

Differences in Resistance to Change, Optimism and Perceived Social Support among individuals with different Sexual Orientations

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ABSTRACT

Background: A study was carried out to investigate differences in personality (resistance to change and state optimism) and perceived social support between heterosexual individuals and individuals with other sexual orientations.

Methodology: The data for the study was collected through a Google Form questionnaire. The snowball technique was used to collect the data for this study. The final sample for the study consisted of 120 participants (60 heterosexual participants and 60 participants with other sexual orientations- 40 homosexuals, and 20 bisexuals). There were 38 females and 22 males among the heterosexual participants. They were administered the Resistance to Change Scale, State Optimism Measure and Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. The results were statistically analysed and presented.

Results: No differences between the sexual orientations were observed on the resistance to change and optimism measures. Individuals with other sexual orientations received greater support from significant others and friends as compared to heterosexuals. However, none of the mean differences in the four dimensions of resistance to change and three dimensions of perceived social support were statistically significant

Conclusions: The study found no significant difference in resistance to change, state optimism and perceived social support between individuals with different sexual orientations. Further studies in larger samples are warranted.

Keywords: Sexual orientation, resistance to change, state optimism and perceived social support.

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INTRODUCTION

Sexual orientation has many a definition and each definition connects it to the preference of the partner. There are four types of sexual orientations: homosexuality, heterosexuality, bisexuality, and asexuality. Homosexuality means attraction toward people of the same gender, heterosexuality means attraction toward people of the opposite gender, bisexuality means attraction towards both females and males, and asexuality means having no sexual attraction but can get emotionally attached or attracted to people.

Research studies have explained sexual orientation to a wide variety of factors that include hormonal, genetic, social, cultural, and developmental. No conclusive evidence of any one factor that dominantly influences sexual orientation has been found.

Historically society has tagged homosexuals and bisexuals as criminals or psychotics or supreme threats to society. Many people believe that individuals with sexual orientations that are other than heterosexual, are abnormal or have some mental issues or are impure. Societal outlook toward the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, bisexual, transgender, and queers) community has resulted in their suppression of the real self and they are

fearful of coming out in the open about their sexual orientations. Smith, Cunningham and Freyd [1] found that LGB people as compared to heterosexual people showed higher rates of sexual harassment at work and less support from institutions, family and friends. They also reported higher levels of post-traumatic stress, depression and lower levels of self-esteem.

Sahni and others [2] found that people in India tend to have a negative implicit attitude towards homosexuals as a result of certain social norms. They also found that people who are in direct contact with homosexual individuals tend to have a positive implicit attitude than people who are not in direct contact with homosexual individuals. Anand [3] found that younger people tend to have a more positive attitude toward homosexuality as compared to older adults.

Sexual Orientation

There has been a scarcity of research on personality differences between heterosexual individuals and individuals with other sexual orientations. This is even more true in the Indian context. Allen and Robson [4] carried out a meta-analysis and found that men and women who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual tend to show different personality traits compared to those who are heterosexual, particularly among younger adults. Specifically, they found that there were differences across sexual orientations in the Big Five Personality Traits of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. They found that bisexual individuals reported higher levels of openness than homosexual individuals, who in turn, reported higher levels of openness than heterosexual individuals. Bisexual individuals also reported lower levels of conscientiousness than both heterosexual and homosexual individuals. Sex moderation effects were also found, homosexual men, scored higher than heterosexual men on neuroticism, agreeableness and conscientiousness, whereas homosexual women scored lower than heterosexual women on extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Personality differences across sexual orientation categories tend to decline with age. The researchers were unable to find any studies on differences between heterosexuals and individuals with other sexual orientations concerning resistance to change, optimism and perceived social support.

Resistance to Change

Oreg [5] has described resistance to change as an "individual's tendency to resist or avoid making changes, to devalue change generally, and to find change aversive across diverse contexts and types of change." There are four dimensions underlying resistance to change - routine seeking, emotional reaction, short-term focus and cognitive rigidity. He suggested that people differ from one another in their internal inclination to resist or adapt to changes irrespective of whether the change is voluntary or imposed. As resistance to change is conceptualized as a stable personality trait, people are less likely to voluntarily bring changes in their life. Besides, they are more likely to experience negative emotions such as anxiety, anger, and fear when changes are imposed upon them. When affect, behaviours and cognition are considered, a particularly strong link has been established between personality and affect [6-8]. Personality traits have often been considered fundamentally affective in nature [9-10]. Indeed, a strong component in the definition of the resistance to change personality trait of Oreg [5] involves individuals' emotional predispositions toward change.

State of Optimism

Trait optimism has been studied in terms of expectancies, where positive expectations of the future lead to goal attainment. Millstein and others [11] described optimism as "having generalized positive expectations about the future." Optimists tend to believe that life circumstances eventually work out for the better. Hence, they respond to life challenges and adversities with greater effort and flexibility. Optimism has been found to be associated with better physical and mental health [11].

Theoretically, one would expect hope and optimism to play an important role in the psychological health of LGB individuals, given the stigma-related stress they face. In support of this conceptualization, a qualitative study by Adams, Cahill and Ackerlind [12] found that Latino/Latina gay and lesbian youths were able to thrive in their career development despite experiences with prejudice and discrimination by maintaining a sense of independence and having a determination to overcome their occupational obstacles.

Kwon and Hugelshofer [13] found that hope buffered the negative effects of a negative workplace climate throughout the study. In short, hope and optimism have been established as resilience factors in the general population as well as for LGB individuals.

Perceived Social Support

Reber [14] defined social support as all forms of support provided by other individuals and groups that help an individual cope with life. Sarafino [15] defined social support “as the perceived comfort, caring, esteem, or help an individual receives from other people or groups.” Thus, social support means an individual’s perception of being respected, loved, accepted and supported by any social group or society.

Fingerhut [16] studied gay individuals on social support from friends and family. He found that individuals with more friend support experienced a little decrease in negative affect and those with less support experienced increases in negative affect.

Aim of the study

The objective of the present study was to investigate differences in personality traits between heterosexual individuals and individuals with other sexual orientations.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the study were:

1. To study differences in change resistance between heterosexual individuals and individuals with other sexual orientations.
2. To study differences in levels of optimism between heterosexual individuals and individuals with other sexual orientations.
3. To study differences in perceived social support between heterosexual individuals and individuals with other sexual orientations.

METHODOLOGY

Sample Selection: The data for the study was collected through a Google Form questionnaire. The snowball technique was used to collect the data for this study. The final sample for the study consisted of 120 participants (60 heterosexual participants and 60 participants with other sexual orientations- 40 homosexuals, and 20 bisexuals). There were 38 females and 22 males among the heterosexual participants. Of the 40 homosexual participants, 26 were females and 14 were males. There were 11 females and 9 males among the 20 bisexual participants. The average age for heterosexual participants was 19 years and for participants with other sexual orientations was 20 years.

Measuring Tools: The following psychometric instruments were used for the study:

- **Resistance to Change Scale:** Resistance to Change was measured with the scale developed by Shaul Oreg [5]. The scale is designed to measure an individual’s dispositional inclination to resist changes. The ‘Resistance to Change Scale’ is an 18-item scale that measures the major four underlying factors that result in a disposition to resist change. The four factors are (1) Routine Seeking, (2) Emotional Reaction to Imposed Change, (3) Short-Term Focus, and (4) Cognitive Rigidity. These factors reflect the behavioural, affective, and cognitive aspects of change resistance, respectively. The participants in the study had to check on each statement, indicating the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement (on a 5-point scale). The higher the score, the stronger the resistance to change. The reliability coefficient alpha (Cronbach’s) of the scale is 0.92. The scale has demonstrated good convergent, discriminant, concurrent and predictive validities.
- **State Optimism Measure:** The “State of Optimism Measure” is a 7-item scale developed by Rachel Millstein and others [11]. The scale has shown high internal reliability across samples (Cronbach’s alphas: 0.92–0.96), and strong convergent validity correlations in hypothesized directions.
- **Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS):** Perceived social support was measured using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) [17]. The MSPSS

is intended to measure the extent to which an individual perceives social support from three sources: Significant Others (SO), Family (FA), and Friends (FR). The MSPSS is a brief, easy-to-administer self-report questionnaire which contains twelve items rated on a five-point Likert-type scale with scores ranging from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (5). The MSPSS has proven to be psychometrically sound in diverse samples and to have good internal reliability and test-retest reliability, and robust factorial validity. Perceived Social Support Internal reliability ranged from 0.84 to 0.92 for the scale as a whole and the scale possesses adequate construct validity [17].

Hypotheses

The following three hypotheses were proposed and tested:

1. There is no significant difference in resistance to change between heterosexual individuals and individuals with other sexual orientations.
2. There is no significant difference in the levels of optimism between heterosexual individuals and individuals with other sexual orientations.
3. There is no significant difference in perceived social support between heterosexual individuals and individuals with other sexual orientations.

RESULTS

The data were first tested for normality and based on the outcome, parametric or nonparametric tests were applied. The findings of the study are given here below.

Table 1: Differences in Resistance to Change, Optimism and Perceived Social Support on account of Sexual Orientations

Variable	Sexual Orientations	Mean	SD	t-value
Resistance to Change	Heterosexuals (n 60)	54.1	8.44	0.509NS
	Other Sexual Orientations (n 60)	53.4	7.69	
Non Parametric Variables			Mann-Whitney-U	
Optimism	Heterosexuals (n 60)	26.3	4.65	1775NS
	Other Sexual Orientations (n 60)	26.5	4.84	
Perceived Social Support	Heterosexuals (n 60)	43.8	8.73	1524NS
	Other Sexual Orientations (n 60)	46.0	8.15	

Table 1 describes the mean and Standard deviation scores on resistance to change, state optimism and perceived social support of individuals with heterosexual orientations and individuals with other sexual orientations. The means indicate higher levels of resistance to change and lower levels of state optimism and perceived social support among heterosexual individuals as compared to individuals with other sexual orientations. However, the findings were not statistically significant (refer to Table 1), hence, the null hypothesis was retained.

Table 2 describes the mean and standard deviation scores on dimensions of resistance to change and dimensions of perceived social support among heterosexual individuals and individuals with other sexual orientations. The mean scores on all the four (routine seeking, cognitive rigidity, emotional reaction, short-term focus) dimensions of resistance to change were higher for heterosexuals than individuals with other sexual orientations. On the dimensions of perceived social support, the data shows greater support from family to heterosexuals as compared to individuals with other sexual orientations. Individuals with other sexual orientations received greater support from significant others and friends as compared to heterosexuals. However, none of the mean differences in the four dimensions of resistance to change and three dimensions of perceived social support were statistically significant (please refer to Table 2).

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present research was to investigate differences in personality (resistance to change and state optimism) and perceived social support between heterosexual individuals and individuals with other sexual orientations.

The study found that there was no significant difference between heterosexual individuals and individuals with other sexual orientations in all the three variables under investigation. There were also no significant differences between the two groups on the four dimensions of resistance to change and the three dimensions of perceived social support.

Table 2: Differences in different dimensions of resistance to change and perceived social support on account of Sexual Orientations

Variables	Sexual Orientations	Mean	SD	t-value
Dimensions of Resistance to Change				
Routine Seeking	Heterosexuals (n 60)	13.3	2.74	0.488 NS
	Other Sexual Orientations (n 60)	13.1	2.87	
Cognitive Rigidity	Heterosexuals (n 60)	15.5	3.08	0.187NS
	Other Sexual Orientations (n 60)	15.4	2.78	
Non Parametric Variables		Mann-Whitney U		
Emotional Reaction	Heterosexuals (n 60)	13.1	2.96	1743NS
	Other Sexual Orientations (n 60)	12.9	2.78	
Short Term Focus	Heterosexuals (n 60)	12.3	2.93	1737NS
	Other Sexual Orientations (n 60)	12.0	3.29	
Dimensions of Perceived Social Support				
Significant Others	Heterosexuals (n 60)	13.9	4.44	1462 NS
	Other Sexual Orientations (n 60)	15.4	3.45	
Family	Heterosexuals (n 60)	15.1	2.90	1691 NS
	Other Sexual Orientations (n 60)	14.5	3.79	
Friends	Heterosexuals (n 60)	14.8	3.92	1474 NS
	Other Sexual Orientations (n 60)	16.1	2.98	

Although there are many studies on people with other sexual orientations, the number of studies on differences between individuals with heterosexual orientation and individuals with other sexual orientations is relatively few. The researchers did not come across any study on the variables under investigation in the current study. Thus, the interpretations of the findings of the current study are in the light of this research context.

One reason for the lack of significant difference between individuals with different sexual orientations could be due to the characteristics of the participants in the present study. All data in the study was collected online and the questionnaires were in the English language. The participants were all very young urban Indians living in India's most populous metropolitan city, Mumbai. Thus, participants in the study were by and large reasonably tech-savvy, literate, educated individuals belonging to social strata that were more liberal, and progressive and lived in a social environment that is different from the one in which the majority of the Indian live. Thus, the context of the participants in the study might have influenced their responses. It is likely that individuals with other sexual orientations have come to terms with their sexual orientations and hence are more comfortable with themselves. The same may be said of the people around individuals with other sexual orientations who have accepted them and hence there was no significant difference in the perceived social support of individuals with heterosexual orientation and those with other sexual orientations. The relatively small sample size might have also had an impact on the findings of the present study.

Implications of the study

This study is an attempt to develop a better understanding of individuals with different sexual orientations in the Indian context. Although no significant difference was found between heterosexual individuals and individuals with other sexual orientations, in the different variables under investigation; the researchers believe that this finding itself is a revelation. The common belief that people with other sexual orientations are very different from those with heterosexual orientation may perhaps be an exaggeration. This study will hopefully generate curiosity and interest among other researchers to investigate differences between individuals with varied sexual orientations.

Besides the small sample size, the data for the present study was collected through self-report measures. Self-report measures often elicit socially desirable responses. That is participants may respond in a socially desirable way or fake their responses.

The study found no significant difference on resistance to change, state optimism and perceived social support between individuals with different sexual orientations.

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