others and quality of life while a score of 100 indicates a masculine society where achievement and success is highly valued. India has a score of 56 in this dimension, making it a mostly masculine society with some feminine traits. This indicates that India is very masculine in terms of competition, success and power. Indians are likely to showcase their success and wealth with one's clothes, accessories, etc. Moreover, competitive natures are promoted, especially educationally with ranking systems in school or other competitive systems. However, as India is also quite spiritual, humility and abstinence is simultaneously promoted. This means that Indians are likely to try and show their success to only a mild extent as humility is a large concept within society.

Uncertainty avoidance is another factor that explains culture that indicates how cultures deal with the fact that the future can never be known and controlled. It is scored using a scale of 1 to 100, 100 being the culture gains a lot of anxiety over the uncertainty in the future. India's score for uncertainty avoidance is 40 out of a 100. This means that they have a medium-to-low preference for avoiding uncertainty. Imperfection and unplanned events are more acceptable and India is culturally a patient country. However, this also means that people generally do not feel compelled to take actions to change current situations; one would rather find a method to "bypass the system" rather than change the system. This becomes a problem for the LGBTQ+ community s it means that Indians may not feel as much of a drive to change the situation currently and instead just find a way for people to adjust to what they are facing.

Next, Long Term orientation explains how society will maintain links with their past while dealing with challenges in the present and future. Cultures with a low score in this dimension will prefer maintenance of traditions and norms and view societal change with distrust while cultures with high scores will encourage change and efforts in modern education as a way to prepare for the future. Due to the score being 51 out of 100, it is difficult to evaluate the specific cultural perspective for this dimension. However, if we take into consideration previous scores this could indicate an acceptance for many truths. A score of 51 could indicate that Indians believe change is inevitable and understand traditions, norms and views may change however, they also do not actively seek out change within the country.

The last dimension is indulgence which indicates the extent to which people will try to control their desires and impulses based on the culture they were raised in. It is rated on a scale of 1 to 100 where 100 would be weak control and means that they are likely to indulge in their desires while 1 would be strong control that signifies that the culture exercises restraint over their own desires. India has a low score of 26 in this dimension. The score suggests a culture of restraint within India. Societies with this score tend to have

pessimistic or cynical perspectives. Moreover, there isn't a large emphasis placed on leisure and meeting their own desires. They feel that self-indulgence is wrong and perhaps even against social norms.

As seen by the culture, India finds comfort in hierarchy and group perspectives. Moreover, while it accepts change, it prefers a slow and steady change rather than a sudden change in social norms. These deductions are important as it helps us discuss solutions to start more sustained change that is accepted. A large problem with society currently in India is that society hasn't fully accepted or understood being part of the LGBTQ+ community and what it entails.

RECOMMENDATIONS

What can India do in order to improve the situation for the LGBTQ+ society in Indonesia?

1.   Education - Spreading awareness

The biggest factor that could help queer Indians is education. If more Indian citizens were informed on why it is okay to be queer and that there is nothing wrong with it, the general homophobia in India would dissipate. Indians must understand that it does not go against the social norm to be queer. As Indians are usually accepting of change, it is important to educate them on the significance behind the change so that the laws and society change together.

At the po nt India is at right now, it seems that although the law is allowing the rec gni ion of queer and transgender people, the society hasn't completely adapted to this. Transgender and queer Indians still face discrimination by majority of the public. Especially in the more rural areas of India, being queer is dangerous as if one is suspected or out as part of the community, they fear physical agression and threats as a result. A lot of queer Indians go to urbanized cities such as Delhi or Bangalore in order to seek new and safer options, but even there, they can not escape judging eyes or statements.

Educating Indians will be a long process and will probably take a long time to establish considering the degree of discrimination against LGBTQ+ community currently. Moreover, it needs to be a gradual shift so that Indians are more open to being educated as if they are just introduced to the queer community out-of-nowhere they are likely to be confused by how the cultural norms of the country are suddenly being changed. This must also be a very gradual process. Schools could include texts that show the hardships that LGBTQ+ individuals face and teach students that one's sexuality does not determine their worth.

One of the best ways to normalize the presence of LGBTQ+ individuals is showing them more in the media. Producing movies or tv shows that are good representations LGBTQ+ characters will be extremely helpful for this and encourage Indians to speak positively about queer people. The media doesn't necessarily have to just show how hard it is being a queer person or the discrimination they face, just showing them as part of the entire Indian community will help in changing the social norms. A study conducted by P&G in 2020 found that people who have been exposed to LGBTQ+ people in media were more likely to be accepting towards finding out a member of a family is LGBTQ+ (at 72%) compared to those who haven't been exposed (at 66%).

2.   Government

The Indian government has already been taking many measures in order to try and educate the public about the legality of homosexuality. However, it is important to also include courses such as sexual health and sexuality in school in order to educate the youth on aspects such as sexuality in order to encourage acceptance from a young age. Moreover, legalising gay marriage will also be instrumental in increasing acceptance among Indian communities.

However, in the end, this comes down to awareness and education. The government should help launch or encourage the creation of education campaigns that go further than India's main cities. While majority of India's main cities are relatively open to homosexuality and queer communities, most of the rural areas are not as open, or may not even be aware about these topics. It is important to educate them about this as it will increase acceptance regardless of geographic residence in India.

CONCLUSION

The view of the LGBTQ+ community in India must be changed so that LGBTQ+ Indians are given the same treatment and allowed the same freedom as others. As seen by the psychological analysis of Indian culture, if proper education takes place, Indians are likely to adapt to the situation willingly and ease the situation for queer Indians. It is important to extend this education past urban centres to decrease the gap in opinions between urban and rural areas. By utilizing the information found regarding the behavioral and cultural norms of India, it is possible to make changes in India's mentality towards LGBTQ+ community. We know through the cultural analysis that India places importance in the hierarchy so it is essential that the government firmly makes it stance on accepting homosexuality. Moreover, as seen by their long term orientation, if change occurs, Indians will naturally adapt so it is important to make it evident that LGBTQ+ Indians are very apparent in Indian society by increasing their representation in the media. It is imperative that we educate Indians about different sexuality and genders so that Indian LGBTQ+ citizens are able to enjoy their life freely, without fear of wrongful persecution and abuse.

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