

Internalised Homophobia and Interpersonal Relationship: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

This systematic review aims to study the relationship between internalised homophobia and relationship quality among Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual individuals. Although the type of relationship is not specified, romantic relationships have been focused upon. There is very little research conducted along the same vein, and this review aims to act as an informative source for those who wish to widen their perspective. Five electronic databases were used to find research articles, the search terms used were: internalised homophobia, relationship quality, minority stress in LGB, same-sex relationships, and homophobia. The results tell us that internalised homophobia does affect the quality of interpersonal relations that an individual may have. Research also points out that internalised homophobia may hurt an individual's self-esteem and also affect their connectivity with the LGB community. The findings are useful to gain insight no how LGB people are affected by the discrimination they face in a heteronormative society.

Keywords: *Internalised homophobia, Interpersonal relationships, Homosexuality, Same-sex couples, Healthy relationship quality, Minority stress*

Internalised homophobia (IH) can be summarised roughly as the negative self-implications a Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (LGB) person might have against themselves. In a more technical sense, internalised homophobia can be defined as “the gay person’s direction of negative social attitudes toward the self” (Meyer & Dean, 1998, p. 161).

The term “homophobia” itself has some negative perceptions inside the clinical field, as homophobia is not akin to an actual phobia, as it does not invoke any sense of irrational fear or any physiological responses related to fear. Homophobia is more focused on a narrow sense of disgust and avoidance of sexual minority people, and sometimes irritation upon seeing LGB persons might be invoked (Syzmanski & Meyer, 2008). The usage of the term ‘phobia’ was criticised for its language as it pathologizes and stigmatises a behaviour that is not inherently phobic (Herek, 2004). In response to these criticisms, terms such as ‘Homonegativity’ (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980; Morrow, 2000), and ‘Heterosexism’ (Herek, 1995). However, Homophobia remains the most popularly used nomenclature in contemporary times.

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Internalised homophobia (IH) and its effect on LGB people can be conceptualised by two major theories, namely 'The Feminist Theory', given by Brown (1994), and 'The Minority Stress Theory' given by Balsam et al (2008); Meyer (2003).

The feminist Theory

The idea that "Personal is Political" encapsulates the feminist theory's contention that personal problems are intricately linked to political, social, economic, and cultural concerns (Brown, 1994; Enns, 2004; Worell & Remer, 2003). This theory highlights the negative effects of homophobia on the psychological well-being of members of the LGBTQ+ community, especially LGB people. These effects stem from feelings of rejection, invisibility, discrimination, harassment, and violence.

According to the theory, which focuses on socially constructed identities including race, gender, and sexual orientation, it is imperative to analyze the oppression that LGB people experience explicitly (Brown, 1998; Syzmanski, 2008). Four perspectives on multi-point oppression are described by Moradi and Subich (2003): main oppression, additive viewpoint, interactionist perspective, and intersectional perspective.

These viewpoints, which reject dichotomization and emphasize the diversity of identity within social institutions, clarify the cumulative impact of different oppressions on mental health (Syzmanski, Kashubeck-West & Meyer, 2008). However, there are several drawbacks, such as a lack of knowledge about how people internalize harmful messages and a scarcity of research on the connection between multiple-source oppression and mental health (Brown, 1994; Syzmanski, 2005a; Worell & Remer, 2003).

Minority Stress Theory

The theory known as Minority Stress, which originated from the ideas of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and the Social Stress Theory (Dohrenwend, 2000), asserts that people who belong to socially stigmatized groups experience higher levels of stress because of their status as a minority. This stress can be persistent and necessitates greater flexibility (Brooks, 1981; Meyer, 2003). Proximal stressors include identity concealment and internalized homophobia, whereas distal stressors are things like violence and discrimination (Meyer, 2003).

Meyer (2003) asserts that coping mechanisms are essential for reducing the harmful effects of stress, as is external support from peers, family, or the LGB community. One particularly potent stressor is internalized homophobia, which can endure without the help of outside stimuli and can even be self-generating (Meyer & Dean, 1998). Stressors that are both internal and external have been related to poor mental and psychosocial outcomes (Meyer, 1998; Syzmanski, 2005b). Research, however, is scarce about the precise link between social support, individual coping, and the impact of minority stressors on psychological well-being.

Interpersonal Relationship

Among LGB people, there are detrimental stereotypes regarding interpersonal relationships, such as the idea that they find it difficult to establish enduring and positive bonds. First, creating a safe identity in the face of unfavourable social perceptions is difficult. Improved connections are correlated with a person's secure identity. Stressors originating from both internal and external causes, including internalized homophobia, have a substantial effect on an individual's social interactions and sense of security within the LGBT community. According to studies, same-sex love partnerships in the US are widely stigmatized, which results in their receiving different treatment than heterosexual couples (Jones, 1996; Walter &

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Curran, 1996). There is a dearth of empirical data on same-sex relationships, yet many studies examine the dynamics of same-sex partnerships. A queer person's perspective of interpersonal interactions is significantly shaped by internalized homophobia, which has long-lasting consequences.

METHODOLOGY

Procedure

Databases such as Psych INFO, ResearchGate, PUBMED, Sage Publications, and Google Scholar were used in the literature study in addition to particular publishing websites. Selected articles were those released between 1990 and the present. Works by well-known LGBT scholars like Meyers and Syzmanski were also taken into consideration. The review's main focus was on two factors: the quality of interpersonal relationships and internalized homophobia.

Inclusion Criteria

1. Internalized Homophobia
 - a. The review examined the societal ramifications of internalized homophobia using theoretical, historical, and empirical research.
 - b. For comparison, articles addressing the effects of internalized and externally derived homophobia were taken into account.
 - c. Papers discussing certain ideas of internalized homophobia were also included.
2. Interpersonal Relationship Stress:
 - a. The selection process focused on papers that primarily addressed interpersonal interactions, including relationship models, within the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual communities.
 - b. Papers offering perspectives on elements of healthy and bad relationships were included in the coverage.
 - c. Included were specific publications that made a distinction between heterosexual and gay partners in romantic relationships.

Exclusion Criteria

- Research articles published before 1990 were not included.
- Some published books were left out since there wasn't enough material in them.
- There were no articles in languages other than English.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to the primary research paper titled "Internalised Homophobia and Relationship Quality Among Lesbians, Gay Men, and Bisexuals" done by David M Frost and Ilan H Meyer (2009), there is a remarkable linkage between Internalised Homophobia and relationship quality. The study was conducted on 396 individuals who identified as either Gay men, Lesbian, or Bisexual (people who identified as Queer or homosexual were also included). The data analysed were obtained as a part of Project Stride which was a large epidemiological study that studied the interloping relationship between stress, identity, and mental health among LGB and heterosexual populations (only LGB data were used). This particular study examined the association between internalised homophobia and the quality of interpersonal relationships of individuals. They proposed that IH would positively affect the quality of relationships regardless of factors such as outness, community connectedness, and depressive symptoms. However, they also noted that decreased levels of outness and lessened contact

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with the LGB community may show higher levels of internalised homophobia, which in turn may indicate increased complications in relationship quality.

The study used different scales such as the internalised homophobia Scale (IHP) by Martin and Dean (1992), the Centre for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) by Radloff (1977), the Sex Problems Subscale of the Psychiatric Epidemiology Research Interview (PERI) by Dohnrenwend et al (1980), and many more adaptations from several batteries and tests. The results from this paper can be briefly constructed as: Internalised homophobia was associated with increased depressive symptoms and consequently, depressive symptoms were linked with increased relationship problems. However, the direct effect of internalised homophobia on the relationship quality was statistically insignificant. This was as Frost and Meyer hypothesized. Although the factors of community connectedness and openness were not significantly associated with relationship problems, the effect was seen in coupled participants, as they had an increased effect size of IH on relationship problems when the aforementioned factors were controlled.

The overall result of this study suggested that the effects of internalised homophobia do not directly affect relationship quality, but are rather mediated by depressive symptoms. Connection to the LGB community and openness does have some effect on relationship quality, but it is significant enough to counter the stress caused by the combined depressive symptoms and internalised homophobia. The study hypothesized to predict the relationship strain, then did so by stating that internalised homophobia increases depressive symptoms and acts as a prohibitor of healthy relationship qualities.

The study done by Mohr and Fassinger titled “Sexual Orientation Identity and Romantic Relationship Quality in Same-Sex Couples” in the year 2006 also focuses on the quality of relationships in the context of homosexual couples. The study investigated the collective identity of a romantic relationship in the context of a stigmatized relationship, i.e., Same-sex or homosexual couples. The overall results of the study also note that homonegativity (same as homophobia), both internalised and external sources, and identity-related confusion usually only affect the individuals in relationships, and the dyad does not receive significant effect as a whole. The paper also stated that the perceptions of comfort of having an LGB identity were linked to having a positive relationship regardless of the specific identity. Overall, it can be said any perceived stigmatization that comes alongside a label or identity will have separate effects on the persons in any relationship where homonegativity or homophobia may be experienced.

RESULTS

Table No. 1 Result Table of ROL

SN	Name of paper	Authors	Year	Variable	Journal	Major finding
1.	How negative interactions affect relationship satisfaction: the paradoxical short-term and long-term effects of commitment	TianYuan Li and Helene H. Fung	2013	Negative interactions, relationship satisfaction, Commitment	Social Science and Personality Science	Highly committed people have higher expectations about the relationship and when they encounter negative interactions, their expectations and satisfaction in the relationships would drop drastically
2.	Minority stress and the health of sexual minorities	Ilan H. Meyer and David M. Frost	2013	Minority label, stress, health and well-being.	Handbook of psychology and sexual orientations	The minority stress model helps in publicising various problems such as IH, workplace stress, etc, that the LGB population experiences The research behind the Minority stress theory.
3.	Internalized Homophobia and Relationship Quality among Lesbians, Gay Men, and Bisexuals	David M. Frost, Ilan H Meyer	2009	Internalized homophobia, relationship quality	Journal of Counseling Psychology	internalized homophobia was associated with greater relationship problems among all participants. These findings are consistent with previous research that has shown a negative relationship between internalized homophobia and relationship quality
4.	Hegemony and the internalisation of homophobia caused by heteronormativity	Yolanda Dreyer	2009	Internalised homophobia, heteronormativity, hegemony	Hervormde teologische studies	Focuses on the hegemony of sexual minorities and the mental effects caused by it. Also calls for LGB-friendly therapies and other psycho-medical services
5.	Internalised heterosexism	Dawn M. Szymanski, Susan Kashubeck-West, Jill Meyer	2008	Internalised heterosexism	The Counseling Psychologist	Explanation of IH through theories and the need for counsellors to be inclusive of such people and their sensitivity to extreme social discrimination.

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SN	Name of paper	Authors	Year	Variable	Journal	Major finding
6.	Sexual orientation identity and romantic relationship quality in same-sex couples	Mohr, J. J and Fassinger, R. E.	2006	Sexual orientation identity, relationship quality, same-sex couple	Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin	Four identity-related variables were investigated (including IH) and a link between sexual orientation identity and the overall quality of a relationship was found. As identity reflects values, IH plays an important role in the identity formation of the person.
7.	Correlates of internalised homophobia and homosexual identity formation in a sample of gay men	Rowen. C. J. and Malcom, J. P.	2003	Homosexual identity, internalised homophobia	Journal of homosexuality	High levels of internalised homophobia among homosexual men are associated with higher sex guilt, lower self-esteem, and poorer self-concept. This may affect the prospects of relationships and hinder homosexual identity formation.

From reviewing the aforementioned literature review, it can be said that experiences of homophobia and social discrimination based on identities and minority labels can be internalised. This internalisation can lead to problems that might be revealed in future relationships. The factor of internalised homophobia can at times amplify other problems that may disrupt the flow of a healthy relationship. Internalised homophobia is also spoken under the term ‘minority stressors’, and hence it can take a drastic toll on an individual's mental well-being.

DISCUSSION

This systematic review aims to focus on internalised homophobia and its effect on the quality of interpersonal relationships.

The current social environment around a person who identifies as Lesbian, Gay, bisexual or any other identity is turbulent and filled with discrimination. The kind of prejudice and stigma that an average person might experience with some pattern of repetition would cause the individual to internalise such behaviour. The internalisation of harmful thought processes might be expressed in any future interaction with people who have a similar identity. Internalised homophobia can also bring about mental self-flagellation, as the thought process is that something within them is different from the heteronormative society (Dreyer, 2007).

Many empirical studies that investigated the linkage between internalised homophobia and relationship quality have found that although the direct effect cannot be quantified, internalised homophobia does indeed have some or the other effect on the quality of a healthy

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relationship. The negative self-perception can lead to self-sabotage of relationships, and may even lead to the individual judging and discriminating against other LGB members unfairly (Dreyer, 2007).

In a healthy relationship, regardless of whether heterosexual or not, the individuals express a certain level of commitment to the upkeep of the relationship. This does not differ drastically between heterosexual and same-sex couples. However, homosexual couples have unique problems that are not experienced by heterosexual couples. These stressors are caused by their status as a sexual minority, and many individuals have their significant other as their primary source of support (Kurdek, 1988). This causes the effect of the stressors to be felt doubly within the relationship and hence be magnified in view. Internalised homophobia also distorts how deeply these problems affect the dyad on an individual level.

Internalised homophobia, regardless of its effect on relationship quality between people, is a toxic mentality that often results in the person doubting themselves and the 'authenticity' of their identity (Williamson, 2000). Although Internalised homophobia is only experienced by homosexual or Queer people, not all LGB people would develop the internalisation of these negative prejudices. It has been found that internalised homophobia was positively associated with anxiety and problems regarding satisfaction in sexual relationships and is negatively associated with self-esteem and confidence in sexual relationships (Nungesser, 1983; information derived from the Nungesser Homosexual Attitudes Inventory).

Non-heterosexual people are victims of societal bias from an early age, and if an individual is exposed to such notions from the start of the realisation of their identity, these notions would be deeply ingrained in their thought process, and they express these negative presumptions in the easiest way available to them; in their close friends and loved ones who also share a non-heterosexual identity. Some people might even express these notions against themselves, causing a drastic drop in self-confidence and a rather heavy spike in shame targeted towards the individual themselves. This factor of shame and negative self-perception may cause the individual to have poor interpersonal relationships (Meyer and Dean, 2007).

Interpersonal relationships, be they romantic or platonic, need to be 'healthy' for the individual to have adequate social fulfilment in their lives. When the person's view of their identity comes in the way of them having a fulfilling relationship. This may also further cause the individual to have doubts about the validity of their relationships, as in they start to doubt the reason behind the relationship, along with severe doubts in the positive progression of their relationship. So, internalised homophobia would deter a person from having long-term, healthy relationships (not in all cases. As individuals are unique and how an LGB person is affected by negative self-perception would vary). For certain people, internalised homophobia would result in them engaging in risky, short-term relationships, which were mostly sexual without any emotional foundations (Newcomb & Mustanski, 2011). Engaging in such risky sexual relationships would further deteriorate the mental well-being of the individual, and might even instil a fear that they may never have a healthy, long-term relationship and some people may even grow disdain for long-term relationships because they fail to see the benefits of such relationships. These relationships are not confined to sexual or romantic relationships. People affected by internalised homophobia may find it hard to maintain relationships with other non-heterosexual people, be it friends or peers.

A relationship which solely used for benefits for a short period would burn out and may leave the person seeking similar relationships to fulfil their social needs for another short period. A

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person's level of commitment to a relationship would also come into play here. A person with high commitment would easily be dissatisfied with a shorter relationship if there are higher problems within the relationship dyad (Li & Fung, 2012). Building on the previous fact, a person with low commitment levels with added internalised homophobia would presumably have even higher dissatisfaction with the relationship if there were any negative interactions early on. This dissatisfaction can also lead the individual to end relationships prematurely before the relationship dyad has solid trust built among them. It can also be said that personal stress can foul a relationship. Internalised homophobia, which is also categorized as a stressor, can also induce more complications in a relationship, making the possible rocky relationship much harder to maintain for longer periods.

However, internalised homophobia is a learned behaviour, and with the help of interventions or self-realizations, any individual can overcome it. When LGB people with certain levels of internalised homophobia realise that it is harming their social lives and mental well-being, they can take steps to slowly pull ahead of it and in due course of time they can release themselves from the clutches of internalised homophobia. Psychotherapy may help in this case, and having a non-biased therapist or counsellor can prove invaluable to people who are looking to overcome internalised homophobia. Dismantling the notions of heteronormativity may also help to lessen in internalisation of such negative self-implications of being homosexuals or having homosexual attractions in addition to heterosexual attractions (bisexuality spectrum).

For LGB people, internalized homophobia has a substantial negative impact on the quality of relationships, particularly romantic ones. People who identify as LGBTQ internalize detrimental beliefs as a result of enduring unfavourable stereotypes and heteronormative social norms, which has an impact on relationship dynamics and self-expression. Relationship quality is impacted by internalized homophobia both directly and indirectly, with more complicated relationships being at higher risk of failing.

People who identify as LGBT and who experience prejudice gain from having supportive interpersonal interactions in their community. Internalized homophobia, however, can obstruct these relationships and keep people from reaching out for help and approval. Psychotherapy, which offers a secure environment and an objective viewpoint to confront negative self-perceptions, may be necessary to overcome internalized homophobia.

Internalized homophobia is a taught trait that may be overcome with outside help and dedication. Establishing a constructive social atmosphere and obtaining objective viewpoints are essential. Future initiatives should concentrate on raising awareness and educating the public to eradicate or lessen discrimination against LGB people. Rebuilding positive impressions from their historical foundations is crucial to promoting harmony and peace between the LGB population and heteronormative society.

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Conflict of Interest

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