

SELF CONCEPT AND PERSONALITY CORRELATES AMONGST HOMOSEXUALS: THE INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

SAHA, S.

Assistant Professor, and M.A. Psychology (Gold Medalist); Department of Psychology, National P.G. College,
Lucknow, India.

Correspondence: snehasaha1990@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

People do what they do because of certain singularities or characteristics of their psychological profile and their profiles are only accurate to the extent that they enable us predict what they will do. It was the primary aim of the present study to explore self concept and personality correlates amongst homosexuals. It was hypothesized that there will be high scores in negative physical and psychological self concept. It was also hypothesized that no significant relationship will be seen in self concept and personality. Sample size of this study was 30 MSM (Men who have sex with men) within the age group of 18-40. Calculation of the study was based on Pearson r correlation method. Results yielded clear support for the hypotheses of this study. Though the scores indicated positive correlation, no significant correlation was found between self concept and personality; and there were high scores in negative physical and psychological self concept. Non verbal observation from conduction setting also supports the findings of the study.

Keywords: *Personality, Self Concept, Homosexuals, India*

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INTRODUCTION

Self-concept and personality has always been a much discussed topic in psychology. Years-long researches have yielded various results on both components over different sets of populations. While *Self- concept* is defined as “perception of self,” *Personality* is defined as the “unique psycho-physiological traits one possesses”. Personality also refers to the pattern of thoughts, feelings, social adjustments, and behaviors consistently exhibited over time that strongly influences one’s expectations, self-perceptions, values, and attitudes. It also predicts human reactions to other people, problems, and stress (Winnie and Gittinger, 1973; Krauskopf and Saunders, 1994).

Yet, considering the tremendous amount of researches on self-concept and personality, it is surprising to find that the number of researches related to self-concept and personality amongst homosexuals is relatively limited.

Although, homosexuals have been considered at a very small level in India, mostly because of the misconceptions about them, it is slowly gaining ground around Indian psychology. More so, with the liberation for homosexuality at its new height in India, researchers are now trying to view homosexuals on empirically generated results rather than old stereotyped perceptions.

In addition, *Self concept* and *Personality* are part of a homosexual’s identity in the same way as it is for heterosexuals. Yet, the literature shows that there is dearth of research in this regard, but interestingly, the study of psychology is spreading in all fields of life and in a vast manner. This vast approach has helped to view various stereotyped topics in a new light; including homosexuality. Even the America Psychological Association (APA) had originally thought that homosexuality is a mental disorder (APA 2009), but researches into the causes, origins, and development of homosexuality, have consequently led to its removal from APA’s list of disorders and diagnoses (Glassgold, 2013).

According to Merriam Webster (2011), *homosexual* is defined “as of, relating to, or characterized by a tendency to direct sexual desire toward another of the same gender”. On the other hand, APA defined *Sexual Orientation* as “an enduring emotional, romantic, sexual, or affectionate attraction towards others” (APA 2009). The APA asserts that one’s sexual orientation is not adopted via individual’s choice, but rather develops as a result of “cognitive and biological factors” as well as by interacting with the surrounding environment.

Nevertheless, three broad categories have been identified within the spectrum of sexual orientation, and these include *heterosexuality*, *homosexuality* and *bisexuality*.

Self-Concept in Relation to homosexuality

A homosexual's identity is a perception of self as homosexual in relation to romantic or sexual situations. *A perception of self as homosexual is an attitude, a potential line of action toward self and others, that is mobilized in settings (imagined or real) defined as sexual or romantic* (Trolden, 1989). Depending upon the context, the homosexual identity may function as self-identity, a perceived identity, a presented identity or all three (Cass, 1983/1984) (Gilbert, 1989). Homosexual self concept evolves out of a clustering of self images which are linked together by the individual's idiosyncratic understanding of what characterizes someone as a "homosexual". This understanding develops out of an integration of the individual's unique interpretation of socially prescribed notions and self developed formulations. Early stages of homosexual self concept development usually involve cognitive processing of self information against a symbolically held image of the "generalized other". Development of a fully integrated self concept, however, requires more direct communication with others.

Personality is the set of psychological traits and mechanisms within the individual that are organized and relatively enduring and that influence his or her interactions with, and adaptations to, the intrapsychic, physical and social environments (Larsen and Buss, 2005). Personality also refers to individual differences in characteristics patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving.

Personality Traits of homosexuals

It is personality traits rather than cognitive skills that first come to mind when distinction of homosexuals from heterosexuals are asked for. A homosexual personality is neither the result of bad environment or undue mother attachment. The true homosexual processes certain identifying and consistent traits which clearly differentiate him from other personalities with which he has been classified. In 2005, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) ran an internet-based survey that asked respondents (half a million) to classify themselves as heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual (LeVay, 2011). It also asked them to assess their own masculinity or femininity on a seven point scale. The results showed that gay and bisexual men assessed themselves (on average) as far more feminine as did straight men,

gay and bisexual women assessed themselves as far more masculine than did heterosexual women (LeVay, 2011). In other word, homosexuality and bisexuality are associated with a very robust and significant shift in self-perceived masculinity-femininity toward the other sex, but not with a complete "gender inversion".

METHODOLOGY

Study Area: The sample of this study was extracted from an organization working for men's sexual rights and aids awareness. These participants are actively part of awareness programs conducted all over India.

Sample: A total number of 30 individuals (aged 18-40) participated in this study. The sample was part of Maan foundation and Bharosa.

Data Collection: Below, instruments used in the present study are presented and their overview is explained briefly.

(a) Self concept scale: A self concept rating scale, developed by Dr. Muktarani Rastogi, was used to assess the self-concept of the participants. Two scales -one consisting of 15 adjectives to measure psychological self-concept and the other comprising of 10 adjectives for measuring physical self-concept were used. The lists of adjectives were presented with 7-point rating scale; where rating 1= most like me, rating 2= quite like me, rating 3= moderately (somewhat) like me, rating 4= undecided, rating 5= moderately (somewhat) unlike me, rating 6= quite unlike me, rating 7= most unlike me. Against each adjective, participants were asked to put a tick on the rating which described them the best for given adjective.

(b) Eysenck's personality questionnaire-revised (EPQ-R): Eysenck's personality questionnaire-revised (Eysenck et al., 1985) was used to assess the personality traits of the participants. The questionnaire consisted of 90 items, covering three major dimensions of personality- psychoticism, neuroticism, and extraversion and containing a lie scale. The reliability results of E.P.Q.-R are quite favorable, with reliabilities mostly lying in the .80 to .90 region. The E.P.Q.-R has established validity. Participants were asked to answer each question by putting (x) mark in the box following "yes" or "no" for each statement.

Data analysis: The research methodology is quantitative, consisting of numerical information in the form of scores that were obtained from different

tests. The research strategy used is correlational, since relationships between different variables were investigated.

RESULT

The results support the sets of hypotheses that guided the empirical part of this study. It was found that the sample scored high in negative physical and

psychological self concept, but there were no correlation between self concept and personality. The results also presented an insignificant correlation among all the clusters of self concept and personality; with the subjects scoring highest in negative psychological self concept, but the scores of psychoticism dominated those of personality.

Result. Tabular representation of correlation data

Correlation among	Obtained value of correlation	Value of significance on .01	Value of significance on .05
Positive physical self concept and psychoticism	0.23	.4226	.4629
Negative physical self concept and psychoticism	0.11	.4226	.4629
Positive psychological self concept and psychoticism	0.22	.4226	.4629
Negative psychological self concept and psychoticism	0.16	.4226	.4629
Positive physical self concept and extroversion	0.22	.4226	.4629
Negative physical self concept and extroversion	0.28	.4226	.4629
Positive psychological self concept and extroversion	0.14	.4226	.4629
Negative psychological self concept and extroversion	0.18	.4226	.4629
Positive physical self concept and neuroticism	0.10	.4226	.4629
Negative physical self concept and neuroticism	0.14	.4226	.4629
Positive psychological self concept and neuroticism	0.006	.4226	.4629
Negative psychological self concept and neuroticism	0.08	.4226	.4629

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study was to explore self concept and personality correlates among homosexuals. Specifically, a perception of self as *homosexual* is an attitude, a potential line of action toward self and others that is mobilized in settings (imagined or real) and defined as *sexual* or *romantic*. Depending upon the context, the homosexual identity may function as self-identity, a perceived identity, a presented identity or all three (Cass, 1983/1984).

It is personality traits rather than cognitive skills that first come to mind when drawing distinctions between homosexuals and heterosexuals. A homosexual personality is neither the result of bad environment nor undue mother attachment. The true homosexual processes certain identifying and consistent traits which clearly differentiate him from other personalities with which he has been classified.

Obviously, from the review of the literature, two sets of hypotheses emerged and these guided the empirical part of this study. First, there will be high scores in negative physical self concept, and second, there is no significant correlation among self concept and personality.

Self concept was measured in two main clusters of physical and psychological self concept; these main clusters had further been bifurcated into two themes each, positive and negative. Four types of self concept were measured in this study: positive physical self concept, negative physical self concept, positive psychological self concept and negative psychological self concept. Personality was measured in three main clusters based on Eysenck’s theory of personality: psychoticism, extroversion and neuroticism. As indicated earlier, the results showed insignificant correlation among all the clusters of self concept and personality.

The observation that the subjects scored highest in negative psychological self concept, clearly indicates the influence of psycho-social factors on their self concept. Of course, the scores of psychoticism dominated the scores of personality. They can be characterized as impersonal, creative, tough-minded and unempathetic.

Much of our self concept is formulated by behavior patterns that are witnessed and experiences rather than by discussion and reading. Certainly, there is no point in denying that our self concept as humans is extricable tied to the idea that there are female and male human beings.

The perception of homosexuals by the relatively “normal” population, as “different and strange”, results in low self concept in them. They perceive themselves as different from the world in a bad way and this hampers their self-concept. These results in negative self concept at both physical and psychological level as the present study results indicate.

The result of this study may indicate the influence of society’s perception and mindset on the sample’s self concept. The high negative self concepts both at physical and psychological level among homosexuals can be a result of society’s stereotyped perception, which affects their perception of self in a negative way. The results also indicated that there were no significant correlation between self concept and personality. Self concept and personality are independent entities in the sample population. Similarly, personality traits of psychoticism, extroversion and neuroticism had no relationship with physical and psychological self concept.

Since the sample was extracted from an organization which works for the liberation of homosexuality, interacting with peers and other significant organizations comes as a routine to them. It can be said therefore, that this exposure can be a huge influence to the personality of the sample population. In addition, personality can be masked to be desirable and accepted in the society, but the society’s rejection and stereotyped perception can influence the self concept negatively.

Surely, the results of this study are insightful and are parallel to the existing researches in this field. However, sample participation should be increased for future reference to this topic to yield elaborate and extensive research findings.

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AUTHOR(S) CONTRIBUTION

Saha Sneha conducted the literature search and wrote all aspects of this article.