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Research Paper

Sensation Seeking, Perceived Social Discrimination, Self-Esteem among Homosexual and Heterosexual Individuals

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to compare sensation seeking, perceived social discrimination and self-esteem between homosexual and heterosexual individuals. A quantitative research design was adopted, utilizing a descriptive research method with comparative and correlational approaches. The sample consisted of 106 individuals, aged between 20 to 35 years, residing in Pune and Mumbai. Data were collected through survey methodology employing standardized questionnaires: Sensation Seeking Scale (Form V) by Marvin Zuckerman, Perceived Social Discrimination Scale by Williams, Yu, Jackson, & Anderson, and Rosenberg's Self-esteem Scale. Results indicated no significant difference in sensation seeking among both groups. However, homosexual individuals reported significantly higher levels of Perceived Social Discrimination compared to their heterosexual counterparts. In terms of Self-esteem, there was a significant difference between the groups, indicating that sexual orientation may play a role in shaping self-worth. Correlation analysis revealed there was no significant relationship between sensation seeking and perceived social discrimination or self-esteem. However, there was a significant correlation between perceived social discrimination and self-esteem. Overall, these results underscore the complex interplay between social experiences and psychological well-being across different sexual orientations.

Keywords: *Sensation seeking, perceived social discrimination, self-esteem, homosexual individuals, heterosexual individuals*

In the recent decade, acceptance of the pride community has been a global phenomenon. The people who never had an identity or rather felt secluded, marginalized, today are a part of a huge community promoting rights, freedom and equality. Such empowerment enables them to voice their identity, building a sense of belongingness and unity that was largely denied within previous generations. Even with these betterments, there are still big problems. According to research, LGBTQ+ people are more likely to face societal stigma and discrimination, which can have a negative impact on their mental health and self-esteem. Studies project that people who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual experience higher rates of anxiety and depression than heterosexual people.

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Numerous studies on homosexual and heterosexual people have been done, taking into account a range of psychological, social, cultural, socioeconomic, and gender factors. There is currently a dearth of research on correlation or comparison from the perspective of psychology and mental health. Numerous populations' individual experiences with sensation seeking, perceived social prejudice, and self-esteem have all been the subject of in-depth research. Comparative and correlational studies between homosexual and heterosexual people have, however, not been done much or at all on these variables. The goal of this research is to improve our knowledge of the psychological processes that underlie the connection between homosexual and heterosexual people's self-esteem, sensation seeking, and perceived social discrimination.

Homosexual and Heterosexual Individuals

Homosexual Individuals

Homo means 'same' in Greek. Homosexual orientation or homosexual individuals are people who are romantically or sexually attracted towards members of their own sex. The term 'homosexual' can be used for both men and women to express their sexual orientation and identities (Ciccarelli & White, 2017).

Heterosexual Individuals

As the Greek word hetero means 'other', heterosexuality refers to 'other sexual' or attraction to the other sex. The most common sexual orientation is heterosexuality, which is defined as people being sexually attracted to members of the opposite sex, such as a man being attracted to a woman or vice versa (Ciccarelli & White, 2017).

Sensation Seeking

Psychologist Marvin Zuckerman, at the University of Delaware, introduced the term "Sensation Seeking" which is a personality trait primarily an inherited attribute and reflects the impact of behavioural genetics on personality. Zuckerman describes sensation seeking as "a desire for varied, novel, complex and intense sensations and experience and the willingness to take physical, social, legal and financial risks for the sake of such experiences" (Schultz & Schultz, 2005).

Perceived Social Discrimination

The unfair treatment of an individual or group because of their gender, age, race, sexual orientation, or handicap is known as discrimination. When people perceive or encounter discrimination, it is referred to as perceived social discrimination. Perceived social discrimination can take both overt and covert forms, and it can occur at the institutional or personal level. It might or might not be deliberate.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is a framework of who we think we are, how we have been treated, respected, appreciated and acknowledged by people around us including our family, friends, colleagues and society in general. (Greene, 2005). Self-esteem is an overall individual judgement or assessment of the self and how an individual thinks of himself/herself. Self-esteem is the extent to which an individual values, approves of or likes himself/herself. It is the evaluative component of self-concept (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2014).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Kamolova, M., Chen, Y., Etuk, R., Sacco, S. J. & Kraus, S. W. (2023) explored men's reports of sexual behaviors, hypersexuality, pornography use, pornography avoidance self-efficacy, and sensation seeking with respect to men's sexual orientation. According to the findings higher hypersexuality was associated with higher sensation seeking, both of which were associated with increased pornography viewing and lower pornography avoidance efficacy. Differences in sensation seeking behaviors by sexual orientation did not reach significance.

The study by Farooq, F., Khan M. A., Jibeen, T. (2015), concludes that sensation seeking behavior has a significant relationship with agreeableness and neuroticism personality traits of homosexual males. Homosexual male's personalities are considered to be somewhat feminized. Homosexual men experience anxiety and depression frequently during their lifetime as they have to face a lot of criticism from their surroundings and also from religious point of view.

According to a study, homosexual and bisexual individuals more frequently than heterosexual persons report both lifetime and day-to-day experiences with discrimination. Approximately 42% attributed this to their sexual orientation, in whole or part. Perceived discrimination was positively associated with both harmful effects on quality of life and indicators of psychiatric morbidity in the total sample (Mays, V. M., Cochran, S. D., 2001).

A study by Chan, A. S. W., Ku, H. B., Yan, E. (2024), explores discrimination, social acceptance, and their impact on the psychological well-being of older men who have sex with men (MSM). According to the findings, older MSM experience discrimination and lower levels of social acceptance. Research found that the participants reported lower general health, higher levels of discrimination, and lower levels of perceived acceptance, particularly from family members. These findings suggest that discrimination and lack of social acceptance can contribute to social isolation and poor mental health among older MSM.

A study aimed to investigate the relation between perceived discrimination and suicidal thoughts among homosexuals in Malaysia through the mediating effect of self-esteem. Results indicated a negative significant correlation between the perceived discrimination–self-esteem link and between the self-esteem suicidal ideation link among homosexuals. Positive relations were found between perceived discrimination and suicidal ideation. A significant mediating effect of self-esteem was found in the link between perceived discrimination and suicidal ideation, which showed that high perceived discrimination and low self-esteem are risk factors for suicidal thoughts (Tan, S., Tay, W. M., Neoh, M. E., & Wong, H. W., 2018).

Matsumoto, D., Mireshghi, S, I. (2008), studied the relationship between three mental health constructs and perceived attitudes toward homosexuality among lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals was examined. The participants were 49 Iranians and 47 Americans. According to the result, perceived cultural attitudes are related to depression, self-esteem and perceived stress.

METHODOLOGY

Statement of problem

To study and explore sensation seeking, perceived social discrimination and self-esteem among homosexual and heterosexual individuals.

Objectives

1. To study gender differences in Sensation Seeking among homosexual and heterosexual individuals.
2. To study gender differences in Perceived Social Discrimination among homosexual and heterosexual individuals.
3. To study gender differences in Self-esteem among homosexual and heterosexual individuals.
4. To study the relation between Sensation Seeking and Perceived Social Discrimination among homosexual and heterosexual individuals.
5. To study the relation between Sensation Seeking and Self-esteem among homosexual and heterosexual individuals.
6. To study the relation between Perceived Social Discrimination and Self-Esteem among homosexual and heterosexual individuals.

Hypothesis

- **$H_0$1** There will be no significant difference in Sensation Seeking between homosexual and heterosexual individuals.
- **H1** Homosexual individuals will have higher Perceived Social Discrimination compared to heterosexual individuals.
- **H2** There will be a significant difference in Self-Esteem among homosexual and heterosexual individuals.
- **$H_0$2** There will be no significant relation between Sensation Seeking and Perceived Social Discrimination among homosexual and heterosexual individuals.
- **$H_0$3** There will be no significant relation between Sensation Seeking and Self-Esteem among homosexual and heterosexual individuals.
- **H3** There will be significant correlation between Perceived Social Discrimination and Self-Esteem among homosexual and heterosexual individuals.

Variables

- Independent variables- Homosexual individuals, Heterosexual individuals
- Dependent variables- Sensation Seeking, Perceived Social Discrimination, Self-Esteem

Sample

The study employed non-probability sampling method in which purposive/judgemental and snowball sampling technique was used for selection of sample. The sample was Homosexual and Heterosexual individuals between 20 to 35 years of age. Sample size was 106 individuals comprising of 53 individuals from each group.

Inclusive criteria

- Participants were between 20 and 35 years old.
- Participants identified as either Homosexual (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer) or Heterosexual.

- Participants had the reading level of 6th grade and above.
- Participants were residing in Pune and Mumbai city.

Exclusive criteria

- Participants were excluded if they were under 20 or above 35 years old.
- Participants were excluded if they did not identify as either Homosexual or Heterosexual (asexual).
- Participants were excluded if they did not have the reading ability of 6th grade and above.
- Participants were excluded if not residing in Pune and Mumbai city.

Research tools

1. Sensation Seeking Scale (Form V) by Marvin Zuckerman

The Sensation Seeking Scale (SSS) is a forty-item questionnaire.
Scoring - Score 1 point if answer is A on item number- 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 14, 16, 17, 18, 22, 23, 24, 28, 29, 32, 34, 36, 39. Score 1 point if answer is B on item number- 2, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 19, 20, 21, 25, 26, 27, 30, 31, 33, 35, 37, 38, 40.

2. Perceived Social Discrimination by Williams, Yu, Jackson, & Anderson

The scale measured perceived social discrimination in individuals, it is a 20-item scale with two subscales namely Lifetime Discrimination Scale and Daily Discrimination Scale. Scoring - The Lifetime Discrimination subscale items are Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7, Q8, Q9, Q10, and Q11. The answer format for these items is fill in the blank. The Daily Discrimination subscale items are Q12, Q13, Q14, Q15, Q16, Q17, Q18, Q19, and Q20. The answer format for these items is: often, sometimes, rarely, and never. Lifetime Discrimination: To calculate the score for this subscale, sum the number of items to which the respondent answered that it occurred one or more times. Daily Discrimination: Q12, Q13, Q14, Q15, Q16, Q17, Q18, Q19, and Q20 should be reverse-scored. Reverse-scored items are worded in the opposite direction of what the scale is measuring. The formula for reverse-scoring an item is: ((Number of scale points) + 1) – (Respondent's answer).

3. Self-esteem Scale by Rosenberg

The scale measured self-esteem using ten items answered on a four-point Likert-type scale — from strongly agree to strongly disagree.
Scoring – The item number 1, 3, 4,7,10 are scored with SA= 1, A= 2, D= 3 and SD= 4. While the item number 2, 5,6,8,9 are scored with SA= 4, A= 3, D= 2 and SD= 1. Sum the scores for 10 items, the higher the score the lower the self-esteem. Score range is Low self-esteem (30-40), Moderate/Normal self-esteem (20-29) and High self-esteem (10-19).
All instruments have demonstrated satisfactory reliability and construct validity in prior researches.

4. Personal Data Sheet

A self-constructed personal data sheet was given to the participants which consisted demographic details like age, gender, sexual orientation and other questions related to the dependent variables- sensation seeking, perceived social discrimination and self-esteem. Few questions were relevant only to homosexual individuals like questions about coming out or support from friends or family in context of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Research Design

The design of the study was Quantitative Research Method. The research had a descriptive research design with comparative and correlational approach.

Procedure

The study employed non-probability sampling method in which purposive/judgemental and snowball sampling technique were used for selection of sample. For data collection, survey research method was employed using questionnaires of the research tools. The researcher built a rapport with the participants and explained the objectives of the study, then the survey questionnaire was circulated. The data was collected by meeting the participants in person along with circulating Google forms on various social media platforms.

Data Analysis

The research employed SPSS software for quantitative data analysis. The hypotheses were examined through inferential statistics tests, utilizing an Independent samples t-test to determine the significance of the differences between the samples. Along with this, Pearson's product moment correlation analysis was used to determine the degree of correlation between the variables.

RESULT

Examining the gender differences and association between variables was the main goal of the quantitative analysis method used to examine the data gathered for this study. These statistical methods addressed the goals of the study by facilitating finding significant differences and correlation.

Independent Samples t-test

Hypothesis 1 ($H_0$1). There will be no significant difference in Sensation Seeking between homosexual and heterosexual individuals.

Table 1 Gender Differences in Sensation Seeking (N=106)

Variable	**Heterosexual Individuals**		**Homosexual Individuals**		**t-value**
	N= 53		N= 53		
	Variable	SD	Mean	SD	
Sensation Seeking	17.83	5.584	18.09	5.100	0.254 ^{ns}

Note: * = p< 0.05, ** = p< 0.01, ns = not significant

Hypothesis (H1). Homosexual individuals will have higher Perceived Social Discrimination compared to heterosexual individuals.

Table 2 Gender Differences in Perceived Social Discrimination (N=106)

Variable	**Heterosexual Individuals**		**Homosexual Individuals**		**t-value**
	N= 53		N= 53		
	Variable	SD	Mean	SD	
Perceived Social Discrimination	19.02	5.669	22.00	7.959	2.221*

Note: * = p< 0.05, ** = p< 0.01, ns = not significant

Hypothesis 3 (H3). There will be a significant difference in Self-Esteem among homosexual and heterosexual individuals.

Table 3 Gender Differences in Self-Esteem (N=106)

Variable	Heterosexual Individuals		Homosexual Individuals		t-value
	N= 53		N= 53		
	Variable	SD	Mean	SD	
Self-Esteem	18.75	4.795	22.43	5.733	3.584**

Note: * = p< 0.05, ** = p< 0.01, ns = not significant

Pearson's Product Moment Correlation

Hypothesis 4 ($H_0$2). There will be no significant relation between Sensation Seeking and Perceived Social Discrimination among homosexual and heterosexual individuals.

Table 4 Product moment Correlation coefficient of Sensation Seeking and Perceived Social Discrimination

	Perceived Social Discrimination
Sensation Seeking	0.112^{ns}

Note: * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, ns = not significant

Hypothesis 5 ($H_0$3). There will be no significant relation between Sensation Seeking and Self-Esteem among homosexual and heterosexual individuals.

Table 5 Product moment Correlation coefficient of Sensation Seeking and Self-Esteem

	Self-Esteem
Sensation Seeking	0.003^{ns}

Note: * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, ns = not significant

Hypothesis 6 (H3). There will be significant correlation between Perceived Social Discrimination and Self-Esteem among homosexual and heterosexual individuals.

Table 6 Product moment Correlation coefficient of Perceived Social Discrimination and Self-Esteem

	Self-Esteem
Perceived Social Discrimination	0.474**

Note: * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, ns = not significant

DISCUSSION

The main goal of the current study was to investigate how homosexual and heterosexual people differed and related to sensation seeking, perceived social discrimination, and self-esteem. The study aimed to shed light on these psychological constructs in order to better understand the emotional and social difficulties that sexual minorities encounter, as well as the ways in which these difficulties interact with personality traits and self-perception.

The results supported all the proposed hypotheses. Firstly, in alignment with Hypothesis 1, the finding suggests that sexual orientation does not inherently influence an individual's tendency toward seeking novel and thrilling experiences. This outcome is consistent with

prior research indicating that sensation seeking is a broadly distributed personality trait, relatively independent of variables like sexual orientation (Zuckerman, 2007). The acceptance of this hypothesis underscores the importance of avoiding stereotypes that associate certain personality traits with specific sexual orientations.

Perceived social discrimination was substantially higher among homosexual individuals than heterosexual individuals, which is consistent with Hypothesis 2. This finding draws attention to the social difficulties that sexual minorities still encounter in a variety of cultural settings. Sexual orientation discrimination is still common and affects people's daily lives, even though it is becoming more accepted in some areas. The results of the current study are further supported by earlier research that also found higher levels of discrimination experienced by homosexual populations (Herek, 2009; Meyer, 2003).

Hypothesis 3 proposed that there would be a significant difference in Self-Esteem between homosexual and heterosexual individuals, and the results confirmed this assumption. Self-Esteem was found to differ significantly, with homosexual individuals generally reporting lower levels compared heterosexual individuals. This finding can be interpreted through the lens of minority stress theory, which posits that chronic social stressors, such as discrimination and internalized stigma, negatively affect the mental health and self-worth of minority group members (Meyer, 2003).

Interestingly, in relation to Hypothesis 4, the study found no significant relationship between Sensation Seeking and Perceived Social Discrimination among both homosexual and heterosexual individuals. This suggests that an individual's inclination towards adventurous or risk-taking behaviour does not necessarily buffer or amplify their experience of discrimination. Similarly, Hypothesis 5 was supported, indicating no significant relationship between Sensation Seeking and Self-Esteem. These results imply that while sensation seeking is a meaningful aspect of personality, it operates largely independently of the social and self-perceptual variables explored in this study.

Finally, Hypothesis 6 proposed a significant correlation between Perceived Social Discrimination and Self-Esteem, and the data indeed supported this relationship. As perceived social discrimination increased, self-esteem levels tended to decrease among both homosexual and heterosexual individuals. This finding reinforces existing literature that links experiences of marginalization and prejudice to diminished psychological well-being (Pascoe & Richman, 2009).

An interesting additional finding from the personal data sheet was that homosexual individuals who had disclosed their sexual orientation ("came out") to their family members exhibited better self-esteem compared to those who remained closeted, even when they reported facing considerable discrimination. This highlights the protective role of authenticity and familial support in the mental health of sexual minorities. Previous research also supports this observation; studies by Rosario, Schrimshaw, and Hunter (2009) emphasized that coming out is associated with improved psychological outcomes, despite the potential risk of encountering negative reactions. Being open about one's identity seems to foster a stronger sense of self and resilience, perhaps by reducing the internal conflict and stress associated with hiding one's true self.

Overall, the findings of this research have important implications for both psychological theory and practical interventions. They emphasize the persistent societal challenges faced by homosexual individuals and highlight the crucial role of acceptance in both personal and social settings in fostering positive self-esteem. Mental health practitioners working with sexual minority clients should consider addressing issues related to discrimination and internalized stigma, while also encouraging strategies that promote self-acceptance and authentic living. This study adds to the growing body of evidence regarding the psychological experiences of sexual minorities, emphasizing both the risks posed by social discrimination and the resilience that can emerge through self-acceptance and supportive relationships.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to deepen the understanding of Sensation Seeking, Perceived Social Discrimination, and Self-Esteem among homosexual and heterosexual individuals. The findings provide valuable insights into the psychological experiences within these groups while highlighting areas where disparities persist. Overall, the study emphasizes the continuing impact of social discrimination on mental health and underscores the importance of societal acceptance and support systems in fostering positive self-esteem and well-being. Although the research adds meaningfully to existing literature, it also opens avenues for further exploration with broader, more representative samples. There remains a pressing need for continued efforts toward inclusivity, awareness, and empowerment of diverse identities within society.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the valuable insights gained from the study, several limitations must be acknowledged.

1. Firstly, the sample size was relatively small, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. A larger sample size would have allowed for more robust statistical analyses and stronger conclusions.
2. Additionally, the study was geographically restricted to participants from Pune and Mumbai. Although these cities are diverse and relatively progressive, regional cultural variations across India could significantly affect experiences of discrimination, sensation seeking, and self-esteem. Therefore, findings from this study might not fully represent individuals from rural areas or smaller cities.
3. Another important limitation was the composition of the sample. Participants included both individuals who were openly homosexual and those who were not, introducing potential variability in reported experiences of discrimination and self-esteem that the study did not specifically control for. This heterogeneity could have affected the outcomes and masked more nuanced patterns within the data.
4. Furthermore, the study did not equally represent the full LGBTQIA+ spectrum. Some identities, such as transgender, non-binary, and asexual individuals, were underrepresented, limiting the scope of conclusions that can be drawn about the broader LGBTQIA+ community.
5. Finally, all data collected were self-reported, which may be influenced by social desirability bias or inaccurate self-assessment. Future research should address these limitations by including a larger, more diverse, and geographically widespread sample, ensuring balanced representation across the LGBTQIA+ spectrum, and potentially incorporating qualitative methods to gain deeper insights.

Implications for Future Study

The findings of this study have significant implications for both research and societal interventions.

1. Firstly, there is an urgent need for initiatives that promote inclusivity and reduce discrimination. Awareness programs, particularly in educational institutions, can play a critical role in shaping young minds toward acceptance and understanding of sexual diversity. Incorporating LGBTQIA+ topics into school curriculums and conducting sensitivity training for students and teachers can foster more supportive environments for sexual minority youth.
2. Moreover, interventions specifically targeting the enhancement of Self-Esteem among homosexual individuals are essential. Mental health programs can be developed to equip individuals with adaptive coping strategies to combat discrimination and to reinforce self-worth. Addressing societal biases and creating safer spaces both socially and legally will further support the psychological well-being of these individuals.
3. Another important implication concerns sensation seeking. While no direct relationships were found in this study, adaptive avenues for sensation seeking, such as involvement in creative, athletic, or adventurous pursuits, can be promoted to provide fulfilling experiences that do not expose individuals to additional social risks. Future research could explore different components of Sensation Seeking (such as thrill and adventure seeking, experience seeking, disinhibition, and boredom susceptibility) to understand more deeply how these aspects may interact with identity formation and psychological resilience.
4. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking changes over time could offer richer insights into how coming out, social support, and discrimination experiences evolve and affect mental health.
5. Expanding research to include the full range of LGBTQIA+ identities and their unique experiences is crucial. Further studies on larger and more diverse samples, encompassing different age groups, socio-economic statuses, and cultural backgrounds, will build a more complete picture of the factors affecting sensation seeking, discrimination, and self-esteem.

In conclusion, this research underscores the profound impact that societal acceptance, familial support, and inclusive environments can have on the well-being of sexual minority individuals. It calls for ongoing efforts both academic and social to create a world where every individual, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, can thrive with dignity and pride.

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Conflict of Interest

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