**Research Paper**

# Man to Man: A Study on Companion Choice of Homosexual Men

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**ABSTRACT**

Choosing a partner is an important transition from being single to being in a relationship. The present study attempted to understand the emotional, physical, and socio-cultural factors that influenced companion choice of homosexual men. Beliefs of homosexual men about companion choice, expectations, type of relationship, least and most desired traits in the companion, methods, and places used for interaction with the homosexual community were explored. Additionally, challenges faced in the process of finding companions and related mental health concerns were probed. A quantitative descriptive study method was used for the purpose of this study. Data was collected from 116 homosexual men with a pre-coded self-designed questionnaire, administered online. Results indicated that "trust, meaningful conversation, loving and caring, cooperative and understanding and availability" were the most desired emotional traits. The least desired traits were "impulsivity and controlling". The participants preferred partners to be of similar age. Most participants claimed that their partner's financial standing was unimportant. Nearly all participants wanted to be in monogamous relationships; but almost half stated that cheating was not a deal breaker. All participants stated the importance of engaging in safe sex; however almost half said that they had engaged in risky sexual behavior. Three fourth of participants stated that they used social media to get in touch with the community. More than half the participants had faced discrimination. The study provides implications for mental health professionals working with sexual minorities.

***Keywords:*** *Companion Choice, Homosexuality, Relationships, Homosexual Men*

**M**ate selection plays a vital role in satisfying the cardinal human need for belongingness proposed by Maslow (Maslow, 1943). It is perhaps the most important choice an individual ever makes (Lykken & Teilegen, 1993). People tend to have a checklist of desirable qualities when selecting future partners which could relate to their lifestyle or cultural beliefs.

Companion choice can be defined as 'the process an individual undertakes to choose a person to have an emotional or physical (or both) relationship with, for either a long stable period or short period according to this individual's beliefs, life, experiences, values, and desires' (Prince, 1961). Individuals tend to choose partners similar to themselves in many ways. This is called "assortative narcissism" (Thiessen, 1979). A study conducted on ninety-

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two couples from a metropolitan area in the United States of America identified characteristics that were more or less desired. The results showed that men and women looked for similar traits in their partners; namely; intelligence, kindness, and understanding. Additionally, women preferred someone with a good personality whereas men preferred a partner with physically attractive features (Buss, 1985). Rao and Rao (2016) conducted factor analysis and produced five factors on the basis of desirable qualities: personality traits, physical traits, family traits, intellectual traits and career factors. The study revealed sharp differences between students' attitudes toward desirable qualities in a future mate and historically preferred qualities, as well as the ways men and women differ on what they desire for their life partner. Another study conducted in Mumbai found that women preferred partners with traits such as being kind, understanding, intelligent, healthy, and capacity to earn well; whereas men preferred traits such as being understanding, kind, intelligent, healthy and being adept at housekeeping (Sethi, 2013).

*Sexuality*

Sexuality is the set of behaviors, ideas and feelings associated with sexual activity. It encompasses all aspects of sexuality, including gender identity (male or female), orientation (straight/gay) and attitudes towards sex (American Psychological Association, 2007). This can involve biological, emotional, social feelings and behaviors, and behaviors that a person enjoys and prefers. Sexuality is different from sexual orientation, which is defined by American Psychological Association (2007) as who you love, engage in sexual activities with, date and are attracted to. The sexual orientation of an individual is classified by society based on the gender of one's partner. Some examples of such classifications/labels are lesbian and gay. Sexual identity is what a person identifies themselves as, based on their own desires, feelings, and attractions. An important distinction to be made is that sexual identity can differ from sexual behavior. For example, an individual who engages in sexual activity with their own gender from time to time may not identify themselves as homosexual.

*Homosexuality*

Wolff (1977) defined homosexuality as love for a person of the same sex. Here, love encompasses sensation, feeling, and emotions. However, the emphasis was on the emotional aspect of an emotional disposition. According to Weeks (1986), the term was coined in the 1860's to refer to someone who was attracted either emotionally or physically to a person of the same sex and wanted to engage with them sexually. The word homosexual was coined by Maria in the West, before which it was known as "sodomite" or "catamite" (Tang, 2018). In India, people commonly avoid speaking about heteronormative sex. Consequently, it may not be surprising that people avoid speaking about homosexuality. Hence, it becomes difficult to determine the number of people who identify as homosexuals as there may be a vast segment who do not wish to disclose their sexual orientation in public. Records submitted by the Government of India to the Supreme Court (2012) indicate that there are about 2.5 million homosexuals in India of which 7% are HIV-positive (BBC, 2012).

*Homosexuality, companion choice and type of relationship*

Studies conducted among homosexual men have found different types of relationships. Spears & Lowen (2016) indicated the presence of three types of relationships between homosexual men. The first type was when individuals were exclusively committed to each other. These relationships were called 'monogamous' relationships or 'committed' relationships. The second type of relationship was an open relationship where a person was committed emotionally to their partner but could have physical relationships with other

people. The couple would decide in advance whether information about the intimate encounters is to be shared with the partner. 47% of the couples fell under this relationship category called 'non – monogamous' relationships.

Savage (2011) conducted a study with 48 homosexual couples to understand the experience of non-monogamous couples in America and results indicated that there was another relationship called 'Monogamish' relationships. These couples were mostly perceived to be monogamous. However, these couples allowed space for non-monogamous activities; that is, these couples expressed an understanding that allowed for some amount of sexual contact outside the relationship.

Kenrick (1995) aimed to identify the difference between choice of partners in homosexual and heterosexual individuals and found that homosexual men had a low interest in their partner's relationship status, and they were more jealous regarding emotional infidelity rather than sexual infidelity. Another study in the USA examined 2400 advertisements on Yahoo and looked at a national sample in which every state from the USA was represented. The ads were sorted according to race and sexual orientation. The results showed that homosexual males had a preference for older men compared to men with masculine traits (Phua & Kaufman, 2003).

Many studies have attempted to explain the age preference of homosexual individuals and have reported varied findings (Bailey et .al., 1994). A study done in the Detroit area with 243 men found that a majority of the participants preferred a partner older than themselves (Harry & DeVall, 1978). The personal advertisements placed by heterosexual and homosexual men in the gay press indicated that, on average, they preferred partners about four years older than themselves when young but not more than five years younger later on (Kenrick et al., 1995).

Another study conducted on the preferences of heterosexuals and homosexuals revealed that homosexual men were more likely to get attracted to the most masculine faces. These features included a broader forehead, a pronounced brow bridge and broader jaws (Glassenberg, 2006).

The sexual preferences differ as some individuals prefer being the one who is penetrating during the sexual activity and are often considered as the "top". Others who prefer being penetrated are referred to as "bottom". There are some who enjoy both penetration and being penetrated and they are often referred to as "versatile". There are also some men who only prefer to engage in oral sex and don't like to engage in anal sex (Moskowitz & Hart, 2011)

### *Issues faced by Homosexual Individuals*
Of the 195 countries in the world, there are 69 countries, which criminalize homosexuals and homosexual behavior. Some countries such as Iran and Afghanistan have penalized homosexuality with the death penalty (Bearak & Cameron, 2016). In India, Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code was a legal obstacle for the LGBT community. The section stated:

> 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 ten years, and shall also be liable to fine (Indian Penal Code, 1860).

In 2009, the Delhi High Court legalised consensual homosexual activity, a decision that was revoked in 2013. When Section 377 was re-enforced, there were 16 suicides of LGBT youth in Chennai over a period of 18 months (Cooke, 2015). In August of 2017, the Supreme court of India passed a judgment declaring the right to privacy as a fundamental right. This meant that people could not be arrested on the basis of their sexual orientation. The biggest win for the LGBT community in India was on 6th September, 2018 when Section 377 was revoked and homosexuality was no longer criminalized. The decriminalization of section 377 reduced some of the immediate dangers that the community faced in terms of imprisonment but the community is still a long way from being accepted in the society.

The community faces other problems, such as caricatured stereotypes of individuals belonging to the LBGT community, which limit their freedom of expression. The LGBT community faces negative attitudes from their families. Most family members try to fix their children through religion or believe it is a phase their child is going through. Humsafar Trust, a NGO in Mumbai, conducted a survey in 2009 which revealed that due to social pressure gay men and lesbian women got married and had unhappy marriages which often led to poor outcomes for them and their spouses. It revealed that 70% gay men in Mumbai got married. It also stated that 80% gay men in smaller cities got married as they did not want to face the stress of coming out.

Once their loved ones know or suspect an individual may not be heterosexual, the individuals are often subjected to violence and rejection by families which leads to problems like homelessness, poverty, sexual assault, and sexual stigma. These individuals may also face discrimination in their workplace or in educational institutions which may further lead to psychological stress. This stress can result in severe health problems like drug addiction, depression, and victim hate (Chatterjee, 2014).

According to the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (2010), 47% of bisexual men and 40% of gay men experience rape and physical violence as compared to 21% heterosexual men. A National school climate survey conducted in the United States by the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network stated that 4 out 5 LGBT students reported verbal, sexual, and physical violation in school. One-third of these children reported missing at least one day of school in the past month when they feared for their safety (Kosciw et al., 2011). A study by Nordqvist & Smart (2014) conducted in the UK revealed that members of the LGBT community were at a risk of losing their loved ones if they came out to them. Another study stated that there is a direct relationship between discrimination and depression. Each episode of bullying or victimization that takes place such as verbal harassment or physical abuse, increases the likelihood of self-harm behavior by 2.5% on an average (Mustanski et al., 2010).

LGBT youth are more likely to contemplate suicide than heterosexual youth (Marshal et al., 2011). A study by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services showed that LGBT people are three times more likely to contemplate suicide. Even at the level of action beyond contemplation, it was found that the LGBT youth were five times more likely to attempt suicide in comparison to heterosexual youth (Centre for Disease and Control, 2016).

Ryan et al. (2010) conducted research in the United States to study the family acceptance and the health of LGBT youth. They recruited 245 LGBT participants for the research who were further screened down to 53 people. Data was collected through extensive interviewing, the study revealed that LGBT youth who come from highly rejected families

are 8.4 times more likely to have attempted suicide in comparison with people who reported low levels of family rejection.

Many different studies have proven that men who have sex with men have a higher risk of mental health concerns (Batchelder et al., 2017). A research conducted online in Australia with 1628 participants found that the LGBT population is twice as depressed and anxious when compared to the heterosexual population (Mc Nair & Bush, 2016). Murugesan (2011) conducted a study in the city of Mumbai and found that 45% of the men who have sex with men were suicidal, 29% had depression, and 24% had anxiety. The above information clearly shows the LGBT community is at a greater risk for mental health concerns and needs immediate attention for the same.

The minority stress model (Meyer, 1995; Mirowssky and Ross, 1989; Pearlin, 1989) explains why groups that deviate from the norm are stigmatized by mainstream society, which further makes them vulnerable to psychological distress. This can happen in two ways; First, as individuals who deviate from the norm, they lose social and economic support from their group leading to a fall in their socioeconomic status. The second case is when they face discrimination and prejudice. Owing to the internalized beliefs of the majority regarding their own sexuality, members of the LGBT community may face dissonance and distress. This can be further explained in terms of distal stress process (the direct events such as violent events of prejudice) and proximal stress process (the expectations people have from themselves about the rejection they face).

This model is based on the idea that interaction between the dominant and minority values are in conflict with the social environment. Mayer clearly describes that stigma leads to mental health issues in the LGBT community. This model also highlights that one does not need to go through discrimination or prejudice in order to internalize heterosexism. From the day one is born in society, they witness celebration of heterosexual norms in every domain which further becomes ingrained in them. This affects the LGBT populations in five ways: AIDS, sex problems, stress related to it, guilt about sexual orientation and suicidal behavior or ideation (Mayer 2013).

Thus, the current study aims to investigate aspects of companion choice of males who are attracted to males and/or engage in sexual practices with males. The beliefs, choices, and expectations about partners that these men who are attracted to men and/or have sex with men have, how they choose their companions and the types of relationships preferred are important to examine. While there is research in India about companion choice for heteronormative individuals, the same for homosexual individuals are scarce. Alongside, the study examined the mental health concerns that males who are attracted to males and/or have sex with males, might face due to their sexuality and preferences. The study seeks to understand discrimination as faced by homosexual males, and the resultant stress if any. Self-harm, suicidal behavior, and help-seeking from mental health professionals has also been studied. This study will also help to identify and understand sociocultural factors (i.e., age, education, socioeconomic status, religion, spaces of social interaction within the community, and more) that influence companion choice.

# METHODOLOGY

## *Design*

The current study is a descriptive quantitative study. A survey questionnaire was developed by the researcher for the purpose of this study. The data collection was carried out online to

access groups and individuals who would be difficult to trace in person due to the social stigma around homosexuality and discrimination against homosexual communities.

## *Participants*

The sample for the study involved men who had sexual relationships with men, or men who were attracted to men. Data was collected through snowball sampling from 120 men, over a period of one month.

## **Inclusion criteria**

- Participants who were Indian citizens, above the age of 18 years, and were gender-assigned males at birth were the main inclusion criterion of the study.
- Participants who have had a sexual relationship with a man at some point in time, or felt an attraction towards a man were also included in the study.
- Participants who were proficient in English were part of this study because the survey questionnaire was developed in English.

## *Tools*

Data was collected through an online survey as companion choice in men who are attracted to men/or have sex with men and their mental health concerns continues to be a highly sensitive topic, and many people might not be comfortable talking face to face with researchers. The online method was chosen as it provided anonymity to the participants, which was essential as some of them had not 'come out', hence feared that their identity might be revealed.

Anonymity ensured that they did not have to fear taking part in the study. A self-designed detailed survey questionnaire was used for data collection. Buss's questionnaire "Factors in choosing a Mate" (1989) and Spears (2016) questionnaire "choices: the perspective of younger gay men on monogamy, non-monogamy", and literature in the area of companion choice and gay men was used for developing the survey tool used for the study. The questionnaire comprised 78 items divided under three sections.

## *Pilot study*

A pilot study was conducted on eight men who met the sample criteria. The participants expressed interest in the topic and provided feedback which was incorporated to improve the questionnaire. Some questions were changed from short answers to multiple choice questions, for example, the question on marital status. The questions on self-harm and risky sexual behavior were modified to accommodate the option that the participant did not engage in self-harm or risky sexual behaviors. All questions during the pilot survey were mandatory, however, certain conditional questions could not be answered by participants who did not meet the criteria for the question. These questions were made optional for the final survey. Additionally, two questions on discrimination that participants may have faced were added to the final survey and were presented as optional questions.

## *Data collection*

The data was collected through a Google Form circulated among participants online. The participants were recruited through social media, online LGBT communities, LGBT events, and snowball sampling. Potential candidates were contacted through social media and asked if they were interested in filling the questionnaire. After a confirmation was received, the

questionnaire was sent to them. Over a period of one month, 120 individuals completed the survey. Four respondents were from outside India, and their responses were deleted.

*Analysis*

The data was analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. Frequency, percentages, mean and standard deviation were calculated.

*Ethical considerations*

As this research was on a sensitive topic, there were certain measures taken by the researcher to ensure that there were no ethical violations. All the participants involved were informed about the purpose of the research and asked for their consent. They were informed that their participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any point of time. The participants were assured that anonymity would be maintained and that the information obtained would only be used for research purposes. Due to the sensitive nature of the survey, the participants were informed that referrals to mental health professionals would be provided in case some traumatic issues arose during the survey.

## RESULTS

The current study explored companion choice, expectations and relationships among men who are interested or had sex with men. It explored the least and most desired traits in their companions. The study attempted to understand the factors influencing mate preferences such as age, education, socioeconomic status, religion, and other factors. The study attempted to understand how and where interactions took place, along with details about who facilitated the meetings. Additionally, the study attempted to identify challenges faced in the process of finding companions. The study also focused on the mental health concerns of the respondents, specifically those related to the choice of partners. The study was conducted using an online questionnaire designed by the researcher. The questionnaire was completed by 116 men who self-identified as having feelings towards other men.

*Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants at baseline*

| Baseline characteristic | *n* | *%* |
|---|---|---|
| **Total sample Age group** | **116** | |
| 18-24 | 34 | 29.31 |
| 25-30 | 43 | *37.06* |
| 31-40 | 27 | *23.27* |
| Above 40 | 12 | *10.34* |
| **Sexuality** | | |
| Homosexuals | 77 | *66.3* |
| Bisexuals | 18 | *15.5* |
| Lables don't matter | 17 | *14.6* |
| Demisexual | 3 | *2.5* |
| Queer non-conforming | 1 | *0.8* |
| **Region** | | |
| Mumbai | 67 | *77.4* |
| Delhi | 13 | *10.2* |
| **Occupational Status** | | |
| Working class | 80 | *68.9* |
| Students | 27 | *23.3* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Retired | 2 | *1.7* |
| **Marital status** | | |
| Single | 100 | *86.2* |
| Married | 7 | *6* |
| Dating | 8 | *6.9* |
| Divorced | 1 | *.9* |

Table 1 indicates the socio demographic details of the participants. A majority of the sample belonged to the age group of 25-30 years (37.06%) and identified themselves as homosexuals (66.3%). 100 of the participants were single. The answers were interesting as the researcher inquired about marital status and yet 8 respondents felt the need to specify that they were dating.

*Table 2 Number of Previous Relationships*

| **Number of Men Dated** | ***n*** | **%** |
|---|---|---|
| No previous partner | 31 | 27 |
| One male partner | 30 | 26 |
| Two male partners | 28 | 24 |
| Three male partners | 8 | 7 |
| Four male partners | 18 | 16 |

Table 2 indicates the number of previous relationships the participants had. Interestingly, a majority of the sample had no previous relationship (27%) followed by only one previous relationship (26%) and two male partners (24%).

*Table 3 Type of Previous Relationship*

| **Type of Previous Relationship** | ***n*** | **%** |
|---|---|---|
| No Relationship | 29 | 25 |
| Committed Relationship | 58 | 50 |
| Open Relationship | 18 | 16 |
| Non-committed Relationship | 10 | 9 |

Table 3 indicates the type of previous relationship of the respondents. while majority of them were in a committed relationship (50%), there were almost 25% of the participants who had no relationship.

*Table 4 Number of participants who have come out of the closet*

| **Participants out of the closet** | ***n*** | **%** |
|---|---|---|
| Participants who came out of the closet | 89 | 77 |
| Participants who didn't come out of the closet | 26 | 23 |

Table 4 indicates that most of the participants had already come out of the closet (77%) while only 23% of the participants had not come out yet.

*Table 5 Preferred Traits Chosen by Homosexual Men (n=116)*

| Traits | M (out of 4) | SD |
|---|---|---|
| Trust | 3.71 | 0.490 |
| Meaningful conversation | 3.65 | 0.576 |
| Loving & caring | 3.60 | 0.541 |
| Cooperative and understanding | 3.53 | 0.611 |
| Availability | 3.46 | 0.610 |
| Emotionally stable & mature | 3.42 | 0.649 |
| Romantic | 3.32 | 0.707 |
| Calm Nature | 3.28 | 0.695 |
| Friendly and out going | 3.25 | 0.701 |
| Intelligent | 3.24 | 0.762 |
| Active and energetic | 3.157 | 0.588 |
| Playful | 3.147 | 0.652 |
| Responsible | 3.143 | 0.619 |
| Ambition | 3.13 | 0.811 |
| Cares for family | 3 | 0.783 |
| Organized & neat | 2.89 | 0.841 |
| Even tempered | 2.87 | 0.705 |
| Adventures | 2.79 | 0.668 |
| Display of physical affection | 2.78 | 0.862 |
| Want to be able to depend | 2.74 | 0.836 |
| Refined | 2.58 | 0.855 |
| Possessive | 2.51 | 0.828 |
| Impulsive | 2.24 | 0.894 |
| Controlling | 2.02 | 0.964 |

Table 5 indicates the preferred traits of homosexual men. According to the data, the most preferred traits include trust, meaningful conversation, loving and caring behavior, co-operative and understanding. Traits such as "trust, loving and caring, meaningful conversation, active and available" have the lowest standard deviation indicating that the respondents rated this trait consistently positively without much variation.

*Table 6 Socio Cultural Traits*

| Socio -cultural traits | M (out of 4) | SD |
|---|---|---|
| Stable job | 2.90 | 0.801 |
| Same social class | 2.03 | 0.903 |
| Similar education | 1.87 | 0.905 |
| Different profession | 1.77 | 0.914 |
| Same religion | 1.44 | 0.637 |
| Same caste | 1.34 | 0.605 |

Table 6 indicates the ranking of socio-cultural traits that the participants desire in their preferred partners. The most preferred characteristic was having a "stable job" (M = 2.90), followed by "being of the same social class" (M = 2.03). The least endorsed characteristics were being of "same caste" (M = 1.34) and being of "same religion" (M = 1.44).

*Table 7 Physical Traits*

| Physical traits | M (out of 4) | SD |
|---|---|---|
| Physically & mentally healthy | 3.41 | 0.662 |
| Masculine | 2.61 | 0.894 |
| Large genitals | 2.22 | 0.845 |
| Lean | 2.20 | 0.879 |
| Fair | 2.09 | 0.907 |
| Hairy | 1.98 | 0.823 |
| Bald | 1.53 | 0.751 |

The most important physical trait which was preferred was being "physically and mentally healthy" (M = 3.1). This was followed by traits such as "Masculine" (M = 2.61) and "large genitals" (M = 2.61).

*Table 8 Age of preferred partners*

| Age of preferred partners | n | % |
|---|---|---|
| Same age | 41 | 36 |
| Younger partners | 13 | 11 |
| Older partners | 27 | 23 |
| Age doesn't matter | 35 | 30 |

Table 8 indicates that 36% of homosexual men preferred partners who were similar to them in age. 30% of the men stated that age did not matter to them in the selection of their partner. 23% of the respondents preferred older men, and 11% of the respondents wanted partners who were younger than them.

*Table 9 Type of relationship*

| Type of relationship | n | % |
|---|---|---|
| Monogamous relationship | 41 | 70 |
| Polygamy | 19 | 16 |
| Not sure | 16 | 14 |

Table 9 indicates that 70% of participants wanted a monogamous relationship and 16% did not want monogamy. 14% were not sure about the type of relationship they wanted.

*Table 10 Views on Non committed relationship*

| I can imagine agreeing to a non-committed relationship | n | % |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 22 | 19 |
| No | 43 | 37 |
| Not sure | 51 | 44 |

Table 10 indicates that 44% of the participants were "not sure" if they wanted to be in a non-committed relationship and 19% could imagine being in a non –committed relationship.

*Table 11 Current generation tends to be more non- monogamous*

| Do the current generation tend to be more non- monogamous? | *n* | *%* |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 68 | 59 |
| No | 14 | 12 |
| Not sure | 34 | 29 |

Table 11 indicates that almost 59% of the participants tend to be more non-monogamous while only 14% of the participants still believe that the current trends are more monogamous.

*Table 12 Challenges in Committed Relationships*

| Challenges in Committed Relationships | n | % |
|---|---|---|
| Being honest about slip ups | 30 | 26 |
| The desire for variety in sex | 28 | 24 |
| Staying faithful when I would like to stray | 24 | 21 |
| There are no challenges in a committed relationship | 19 | 16 |
| Limited sex and it being unsatisfying | 15 | 13 |

Table 12 indicates the different challenges the participants faced in a committed relationship. It indicates that more than 26% of the participants faced difficulty in being honest about slip ups, while 24% of them faced difficulty in expressing the desire for variety in sex.

*Table 13 Importance of Safe sex*

| How important is it for you to engage in safe sex | *n* | % |
|---|---|---|
| Important | 111 | 96 |
| Not Important | 5 | 4 |

Table 13 shows that 96% of participants viewed engaging in safe sex as important, and only 4% percent stated that safe sex was not important for them.

*Table 14 Sexual Behavior*

| *Sexual Behavior* | *n* | *%* |
|---|---|---|
| Having unprotected sex with one partner | 111 | 96 |
| Not Important | 5 | 4 |

Table 14 indicates that almost 96% of the participants engaged in unprotected sex with only one partner and according to 5 participants found this information to not be important.

*Table 15 Maintaining boundaries allowing my Partner access to personal belongings and social media*

| Maintaining boundaries | n | % |
|---|---|---|
| Not allowed | 27 | 23 |
| Allow full accessibility | 37 | 32 |
| Reason it out with my partner | 39 | 34 |
| Don't know how to react | 13 | 11 |

Table 15 indicates that 34% of participants would try to reason with their partners if they found them checking their personal belongings while 32% would allow this behavior.

*Table 16 Emotional closeness*

| Emotional closeness | n | % |
|---|---|---|
| I am okay with it | 48 | 41 |
| It would bother me, I would consider it emotional cheating | 34 | 30 |
| Not sure | 33 | 29 |
| Other | 1 | 1 |

Table 16 indicates that 41% of participants were secure with their partners having a friend who was closer to them than they were. However, 30% of participants would consider it "emotional cheating" and this friendship would bother them. 29% of participants were not sure how they would react to such a friendship.

*Table 17 Is lying in a relationship okay*

| Lying Behaviour | n | % |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 5 | 4 |
| White lies are okay | 50 | 43 |
| No | 55 | 48 |
| Other | 5 | 5 |

Table 17 indicates that 48% of the participants indicated that lying in a relationship was not okay, whereas 43% stated that white lies in a relationship were okay. 4% of the participants indicated that lies were okay in a relationship.

*Table 18 Emotional Blackmail of Partners*

| Emotional blackmail of partner | n | % |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 6 | 5 |
| No | 78 | 67 |
| Sometimes, depends on the situation | 33 | 28 |

Table 18 indicates that 67% of the participants thought it was not okay to emotionally blackmail their partner, while 28% thought it depended on the situation. Around 5% thought it was okay to emotionally blackmail their partner. Participants who indicated that they were okay with lying also indicated that emotional blackmail is acceptable.

*Table 19 Financially supporting the partner*

| Financial Support | *n* | *%* |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 51 | 45 |
| Support their partners for a short while | 43 | 37 |
| No | 21 | 18 |

Table 19 shows that 45% of the participants would like to support their partner and 37% would want to support their partners for a short while.

*Table 20 Spaces of interactions*

| Social Media | *n* | *%* |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 87 | 76 |
| Sometimes | 18 | 16 |
| No | 20 | 8 |

Table 20 indicates that 76% of the participants use social media to connect with the community, 16% of the participants used it sometimes and 8% have never used it.

*Table 21 Social Media Platforms*

| Social Media | *%* |
|---|---|
| Grindr | 80 |
| Facebook | 65 |
| Instagram | 53 |
| Tinder | 46 |
| Other | 7 |

Table 21 indicates the different social media platforms used by the participants. 80% of the participants used Grindr to get involved in the community and find partners. 65% of the respondents used Facebook as it provides different groups and pages that are accessible to the community. 53% of the participants used Instagram to contact the community, while 46% used Tinder to find men to hookup.

*Table 22 LGBTQ+ Events Attendance*

| LGBTQ+ Events Attendance | *n* | *%* |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 31 | 27 |
| Sometimes | 28 | 24 |
| No | 57 | 49 |

Table 22 indicates that 49% of the participants do not attend LBGTQ+ events such as pride marches, sporting events, or parties. 27% of the participants attend these events whereas 24% of them attend them sometimes.

*Table 23 Family helps in finding a partner*

| Family helps in finding a partner | n | % |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 2 | 2 |
| Sometimes | 4 | 3 |
| No | 110 | 95 |

Table 23 indicates that 95 % of the participants never received help from their families in finding a partner. Only 3% of the participants' families had occasionally helped them in finding a partner and 2% of the participants' families had actively helped them in finding a partner.

*Table 24 Friends helps in finding a partner*

| Friends helps in finding a partner | n | % |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 14 | 12 |
| Sometimes | 43 | 37 |
| No | 59 | 51 |

Table 24 indicates that 51% of the participants did not receive help from their friends in finding a partner while 37% of the participants received occasional help from their friends.

*Table 25 Process of coming out*

| The process of coming out was | n | % |
|---|---|---|
| Difficult | 55 | 47 |
| Extremely Hard | 14 | 12 |
| Relatively Easy | 14 | 12 |
| Easy | 33 | 27 |

Table 25 indicates that 47% of the participants found the process of coming out "difficult" while only 27% of the participants found it to be easy. 12% of the participants found the process relatively easy while another 12% of the participants found it extremely hard.

*Table 26 Whom have participants come out to*

| Whom have participants come out to | n | % |
|---|---|---|
| Online friends | 26 | 22 |
| Friends | 35 | 30 |
| Family | 19 | 16 |
| Co-worker | 15 | 13 |
| To everyone | 7 | 6 |
| Not come out yet | 14 | 12 |

Table 26 indicates that 30% of the participants had come out to their real life friends while 22% had come out to their online friends. Only 16% of the participants had come out to their family, and only 13% had come out to their coworkers; 12% of the participants had not come out to anyone yet. 6% of the respondents had come out to everyone in their life.

*Table 27 Participants that felt the need to repeatedly come out*

| Participants that felt the need to repeatedly come out | n | % |
|---|---|---|
| Felt the need to come out repeatedly | 63 | 54 |
| Did not feel the need to come out repeatedly | 39 | 33 |
| Not sure | 14 | 13 |

Table 27 indicates that 51% of the participants felt the need to repeatedly come out, while 33% of them did not feel the need to come out repeatedly and 11% were unsure about the same.

*Table 28 Number of participants who faced discrimination*

| Number of participants who faced discrimination | n | % |
|---|---|---|
| Faced discrimination | 88 | 76 |
| Not faced discrimination | 28 | 24 |

Table 28 indicates that 76% of the participants had faced discrimination at some point of time while 24% of them stated that they had not faced any form of discrimination.

*Table 29 Self harm*

| Self harm | n | % |
|---|---|---|
| No | 53 | 46 |
| Yes | 63 | 54 |

It was observed that 54% of the participants had engaged in or contemplated a form of self-harm. The tendency to engage in self-harm showed a decreasing trend with age.

*Table 30 Therapy*

| Therapy | n | % |
|---|---|---|
| Sought Counseling | 27 | 23 |
| Sought therapy but discontinued | 11 | 10 |
| Never | 78 | 67 |

Table 30 indicates that only 23% of the participants sought counseling while 10% sought counseling but discontinued it and 67% never attended therapy.

*Table 31 Difficulty to find LGBT affirmative therapist*

| Difficulty to find LGBT affirmative therapist | n | % |
|---|---|---|
| Easy to find | 57 | 49 |
| Difficult to find | 59 | 51 |

Table 31 indicates that out of the sample that attended therapy only 49% found it easy to find a LGBT affirmative therapist while 51% found it difficult to find one.

# DISCUSSION

The survey was conducted on 116 males from twenty nine cities in India. The participants were between the ages of 18 to 70 years, with the majority of the participants being in the age range of 25-30 years.

It was found that "trust" and being able to have "a meaningful conversation" were the most preferred emotional traits that respondents chose. The other traits which were rated highly were "loving and caring", "understanding" and "being available". The five least desired traits were controlling, impulsive, possessive, refined and dependable. These findings are consistent with some of the previous research done with heteronormative samples, where traits such as "understanding" being highly ranked (Pawar, 2014; Sethi, 2013.) Another study also showed that "trust" was an important aspect in relationships with homosexual men (Spears & Lowen, 2016).

Further, a study indicated that controlling personality traits increased the chances of abuse in a relationship (Holtz, 2018).

Also, respondents stated that they would like their partners to have stable jobs and be of a similar social class. One third of the participants wanted partners who were closer to them in age. The respondents also preferred their partners to be "Masculine" as well as physically and mentally healthy. These findings are consistent with previous findings that show masculine traits were important to homosexual men in their criteria for choosing their partners (Kaufan, 2003; Bianchi, 2010). A study indicated that adopting masculine behaviors comes with a heteronormative assumption which ostracizes peoplefrom the community and individuals from an inherent sense of male identity which leads individuals to adopt dominant masculine roles to reduce feelings of minority stress (Clark, 2018). Other studies show that homosexual men have significantly larger genitals than heterosexual men and hence they would desire the same from their partners (Bogaert and Hershberger, 1999). Previous literature also shows that homosexual men choose partners based on physical attractiveness which explains the high preference shown for "large genitals" and being "lean" (Townsend & Wasserman1998; Buss, 1989; Marshal, 1993; Bianchi, 2010; Buss, 2014; Wierzbinski, 2016).

When compared to emotional traits, social characteristics were rated consistently of lower importance. The results are consistent with previous research on homosexual men that shows homosexual men have a low interest in the economic status of their partners (Kenrick, 1995).

Religion and homosexuality have a conflicted relationship; consequently, religion would seldom matter to homosexual men while finding a partner. Research has indicated that the more religious a person is, the more homophobic they are (Ryon,2014; Whitley, 2009). Some reserach also suggests that religion is a poorly considered factor even in heteronormative relationships (Sethi, 2013, and Pawar, 2014).

It can be seen that the standard deviation on socio- cultural traits is higher when compared to the emotional traits, indicating that the data is dispersed over a wider range of values. "Different profession" having the highest standard deviation value of 0.914 to "similar caste" being the lowest with a value of 0.605.

When the data was examined further, it was seen that the men who wanted older partners were men in the age range of 18 to 30 years, while older men (30+ years of age) were the ones who wanted a younger partner. These results are inconsistent with previous literature that states that homosexual men prefer younger partners (Buss, 2014; DeVall 1978; Gabrielidis 1996; Kaufman 2003; Kenrick, 1995; Symons, 1979 Wierzbinski,. 2016).

Table 9 indicated that 70% of participants wanted a monogamous relationship and 16% did not want monogamy. This is consistent with previous literature which stated that 90% of homosexual men were looking for a monogamous relationship (Lowen, 2016). This might explain the reason that trust is rated so highly as trust is a key component in monogamous relationships.

Table 10 indicated that 44% of the participants were "not sure" if they wanted to be in a non-committed relationship. This dispels the popular belief that homosexual men only want non- committed relationships. Notably, though trust was rated the highest among partner characteristics, the highest rated challenge for respondents was "being honest about slip ups". These findings vary from previous research where 43% participants felt "there are non-challenges to being in a committed relationship" (Spears & Lowen, 2016).

Table 13 shows that 96% of participants viewed engaging in safe sex as important. However, it was seen that 39% of participants engaged in sexual activity with a stranger and 26% had unprotected sex. 29% stated that they did not engage in sexual behavior. An interesting observation is that the 4% of participants who said that engaging in safe sex was not important for them, did not engage in any sexually risky behaviors themselves. There is an overlap in what the participants believed and what they did with regard to their sexual behavior. Previous research indicates similar results, where participants reported engaging in unprotected anal sex (Hays, 1997; Wolitski, 2001).

Table 15 indicates that 34% of participants would try to reason with their partners if they found them checking their personal belongings. Their responses correspond with the most valued characteristic of relationship indicated earlier; trust. In a study, 58% of the participants were aware of their partners being unfaithful while the other 51% admitted to being unfaithful (Terrance Higgins Trust, 2016). Generalizing these high rates of infidelity, we can derive a rationale for partners trying to pry on the other's personal space. The participants who indicated that they would reason with their partners might be aware of this issue and would prefer confronting their partners.

Table 16 indicates that 41% of participants were secure with their partners having a friend who was closer to them than they were. However 30% of participants would consider it "emotional cheating" and this friendship would bother them. Previous research shows that 62% of participants considered emotional closeness to someone else as infidelity (Terrence Higgins Trust, 2016), while another study showed that homosexual men were more jealous over emotional infidelity (Kenrick,1995).

Table 19 shows that 45% of the participants would like to support their partner and 37% would want to support their partners for a short while. These results are supported by the finding that men have low interests in their partner's financial status (Kenrick, 1995). In contrast to the participants' willingness to support their partners, research shows that 48% of the LGBTQ+ population identified as spenders as compared to 32% of the general population (Prudential, report 2017 in the United States). Another study states that 4 in 5

LGBTQ+ households in the United States have high debt which makes handling finances difficult (Mass Mutual report, 2017). This contrast can be attributed to the difference in location of these studies. This study also showed that partners with stable jobs and belonging to the same social class as the individuals were preferred.

Table 20 indicates that 76% of the participants use social media to connect with the community, 16% of the participants used it sometimes and 8% have never used it. A study done in the United States stated that 34% of homosexual males used the internet to find sexual/romantic partners (Bennotsh, 2002). The internet has become a popular space for homosexual males (Kalichman, & Cage, 2002). Specific websites are available nowadays, including in India, that enable gay individuals to connect with others of similar sexualities, such as Grindr, GayCupid, 1man and Hornet.

Table 21 indicates the different social media platforms used by the participants. 80% of the participants used Grindr to get involved in the community and find partners. Grindr and Tinder had a high percentage of users and are known for offering casual sex however, the majority of the participants stated that they wanted a monogamous relationship. Contrary to the popular belief that younger individuals use social media more than older individuals, this research found that those gay individuals who do not use social media were all in their twenties.

Table 22 indicates that 49% of the participants do not attend LBGTQ+ events such as pride marches, sporting events, or parties. Low attendance in the events is surprising as 77% of the participants have disclosed their sexualities. Table 23 indicates that 95 % of the participants never received help from their families in finding a partner. This can be explained by the lack of sexuality awareness in the heteronormative population. A study found that 90% of Indian parents were ignorant and lacked awareness about different sexualities (Iyer, 2017).

Table 25 indicates that 47% of the participants found the process of coming out "difficult" while only 27% of the participants found it to be easy. A survey done by PEW Research Centre in 2013 found similar results and stated that 63% of the LGBTQ+ population in the United States found the process of coming out to be extremely hard due to the fear of rejection and isolation.

Table 26 indicates that 30% of the participants had come out to their real-life friends while 22% had come out to their online friends. According to a Pew Research survey of 2013 only 5% of homosexual males stated that their sexuality came up in front of their close friends and family. It also stated that 39% of all LGBTQ+ adults had come out to their parents which was significantly more than only 16% as found in this study. This could be explained by the different cultural contexts in which these studies were conducted. According to the World Values Survey of 2014, 30% of Indians supported homosexuality, which was far less than developed countries like the United States, but was higher than other developing countries. The Pew Research of 2013 also stated that only 23% of the coworkers of LGBTQ+ people were aware about their sexual orientation; and this figure was close to the 13% as found in this study.

Table 27 indicates that 51% of the participants felt the need to repeatedly come out, while 33% of them did not feel the need to come out repeatedly. The coming out experience of an individual can be extremely stressful (Boon and Miller 1999; LaSala 2000) and can also help

them strengthen their identity (Balsam 2003; Halpin and Allen 2004; Konik and Stewart 2004; Moradi et al. 2009; Riggle et al. 2008).

Contrary to the popular belief that coming out is a one-time process, it is an ongoing one; and an individual might have to come out repeatedly especially when they are transitioning from one stage in life to another; for e.g. from high school to university. LGBTQ+ individuals often face this 'repeated coming out' process wherein they choose their level of comfort with others, based on the perceived danger and the other person's attitude towards sexual orientation and accordingly decide to conceal their sexuality or declare it (Malyon,1982).

Table 28 indicates that 76% of the participants had faced discrimination at some point of time. It must be noted that often people are not aware of the subtle ways in which discrimination is expressed. Research conducted by the Centre for American Progress 2016 showed that 68.5% people reported that discrimination had a negative effect on psychological wellbeing, and individuals who had experienced discrimination were significantly more likely to alter their lives due to the fear of discrimination. The World Values Survey of 2006 showed that 64% of Indians believe that homosexuality isnot acceptable and 41% of Indians would not want a homosexual neighbor. In a study done by the Naz Foundation in 2005, homosexual men reported experiencing violence and harassment by classmates and teachers (Khan, 2005). A 2013 survey of LGBTQ+ people with corporate jobs in India showed that 56% of the participants experienced discrimination due to their sexual orientation. However, the Worldwide Survey of 2014 recorded an increase in favorable attitudes of Indians towards homosexuals; with 30% of Indians accepting homosexuality.

26% of the participants responded to the descriptive question in the survey which asked them to describe their experiences of discrimination. The major themes that emerged were bullying, isolation and name calling in colleges, communities and workplaces. Respondent 111 mentioned,; "I remember incidents in which opportunities were snatched from me just because I am homosexual". Respondent 103 spoke about being bullied by college seniors and neighbors who assumed the respondent's sexuality despite their choice to conceal their sexual identity.

Respondent 84 narrated an experience where he was physically abused, "I was beaten up in my own house in Delhi by some random neighbors for having talked back to them. They didn't like men 'hanging out in my house all the time'." Respondent 102 stated that they were labeled "like gud or chakka". Instances of isolation, as described by the participants included a lack of stag entries at all mainstream bars, exclusion from the information loops in companies, loss of friends, lack of familial love and even exclusion from family property ownership.

Respondent 106 spoke about the discrimination the LGBTQ+ community faces from the country at large, "My country of citizenship won't recognize my commitment as marriage and won't recognize my children as ours in law. My country of residence won't keep me if I contract any long-term illness due to my sexuality and considers me a high medical risk because I am queer." Respondents described how such experiences made them feel 'ill' and 'rattled' and how even describing experiences of discrimination made them feel 'weak'.

Table 29 indicates that 54% of the participants had engaged in or contemplated a form of self-harm. The tendency to engage in self-harm showed a decreasing trend with age. A study found that half of the young adults in the USA have engaged in some type of non-suicidal injury (Yates, 2008). According to a study, queer individuals are seven times more likely to die of suicide than their heteronormative counterparts. (Haas, 2011). Another study stated that queer youth are twice as likely to contemplate suicide as their peers (King, 2008). Being a part of the sexual minority exposes individuals to several unique risk factors that aggravate suicidal and self-harm behaviors and thoughts (Mutanski, 2012). Recent studies have also shown that homosexual males have a higher chance of depression (Meyer, 2007). Other studies have also found a correlation between minority stress and mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation (Kuyper & Fokkema, 2011).

The reasons provided by the individuals for engaging in self-harm or suicidal ideation include the inability to handle their sexuality was the highest at 19%, followed by relationship problems at 18%. Other reasons included bullying, family problems, loss of a loved one, educational, and financial problems. Other reasons indicated by participants included anxiety, wearied of life, sexual assault, depression, loneliness and body issues. Notably, most reasons stated could be associated with one's sexual identity. Bullying seems to be a stressor for the LGBT community as seen in a survey done by the National School Climate Survey conducted in United States, which showed that 4 out 5 LGBT students reported verbal, sexual, physical violation in school, and one-third of these children reported missing at least one day of school in the past month when they feared for their safety (Kosciw, 2014). Queer individuals are at risk of losing their loved ones after coming out of the closet to them which as pointed out is a risk factor for self-harm (Chakraborty, 2011.) Depression due to discrimination also exacerbates likelihood of self-harm (Mustanski, 2010). Close relationships with at least one parent was observed to act as a protective factor against suicide for queer individuals (Brent, 2009). The perception of being cared for by adults outside the nuclear family also reduced the risk of suicide (Hass, 2011).

In the current sample, 23% sought therapy and 10% sought therapy but discontinued it. 67% of participants never availed therapy. Approximately half of the participants who availed therapy stated that it was easy to find a gay-affirmative counsellor while the rest disagreed. , However, there is a difference between a friendly therapist and that of an affirmative counselor (Carlson, 2010). According to Carlson (2010), affirmative counsellors have a positive view of queer identities and relationships and are aware of the negative impact of heteronomative social structures, discrimination, and heterosexism on queer individuals. These counselors affirm their client's sexuality as that becomes the backdrop of systemic culture of silence and shame about being homosexual. A recent research shows that heterosexual therapist can be trained to become affirmative. This improves the likelihood of recovery of queer clients (Lebolt, 2010).

It was seen in this study that "trust" and having a meaningful conversation were important to most men who had sex with men. Majority participants preferred partners who were masculine. Majority of the participants did not focus on social class and finances of their partner. Participants stated that safe sex is important to them but thoughts and actions seemed to different as 39% admitted in engaging in unsafe sex practices. 76% of participants stated that they use social media to find their partners. The most popular platform of social media used to find partners was Grindr as 80% participants stated that they use it. 76% of the participants stated that they had been discriminated against at some point of time. 54% of participants admitted that they have engaged in some form of self-harm or considered it

some point of time in their life. 67% of participants had never been to counseling and 49% of participants find it hard to find a queer affirmative counselor this an alarming concern as there is a growing need of affirmative counselors.

The important finding is that males who engage in sexual activities with males have very similar needs as compared to heteronormative men.

### *Limitations*
While the study provides an overview of the community it fails to delve into individual differences in experience as no qualitative data was collected. The study brings about traits that were desired or undesired by the respondents, relationship status was inquired about but the questionnaire did not inquire about mental health concerns of homosexual males, rather it only inquired about self-harm, reasons for self-harm, and their accessibility to mental health services. Majority of the participants were young adults and it is possible that the characteristics that they desired in their partners were ideas that might change over time.

Additionally, the survey questions enquired about experiences in retrospect and did not collect data on present behaviors. This may be crucial in case of self-harm, discrimination faced, and mental health crises. Detailed accounts of respondents' experience with mental health professionals were not collected either. Lastly, as the questions' options were predetermined, there are chances that participants selected options which were inexact to their actual opinions.

Another major limitation of the study is that the sample was not representative of the linguistic and socio-economically diverse population of India. This affects the generalisability of the results.

### *Implications of the study*
There is plenty of research on companion choice of heterosexual males compared to the dearth of research on companion choice of homosexual males in India. The current study brings forth an important factor that men who have sex with men have similar needs as that of heteronormative men. Further, the mental health concerns of males who engage in sex with males was highlighted, with a majority of the participants claiming that they had engaged in self- harm behaviors and had been discriminated against because of their sexuality at some point of time in their life. The respondents' difficulty in finding queer affirmative counselors indicates the need to train more queer affirmative counselors.

A need for psychoeducation for different sections of society comes into light with the results of this study as it indiactes that there are different stakeholders in society that can act as a protective factor for a person who identifies as queer. Psychoeducation is also required for the homosexual men on safe sex practices, common social media used by the community, accessible queer spaces in the city, and the diverse mental health professionals that they can access. There is a need to form and develop psycho education programs about sexuality and bullying in educational institutions due to the high levels of bullying and discrimination that is present in these settings. The lack of family participation in helping respondents find partners could highlight the need for psycho education of the family to better understand the queer individuals. There is an urgent need for sensitization and psychoeducation at work places where queer people choose to come out the least due to high levels of discrimination and harassment. It is necessary to dispel the myth that the homosexual community is a non-monogamous space and that everyone in the community wants open relationships.

*Further Research*

This study provides a preliminary look into the companion choices of homosexual males in India. A qualitative study can be designed on one of the many aspects enquired about through the survey. One can investigate what a healthy relationship is for homosexual males to better comprehend their needs. The inclusion of the experiences of transmen in future researches who were homosexual would also give a more holistic view.

The study opens up a plethora of options for researchers to explore including to understand the challenges that are unique to males who date males, comparison between homosexual men from tier one and tier two cities to identify whether the challenges faced in a relationship are similar or distinct, difficulties faced during the process of coming out at different ages.

Other aspects, such as the use of various social media applications and their effect on the search for a partner, as well as their correlation with unsafe sexual practices can be examined in research. The current study enquired into these topics on a superficial level, but all of these topics need to be researched in an in-depth manner to understand them better.

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