

Attitude Change towards Homosexuality Post Intervention

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ABSTRACT

While there have been advancements in the pro-homosexuality attitudes and civil rights of homosexual individuals in recent times, the progress is mostly confined to the Western nations. Homosexuality is largely considered a taboo in India with negative attitudes prevailing in the general public. The present research aimed at examining the impact of audio-visual intervention on students' attitude towards homosexuality. The sample included 108 undergraduate students (M-54, F-54) in the age range 18-21 years studying in Delhi. The participants completed the Homosexuality Attitude Scale (Kite & Deaux, 1986) prior to and after viewing two intervention videos shown on consecutive days. Comparisons between the pre-intervention and the post-intervention scores of males, females and the total sample were done using t-test. The results indicated significant positive attitude change in the total sample and the male subjects. The attitude of female subjects towards homosexuality also became more favourable; however, the change was not significant in nature.

Keywords: *attitude change, audio-visual intervention, gender differences, homosexuality.*

Homosexuality refers to having emotional, romantic or sexual attractions to members of one's own sex or gender (American Psychological Association, 2008). Homosexuality was recognised as a mental disorder and it was not until the publication of DSM-III, when homosexuality was finally recognised as a sexual orientation than something abnormal and against the course of nature.

International Social Surveys conducted in the 1990s show that there are stark national differences in attitudes towards homosexuality. Summaries compiled by Widmer, Treas & Newcomb (1998) and Kelley (2001) show that people in the Netherlands are by far the most accepting of homosexuality, with two-thirds of the population considering homosexuality 'not wrong at all'. The western nations are generally exhibit more favourable attitudes

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towards homosexuality while in countries like Russia, and other Middle Eastern Societies, homosexuals are often discriminated, abused, maltreated, tortured and even punished with capital punishment.

Western culture is more outspoken about the issues related to sexuality and LGB community explicitly demands equal rights however, this trend is not so prevalent in Eastern Asia. Though, now with time countries are amending their laws to accommodate equal rights everyone including LGB community. The latest countries upholding gay rights are Finland and Slovenia in 2017 (Novak, 2017; Robins-Early, 2017), Colombia in 2016 (France-Presse, 2016) and the USA and Ireland in 2015 (McDonald, 2015; Roberts & Siddiqui, 2015). However, many still continue to criminalise same-sex sexual contact under the threat of imprisonment or even death. As of 2016, 73 countries criminalize same-sex sexual activity, India being one of them. The number of countries where the death penalty might be applied for same-sex sexual acts stands at 13 for instance Nigeria and Sudan (Carroll, 2016).

The Supreme Court of India reinstated Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC, 1860), in December 2013. The section criminalises any kind of sexual intercourse other than peno-vaginal and has come to be known as the 'gay sex law'. The law along with the condemnation from many religious groups has made homosexuality a social taboo in India. However, on January 10, 2018, the Supreme Court of India decided to review criminalisation of homosexual activity.

Researchers have examined the effectiveness of various interventions to change attitudes towards homosexuality. Interventions such as direct social contact, awareness workshops, visual media, education have all been found out to be effective (Cerny & Polyson, 1984; Rudolph, 1989; Sakalli & Ugurlu, 2001, 2003).

In 1982, Goldberg compared the effect of three audio-visual programs on attitudes of college students toward homosexuality and it was found that subjects who watched the film on prejudice and the video-tape of a discussion of homosexuality, as well as the control group, were all significantly more tolerant toward homosexuality than subjects who watched the explicit films. However, the difference among groups was immediate only. Five weeks after exposure to audio-visual programs, there were no significant difference. Similarly, Levina, Waldo and Fitzgerald (2000), also, studied the effects of visual media on attitudes toward gay men and lesbians by exposing 3 groups of participants to a brief video in a pre-post research design. The results indicated that the participants' attitudes were significantly different from the pre-test, with attitudes of the pro-gay video group being most positive, and those in the anti-gay video group being most negative. However, not all research report visual intervention as an effective one. Deese and Dawson (2013) found that regardless of the content of the training video, whether presenting biological information or social differences, participants' pro-LGBT attitudes were significantly decreased.

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Cooley and Burkholder in 2011 found that attitude change scores for the video-only and the video-plus-contact-and-interaction groups were not statistically different indicating that the video was as effective as contact as an intervention. Riggle, Ellis and Crawford (1996) conducted a study on the effectiveness of 'media contact' as an intervention and found that showing a film had a positive significant effect on attitudes towards homosexuality.

The purpose of the current research was to assess the attitude change towards homosexuality post intervention of college students. The lack of scientific studies and awareness in India has rendered homosexuality to remain a social evil and a taboo. Mays and Cochran (2001) found that perceived discrimination is positively associated with negative effects on quality of life and psychiatric morbidity indicators for LGB individuals, such that homosexual men have much higher rates of mood disorders, anxiety disorders and suicide attempts than heterosexual men (Aggarwal & Gerrets, 2014). Given the situation, it is important to create an accepting and positive environment for LGB individuals. With this in focus, the present research aims to assess the use of a visual intervention in an attempt to foster positive attitudes in individuals towards homosexuality. The hypothesis thus formulated is:

1. There will be significant change in attitude towards homosexuality of females post intervention.
2. There will be significant change in attitude towards homosexuality of males post intervention.
3. There will be significant change in attitude towards homosexuality post intervention of the entire sample.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Data was collected using convenience sampling method. A total sample of 108 was collected out of which 54 were males and 54 were females, belonging to the age group 18-21 years studying in various under-graduation courses in Delhi.

Materials

The Homosexuality Attitude Scale (HAS), developed by Mary E. Kite and Kay Deaux (1986) was used to assess the attitude towards homosexuality. HAS is a Likert scale which contains a uni-dimensional factor representing a favorable or unfavorable evaluation of homosexuals ranging from 'Strongly Agree' (1) to 'Strongly Disagree' (5). It has an internal consistency of more than 0.92. The scale has a test-retest reliability of $r = 0.71$. The scale has convergent validity with the FEM Scale (Smith, Ferree, & Miller, 1975) and the Attitude toward Women Scale (Spence & Helmreich, 1978) ($r_s=0.50$).

Procedure

Single group pre-test, post-test design was used for the current research. The participants were read out the complete instructions and handed over the questionnaires after the rapport formation and briefing about the purpose of the study. They were also asked to sign a consent form to ensure a wilful participation in the study. After an interval of 10 days, the subjects were shown the intervention video 1. The day after that, the video 2 was shown and the

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subjects were asked to fill the questionnaire again. The intervention used in the study was audio-visual intervention. Two videos of approximately 9 minutes each were shown on two days. The content of video 1 dealt with the story of an Indian bisexual girl and the murder of a 15-year old boy who was gay. Video 2 began with presenting the names and achievements of famous LGB individuals and then the views and experiences of various Indian LGB individuals. The interventions were designed to sensitize the subjects towards LGB individuals by telling about their stories and the discrimination faced by them and, also, makes them aware about famous LGB individuals in the various fields.

RESULTS

The means and the standard deviations of the attitude towards homosexuality of males, females and the combined sample before and after the intervention have been shown in the Table 1. t- test dependent was used to compare the pre and post intervention attitudes towards homosexuality.

Table 1: Comparison of the pre-intervention scores with the post-intervention scores for males, females and the total sample.

	Pre-Intervention		Post-Intervention		t value	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Female (n=54)	75.02	11.29	77.44	12.08	1.56	0.124
Male (n=54)	72.70	13.42	80.24	13.60	4.46	<0.001
Total (n=108)	73.86	12.40	78.84	12.88	4.26	<0.001

The pre-intervention mean attitude score for female subjects was 75.02 and for post-intervention, it increased to 77.44. The value of t obtained was 1.56, which was not statistically significant ($p>0.05$).

For the male subjects, the pre-intervention mean attitude score was 72.70 and for the post-intervention, it increased to 80.24. The value of t obtained was 4.46 which was significant ($p<0.001$).

For the total sample, mean for the pre-intervention was 73.86 and for the post-intervention it was 78.84, which was also found to be statistically significant ($p<0.001$).

The results show a significant value of t for the males and the total sample at 0.01 level of significance. An increase in mean scores on attitude towards homosexuality post-intervention is observed for males and the combined (total) sample, which indicates that their attitude towards homosexuality became more positive. An increase in post-intervention scores is also observed for the female subjects but the difference was not statistically significant.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to assess attitude change towards homosexuality post intervention. Homosexuality is still considered a taboo in many parts of the world, with India being one of them. While there has been progress in the gay rights movements with marriage equality

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being achieved in more number of countries, the progress is mostly confined to the Western nations. It is important to create an environment for LGB individuals in which they can feel accepted and grow safely. With this in mind, the present study was designed to assess attitude change in individuals towards homosexuality using audio-visual intervention.

In the present study, males and females' attitude towards homosexuality was assessed using Homosexuality Attitude Scale (Kite & Deaux, 1986). After 10 days, the subjects were shown two intervention videos on consecutive days and their attitudes were assessed again to check for any immediate change in attitude towards homosexuality.

The results are depicted in the Table 1. It indicates that there was a significant change in the males and the total sample's attitude towards homosexuality ($p < 0.001$). The female subjects also showed an increase in positive attitude but the change was not significant.

The results indicating a positive shift in attitude are consistent with the findings of other researches. Thus, the hypothesis 2 & 3 were accepted. Goldberg (1982) found an immediate positive attitude change among the participants when shown audio-video clips about prejudice and discussion of homosexuality followed by a lecture on the subject.

Videos interventions that showed the life stories and discrimination faced by LGB people, and positive LGB role models have been found to produce positive changes in attitudes towards homosexuality (Bonds-Raacke et al., 2007; Riggle, Ellis & Crawford, 1996). Both these aspects were covered in the intervention used in this study. Knowing about the discrimination faced by LGB individuals might have led to increases in the empathy in people which might have also led to a positive attitude towards gay individuals.

Positive media portrayals such as showing clips of famous LGB individuals and their contributions to the society make people aware about positive impact of these individuals. Such role models could have been from an area the participants can relate to or a person they may have admired. This could have led to an increased similarity with the people shown and similarity has been found to lead to more positive attitude change (Jiang, Dahl, Chattopadhyay & Hoegg, 2009).

However, the attitude change towards homosexuality among female subjects was not found to be statistically significant. Thus, the hypothesis 1 has been rejected. This may be attributed to the research findings that people hold more negative views about the similar sex homosexual people (Kite and Whitley, 1996). LaMar and Kite (1998) and Lim (2002) have also reported similar results.

In the intervention videos used in the current research, there were more female individuals sharing their stories as homosexuals. The intervention video 1 showed the story of a bisexual girl and had a segment of Ellen DeGeneres, a famous talk show host who is a lesbian, talking about the murder of a gay teenager. Since the Intervention video 1 consisted of female LGB

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narrator, the intervention might have been ineffective for female subjects but effective for males as they tend to have more positive attitude towards female homosexuals (Kite and Whitley, 1996; LaMar and Kite, 1998 and Lim, 2002). This might have led to a significant change in attitude towards homosexuality among males but not females.

A more effective way to increase positive attitudes toward homosexuality could have been direct contact with individuals who identify as LGB. The contact hypothesis, given by Allport (1954) states that prejudice can be reduced by equal-status interaction between different groups. Direct contact would have allowed the individuals to confront stereotypes or beliefs regarding homosexuality. Contact as an intervention has been shown to significantly increase positive attitudes toward homosexuals (Burkholder & Dineen, 1996).

The study had some limitations. The subjects were chosen through convenience sampling and usage of English language in most of the intervention videos might have made it less effective. Also, only immediate attitude change was assessed in the study, no follow-up was done to see its long-term effectiveness.

Future research can target a larger and more diverse sample to assess the effectiveness of the intervention. Also, feedback about the intervention videos from the participants can be collected and analysed to know their point of views about the intervention. This can contribute to making of effective audio-visual interventions for individuals from different backgrounds. A follow up study can be done to assess whether or not these interventions have long-term effects. Further, different interventions can be used to assess differential effectiveness of the interventions.

Implications

The findings of the current research have implications in the media portrayals of LGB individuals. Television programs should portray LGB individuals and characters in a normal and positive light rather than in stereotypical roles. Sensitivity workshops for homosexuality should include audio-visual interventions that show the discriminations faced by LGB individuals and make them more relatable.

CONCLUSION

The present research found that the attitude of males and the total sample (consisting of both males and females) became more positive after implementing audio-visual intervention. The female subjects also showed an increase in positive attitude; however, the increase was not statistically significant.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors colorfully declare this paper to bear not conflict of interests

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