

How Gender and Sexuality Stereotypes Influence The Psychological Well-Being of Transgender (Lgbtqia++) Individuals

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Abstract

This research paper explores the evolving perceptions of gender and sexuality within Indian society, contrasting contemporary views with ancient cultural understandings that embraced diverse sexual identities. It highlights the historical acceptance of various sexual orientations and gender expressions, as reflected in texts such as the "Kama Sutra," which celebrated sexual diversity. However, the paper notes a significant shift in societal attitudes driven by self-serving ideologies, leading to the stigmatization and misunderstanding of LGBTQIA++ identities, particularly within the transgender community. This stigma fosters misconceptions that erroneously link biological sex with gender identity and sexual orientation, contributing to discrimination and mental health issues among transgender individuals. The discussion outlines the myriad challenges faced by these individuals, including family rejection, social ostracism, and a lack of access to essential services, which collectively result in profound psychological distress and social marginalization. The research argues for a societal transformation towards the acceptance of all gender identities, emphasizing the need for education and awareness to combat ignorance and prejudice. By fostering inclusivity and understanding, it asserts that we can improve the mental health and well-being of transgender individuals, thereby enriching the fabric of society as a whole.

Keywords: Gender Identity, Sexuality, LGBTQIA++, Transgender Community, Misconceptions, Stigmatization, Psychological Distress, Acceptance of Diversity, Societal Transformation

BACKGROUND OF THE TOPIC

In the 20th and 21st centuries, Indian society's cultural picture appears to diverge from, or at times be obscured by, the ancient and mythological views of society and morality. Morality in ancient human societies reflected a holistic blend of biological, chemical, medical, psychological, philosophical, and religious customs and lifestyles grounded in reality.

Almost all religions, including Hinduism, have traditionally expressed high regard and straightforward acceptance of various forms of sexuality and sexual practices. Ancient Hindu mythological literature includes references that challenge and intrigue contemporary mindsets. The "Kama Sutra," a treatise on sexual behavior, delves into even the smallest nuances of sexuality and intimacy, presenting an understanding that is now unfortunately distorted by the influence of pornography, which provides the current generation with a flawed and poor-quality representation of sexuality.

According to ancient literature, it appears that society at that time accepted various forms of sexuality, gender differences, and sexual behaviors in a very natural manner. Terms like homosexuality, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and other identities were recognized and integrated into society with respect. This acceptance acknowledged their unique place and existence within society.

INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC

As human society evolved, self-serving ideologies began to infiltrate, leading to discrimination based on religion and caste. Society was further divided into economic, religious, caste, geographical, and gender-based categories, which fragmented it. With advancements in science, a wave of modernization swept over, introducing a game of knowledge, technology, and ignorance. During this period, rapid global, political, scientific, and technological changes occurred, and developing countries struggled to keep up, especially a country like India, which was under foreign rule for many years. These shifts caused significant upheavals in Indian society's religious, caste-based, social, economic, mental, and moral thought processes. This turmoil left a lasting impact, as society clung to a facade of modernization while maintaining rigid religious practices, traditional customs, and superficial approaches to higher education. Instead of fostering the true development of intellectual, mental, and moral values, society adopted a formal, commercial, and self-centered approach, similar to science and technology. Maintaining one's place in society required conforming to religious norms and submitting to accepted practices. This led to a deliberate disregard for the natural form, diversity, and needs of the human body, including gender diversity, sexuality, and sexual behaviors, all of which were confined within rigid societal norms.

As a result, today's generation is often forced to gather information about sex and view related images and videos secretly, as if committing a crime. They perceive sexual acts as something mysterious, suppressing their questions about sexuality and gender diversity—topics that were openly accepted in ancient society. Now, simply discussing these subjects can be considered taboo, and there is a palpable fear of being excluded, isolated, or subjected to verbal, physical, or sexual abuse.

INTRODUCTION:

It is commonly observed that there is considerable confusion among people regarding fundamental concepts like biological sex, gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Open discussion, reading, or even understanding these topics is often avoided, leading to many misconceptions.

Misconceptions About the LGBTQIA++ (Transgender and Gender Diverse) Community:

Misunderstandings stemming from social stigma and moral pressure around gender, sexuality, and sexual relationships are briefly outlined as follows:

1. A person's sexual orientation is solely determined by their biological sex (genitalia) at birth.
2. Only male and female genders exist.
3. Sexual attraction should, or must, always be toward the opposite sex.
4. Gender identity and sexual orientation must align with one's biological sex organs.
5. Transgender identity is simply an act; it does not truly exist.
6. Being transgender is a choice.
7. A boy acts feminine because he is surrounded by women, so transgender behavior is merely a habit.
8. Transgender identity is a behavior that can be changed through strict discipline or punishment.
9. Being transgender is caused by brain disorders or certain medications.
10. Transgender people act as they do to escape responsibilities, avoid work, or seek attention.

11. Once they find the right partner, take on responsibility, have children, or gain life experience, they will forget about their transgender behavior.
12. Transgender identity is a mental illness, and they are unaware of societal norms.
13. These people are deviant and sexually abnormal.
14. Being transgender is a serious disease.
15. Transgender identity is contagious, like an infection, and can spread to others through proximity or sexual contact.
16. Transgender identity is an imitation of Western culture.
17. Transgender identity is an addiction, and they are addicts.
18. This community is dangerous to mainstream society and engages in anti-social acts.
19. They are criminals and violent by nature, prone to aggression.
20. Allowing them into regular schools will corrupt other children.
21. Their intellectual capacity is lower; they have impairments and cannot study, work, or pursue careers.
22. They are strange or different and should not be integrated into normal society, educated, given rights, or hired. They should not be allowed in public spaces, events, or celebrations.
23. They have no right to seek justice, so exploiting them is not wrong.
24. They are sinners and have been born this way as a consequence.
25. They have been reincarnated this way due to bad deeds in a previous life.
26. Someone has cast a spell or done black magic on them, causing this behavior.
27. They are possessed by evil spirits or have been overtaken by dark forces.
28. Someone has cast the evil eye on them.
29. They might have been poisoned by someone.
30. They are cursed by deities or gods.
31. Being transgender is a temporary phase and will pass, eventually curing them.
32. With the right medication, this can be cured; sexual orientation can change with drugs.
33. Gender changes with hormone medications or injections.
34. All LGBTQIA++ individuals can undergo surgery without exception.
35. They are a curse on their family or society.
36. With psychiatric medication or shock treatment, they will forget their gender identity and become "normal."

Beyond these, there are numerous other misconceptions due to a lack of anatomical, medical, or psychological understanding.

SOME BASIC CONCEPTS EXPLAINED BRIEFLY:

1. **Sex (Biological Sex)** - When a baby is born, a label of either "male" or "female" is assigned based on anatomical features, gonads, and chromosomal makeup. This label, which also appears on the birth certificate, is typically based on genitalia. However, terms like "assigned male at birth" or "assigned female at birth" are sometimes preferred, as "biological sex" may not fully capture the complexity of a person's identity.
2. **Gender** - Gender is a more complex concept that represents a person's social and legal status within a society. Typically categorized as masculine (male) or feminine (female), gender denotes societal roles, characteristics, and behaviors expected from each gender within a cultural context. These roles can vary across societies and are guided by cultural norms and expectations.

3. **Gender Identity** - Gender identity is based on an individual's internal experience of their own gender. A person may feel that they are female, male, both, neither, or something different, and this internal sense of identity shapes how they behave, speak, dress, and present themselves. Gender identity is self-determined and is unique to each individual.

Understanding these foundational concepts is essential for a clearer comprehension of other related terms, such as intersex (individuals born with atypical sexual anatomy) and sex reassignment surgery (SRS).

These ideas of biological sex and gender lead to further, more nuanced terms and distinctions:

Additional Gender-Related Concepts:

1. **Agender** - A person who identifies as neither male nor female.
2. **Cisgender** - A person whose gender identity aligns with the sex assigned to them at birth.
3. **Transgender** - A person whose gender identity differs from their biological sex.

These terms highlight differences between gender and gender identity. The following terms add more layers and distinctions:

1. **Pangender** - Individuals who experience multiple or countless gender identities.
2. **Genderqueer** - A person whose gender identity is neither exclusively male nor female but may exist somewhere in between.
3. **Gender Fluid** - Individuals whose gender identity shifts over time or depending on circumstances. For some, this may mean changes in behavior rather than identity; for others, both identity and behavior may vary.
4. **Gender Dysphoria** - A term used to describe the intense distress that some individuals experience due to a mismatch between their biological sex and gender identity. For example, a male-assigned individual may feel a persistent desire to be recognized or treated as female.

Other terms like **Transsexual**, **Non-binary**, **Dead-naming**, and **She-male** are also becoming more widely recognized in discussions around gender identity and understanding.

In addition to these concepts, key terms related to sexuality are as follows:

1. **Sexuality / Sexual Orientation** - This concept encompasses an individual's sexual feelings, thoughts, attractions (both physical and emotional), and behaviors, which may be directed toward the same gender, opposite gender, multiple genders, all genders, or no gender at all.

Based on one's sexual orientation, the following classifications are often observed:

1. **Asexual** - An individual who does not feel sexual attraction toward any gender.
2. **Bisexual** - An individual who is attracted to both men and women. This may vary in degree.
3. **Heterosexual / Straight** - An individual who feels sexual attraction toward the opposite gender.
4. **Homosexual / Gay** - A male individual who feels sexual attraction toward other men.
5. **Lesbian** - A female individual who feels sexual attraction exclusively toward other women.
6. **Butch Lesbian** - A woman who may adopt traditionally masculine behaviors but has sexual attraction solely toward women. Her gender identity remains female.
7. **Femme Lesbian** - A woman who presents in a traditionally feminine manner and is attracted only to other women.
8. **Pansexual** - Also known as "gender-blind," a pansexual person feels sexual attraction toward individuals of all genders.

Based on these definitions, the LGBTQIA++ spectrum is represented as follows:

- **L** - Lesbian
- **G** - Gay

- **B** - Bisexual
- **T** - Transgender
- **Q** - Queer
- **I** - Intersex
- **A** - Asexual
- **+** - Represents additional identities

DISCUSSION:

Due to widespread misconceptions about the LGBTQIA++ community, individuals within this group often face numerous challenges from a young age. Family and social pressures, along with societal stigma, lead many LGBTQIA++ individuals to experience confusion, helplessness, and distress in their personal lives. They commonly encounter exclusion, discrimination, emotional and physical abuse, and even sexual exploitation. Many endure shame, violence, alienation, and exploitation, often resulting in them being ostracized or shunned. These factors create a host of issues for people within the transgender community, impacting their ability to lead a normal life.

PROBLEMS FACED BY TRANSGENDER INDIVIDUALS DUE TO MISCONCEPTIONS			
	Family Issues	Social Issues	Personal Issues
Family Abuse	Family abuse	Social discrimination	Exclusion from education
Neglect and Rejection	Rejection	Peer bullying	Isolation from family and society
Discrimination and Abuse	Neglect	Sexual abuse	Lack of friendships
Harassment and Violence	Harassment	Physical abuse	Lack of support
Sexual Exploitation	Violence	Unemployment	Substance abuse
Exclusion and Ostracism	Sexual exploitation	Poverty	Unemployment
Sexual and Economic Exploitation	Discrimination	Neglect and exclusion	Financial difficulties
Media Representation as Perverse	Harassment	Marginalization in media portrayal	Homelessness
Lack of Access to Services	Humiliation	Mockery	Health issues
Ridicule and Exploitation	Sexual exploitation	Exploitation	Involvement in prostitution
Healthcare Access Denied	Financial exploitation	Denial of services	Engagement in criminal activities

Feeling of Loneliness	Mockery	Economic and sexual exploitation	Prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases
Awareness of Being Different	Exploitation	Ridicule	Emotional instability
Helplessness and Powerlessness	Lack of basic facilities	Bullying and discrimination	Sense of abandonment and hopelessness

Due to all the above problems, transgender individuals face numerous mental distress and issues:

1. Very low self-esteem
2. Depression
3. Anxiety disorders, especially social anxiety
4. Personality disorders
5. Low self-confidence
6. Addiction—substance abuse
7. Emotional and behavioral issues
8. Increased criminal tendencies and bad behavior
9. Self-harm or harm to others
10. Anti-social and disruptive behaviour
11. Suicidal tendencies
12. Begging or engaging in theft and violence
13. Unsafe sexual relationships
14. Increased tendency towards prostitution or selling of bodies
15. Eating disorders and other serious mental illnesses

Other societal elements have given the transgender community an extremely grotesque and distorted representation. Media, films, web series, and books have depicted transgender individuals in an exaggerated, cruel, and repulsive manner for entertainment purposes. This has led to the following concepts related to this community:

1. **Transphobia** - Fear or hatred of transgender individuals
2. **Homophobia** - Fear or hatred of gay or lesbian individuals
3. **Biphobia** - Fear or hatred of bisexual individuals

CONCLUSION:

Given the current situation, all gender identities need to be universally accepted according to their sexuality. This will not only reduce discrimination, injustice, and exploitation in society but also decrease mental health issues, crime, and addiction, thus improving the overall physical and mental health standards within society. There will be advancements in economic, educational, and professional fields, allowing all societal elements to experience a qualitative improvement in personal and social life.

With the initiative of the cisgender community, it will be easier for the transgender community to come out (to acknowledge their true sexual identity). Many individuals still cannot express themselves due to fear, pressure, embarrassment, or shame (often referred to as "closeted"). They will find a voice and gain social acceptance of their natural existence. Significant struggles still lie ahead. Nevertheless, on a global

scale, it is being acknowledged that transgenderism/homosexuality is normal. (In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association and in 1975, the American Psychological Association made changes to certain documents regarding this matter.)

Furthermore, to affirm that homosexuality is not a mental illness, in 2013, both DSM (5th Edition) and ICD-11 (WHO) removed homosexuality from the list of mental disorders. Today, many countries are beginning to recognize same-sex marriages, indicating that the LGBTQIA++ community is now being granted legal consent and safety. Moreover, due to advancements in the medical field, many medical facilities and resources are now available to the LGBTQIA+ community. Treatments ranging from mental health care to surgeries are accessible, allowing individuals from this community to integrate into mainstream society.

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