



# A Gap Analysis of the Perception of College Teachers and Students towards the LGBT Community

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## Abstract

This work explores the gap between the attitude of college teachers and students towards The LGBT community. There have been various studies on the topics related to homosexuality and The LGBT community exposing the double standards of society and highlighting the pitiable condition of homosexuals in India and other countries. This study, however, studies the perception of teachers towards the issue since teachers are the ones who are responsible to impart education and understanding to the youngsters. The comparative empirical study was conducted on 120 respondents including 85 students and 35 teachers. The teachers' perception has been compared to the perception of the young students to explore the gap. It was found that the attitude of the teachers was quite positive whereas that of students was more towards neutrality. The difference between the attitude of teachers and students was found to be significant.

**Disciplinary:** Gender & Sexuality Studies (LGBTQ), Social Sciences & Engineering, Education, Religion & Belief.

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## 1 Introduction

Education plays an important role in nation-building. Homosexuality is considered a taboo and social stigma. Topics related to sexual identity, same-sex marriages, and giving equal rights to LGBT are still out of the discussion in the public domain. People in society still do not openly discuss such topics. Decriminalizing section 377 has not been able to eradicate the stereotyped notion of the people about homosexuality. Same-sex marriages are still not allowed in society. Same-sex people are still living on the fringes of society and facing day-to-day challenges when it comes to earning a living, getting acceptance in society, and getting legal rights. Though Gender

studies have really helped to create awareness amongst students and teachers but still people who do not have the knowledge and are not aware of homosexuality or the different orientation of such people, still treat them differently. People perceive themselves to be self-aware yet when homosexuals or LGBT people of society conform to their non-heterosexual orientation, they tend to socially exclude them. Education helps in increasing the acceptance of homosexuality and tries to improve the attitude of people towards homosexuals.

The social stigma associated with homosexuality is still prevalent in India. Homosexuality is considered abnormal and sometimes a crime. Many people think that homosexuality is a western import but its roots lie in the Indian culture since time immemorial. This research attempts to find that several factors influence the attitude of people towards the LGBT community such as gender, age and education level. However, data from national surveys reveal that attitudes among heterosexuals concerning homosexuality and perceptions of lesbians and gay men have become less disparaging and more tolerant in recent years (Dasgupta & Rivera, 2006).

This study is to understand the degree and level of inclusivity the LGBT community members feel when many laws and amendments are being introduced and brought to the limelight especially the decriminalization of homosexuality under Section 377 of the Indian penal code (TOI, 2018). Homosexuality is considered a social stigma, a taboo, and abnormal behavior of the same-sex people who are attracted towards the same sex. This phenomenon is prevalent for a long time. Many people think that homosexuality is a contemporary development, but research proves that homosexuality has existed since immemorial time. In contemporary times, one can see a quantum jump with reference to the awareness regarding homosexuality in India. To understand if there is any difference in the attitude of people even after legal support, a sample of 25 teachers and 85 students was collected and themes were generated using a statistical analysis method.

## **1.1 History of LGBT**

There exist a plethora of ancient Indian texts which remain relevant to the current LGBT causes. The rich literature on this topic helps us to understand the various causes that hinder explicit discussions of the same. Hinduism, the largest religion prevalent in India has taken many different stances on the role of homosexuality in its traditional literature with some being neutral and antagonistic characters. As the Rig Veda, says “Vikriti Evam Prakriti” (Vidula, 2017) which when translated to English means that what seems unnatural is also natural. Based on the same notion, where Same-sex partners still struggle to be accepted in Indian society, the mythical characters have always come out as a part of remarkable gay literature in India as well as abroad. There are verses in the Kamasutra, written around 400 BC in India by Vatsyayana, that mentions that in ancient India men engages in oral sex practices with other men with Sanskrit terminologies like, 'anyonyasya hitaisinah' (mutual wellbeing/desiring) and 'rudhavisvasah' (established-trust). Therefore, with the help of the ancient texts and literature, one can trace back the existence of same-sex relationships or unnatural relationships as they are called (Vatsyayana, 2009).

## 1.2 The Emergence of LGBTQ in India

Volunteers from the AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan (ABVA) have played a pivotal role in bringing the topic of homosexuality and the harassment faced by those who practiced the so-called unnatural sex, back in August 1992 (Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan, 2020). This led to the first-ever gay protest in India, where the volunteers gathered outside the police headquarters in ITO, Delhi, and blocked the entrance in protest so that the police could not take the men they had arrested from Central Park, on suspicion of homosexuality. From there on, many activists have come forward and worked towards spreading awareness and working for the betterment of their situation so that the members of the LGBTQ can be accepted more by society and they can explicitly, without any threat, live the way they want to, with their choices and preferences, and with dignity. Currently, this movement has passed on to the preliminary level, where students at various colleges and schools and contributing to spreading awareness and desensitizing society.

LGBT is the most discriminated against in the community of society today. There are no official statistics or records about the percentage of the Indian population that is a sexual minority, but according to a report submitted to the Supreme Court by the Government of India in 2012, there are about 2.5 million gay people in India. They experience tumultuous phases of life where they are discovering their own sexual identity and then at times they have to struggle to disclose their identity to their own families, which at times do not even accept them. Later, when it is time for them to take up jobs, with the fear of not being accepted, not being given the job and attitudinal discrimination, they decide to not disclose their sexual orientations. This has major physiological and psychological implications and as a result, the individual has a higher tendency to reach burnout situations earlier and has higher levels of stress, and is incapable of delivering his/her best. In other instances when they own their sexual orientations and are open about them, they face a lot of discrimination at the workplace, since, not every organization is sensitive or keen towards the inclusion of LGBT people at their workplace. The majority of the organizations do not form or follow such inclusion practices and policies. The ones that do, are efficient only at the policy level and fail to provide an accepting and accommodating environment altogether, therefore this forces them to quit the job or conceal their identities from others which is evidently an added stressor (Sears and Mallory, 2011). Current time witnesses the emergence of the LGBT in society as a movement. These individuals, after surviving the hardships for numerous years now, choose to speak against the discrimination that they have been experiencing. They no more want to be closeted rather they want to come out in the open and want to be accepted the way they are. After battling at the legal and societal front, finally, there is a ray of hope. With value education being parted at an academic level, children of primitive age groups are being desensitized towards the LGBT community. This not only creates a facilitating environment but also comforts the ones who are still confused or closeted. Family members are peers are the perennial source of support and strength. When these individuals are accepted the way they are, not forced to change themselves and adhere to the prevalent norms, by the immediate family and relatives, this strengthens their

beliefs of being open about their sexual orientation and that they have no psychological disorder as earlier having a non-normative sexual preference and orientation was categorized as a psychological disorder and there was an increased need to get them treated. At the legal front too, our laws and customs have become much more flexible and accommodating though there was a long struggle preceding these amendments. In India, earlier in 2018, Section 377 was abolished. Section 377 of IPC criminalized any involvement in sexual acts, be it consensual, which against the laws of nature. With this, there was seen a new ray of hope among the LGBT individual as they were not legally covered and has a law to support them. Following this amendment, most organizations introduced policies that explicitly accept and include people from sexual minorities. This celebrated the beginning of a new and diverse workplace that is more accepting and facilitating. Employees here do not fret over others' sexual orientation and gender identity. Though constant conscious efforts have been made at various levels to provide a facilitating environment to the LGBTQ at home, society, and workplace, work does not end at the legal or policy level.

## **2 Review of Literature**

### **2.1 Gap Analysis**

Recent debates and protests in India have brought the attention of the masses as well as the state to the much-neglected issue of Homosexuality. The perception and attitude of people in India towards LGBT have received attention through public debates, campaigns, and media outcry. There have been various surveys conducted on the life and challenges faced by The LGBT community in India which attempt to find the sentiments of people associated with homosexuals. However, their large population is still hostile towards homosexuals and treats them as the other. “Broader currents in society have influenced how scholars and activists have approached research into sexuality and same-sex attraction. Some early 20<sup>th</sup> century researchers and equality advocates, seeking to vindicate same-sex relations in societies that disparaged and criminalized it, put forward lists of famous historical figures attracted to persons of the same sex” (Pickett, 2015). In India homosexuality is treated as a sin, sickness, or even abnormality. Homosexuality is behavior or a phenomenon in which individuals of the same sex are attracted to or have sexual relations with each other. Homosexuality is a taboo subject in India, throughout the upbringing an individual is unknowingly taught that it is an unnatural phenomenon, which leads to homonegativity (Lottes & Grollman, 2010). Various writers such as Michel Foucault, R. Raj Rao, Ruth Vanita, Mahesh Dattani, and many more have written about LGBT relationships existing in society and have tried to bring forward the issue and hostile attitude of people in Indian society with reference to the treatment of LGBT. Mahesh Dattani in his play “Dance Like a Man” has focused on the gender inequality and discrimination faced by LGBT people in society. He has tried to highlight the notions of social injustice, inequality, social stigma, suffering, and depression faced by these people. The play “Dancelike a man” express the social issue, tradition, relationship, and discrimination faced by LGBT people. “Dattani’s knowledge of human relationships and the problems of the people

involved in the play are profound. He attempts to draw many of his characters from real-life situations and they are remarkably realistic” (Marigold and Backiavathy, 2017). Ruth Vanita in her book *Same-Sex Marriage in India and West* has done a deep analysis of homosexuality and how it is treated as a sin or social stigma in Indian Society. She has not only focused on the same-sex relationships which existed in the Traditional Indian families but has presented the true picture of the joint suicide cases as well as the mental harassment and public shame faced by homosexuals in their day-to-day lives. In *Same-sex marriage in India and the West*, she maintains, “Governmental refusal to validate the same-sex marriage does not put an end to same-sex relationships or strengthen the traditional family. On the contrary, by refusing equal rights to gay people, governmental discrimination will continue to function as an incentive for gay and bisexual people to enter heterosexual marriages and lead double lives, in accordance with well-established tradition” (Vanita, 2005, p. 219). “To not be able to love the one you love is to have your life wrenched away, says Vikram Seth on gay rights and Section 377” (Seth, 2013). R. Raj Rao is a pioneer for the gay voices and has highlighted problems in the lives of gay people in India. In his novels he has tried to bring forth the issues of gay identity and social inclusion of homosexuals. “Rao is one of the pioneering gay voices whose autobiographical work amazingly allows the reader to peep into the human microcosm of BomGay, a fictitious gay space for the real city of Bombay. In Rao’s narrative, BomGay becomes an epitome of the gay culture in India, which has to find its own (in)visible ways to survive in contemporary times, when the oppressive section of the Indian Penal Code, 377, is still used to threaten and punish those who express alternative sexualities, desires or same-sex love” (García-Arroyo, 2018). Another writer Hoshang Merchant writes about what is the meaning of being gay in India? He states in his edition of *Yaraana* (2011) that, “Is not an ethic, not a religion, not a sub-culture, not a profession, not a sub-caste. Yet it is all-present, all-pervasive, ever practiced and ever secret. It comes upon you in unexpected places, in unexpected faces. It is shame, guilt, subversion ... honor, and pride (Merchant, 2011).”

Thus, if one sees the fact that in democratic countries such as India the treatment offered towards homosexuals and alternative sexuality presents the true picture of society. But literature offered or written on the LGBT communities does promise a change that contributes to the understanding social recognitions of LGBT people.

### 3 Method

The study aims at exploring and finding gaps between the perceptions of teachers and students towards the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexuals, and Transgender Community. The attempts involve the collected data based on a questionnaire distributed during July 2020, to be analyzed using basic descriptives like mean and SD.

A questionnaire was designed to record the responses of teachers and students regarding their attitude towards the LGBT community and homosexual relationships. The statements were formed in order to get clear responses from the respondents who were teachers and students of a reputed private University located in the National Capital Region (NCR) of India. The questionnaire

comprised 22 items which were based on a five-point Likert scale from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1), with neutral being 3.

National Capital Region (NCR) of India is a unique example of inter-state regional planning and development for a region with NCT-Delhi as its core, plus certain districts of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan, covering an area of about 55,083 sq. km.

## 4 Analysis

### 4.1 Profile of the Respondents

The respondents for this study were the teachers and students of reputed professional Colleges in the National Capital Region (NCR) of India. The responses to the questionnaire were collected from 35 teachers and 85 students. The responses were recorded and then analyzed qualitatively considering only the mean scores of the individual items and overall.

The study aims to explore the attitude and perception of the educated people regarding the LGBT community. The teachers are the people who are idealized by hundreds of young students. Therefore, it is very important and interesting to see how these educated people, who impart knowledge and morals to the youngsters, feel about homosexuality and The LGBT community.

The questionnaire for the study was adapted from the Survey on CSUN Attitudes Toward LGBT Issues prepared by Gina Masequesmay, Professor of Asian American Studies CSU, Northridge. The original questionnaire consisted of 24 parts with around 72 statements on various aspects related to the understanding, attitude towards, and perception of The LGBT community. The adapted questionnaire for this study comprised 22 items from the original survey instrument. Items 1-7 focus on exploring the respondents' attitude towards gender roles whereas items 8-22 attempt to explore the attitude of the respondents towards the LGBT people and homosexuality.

The questionnaire was administered to teachers at different professional colleges in the NCR, India. It was assumed that teachers would have a good understanding of the concepts of LGBT and have a positive attitude towards the LGBT people and their rights. The questionnaire was also administered to students of the same colleges to record their understanding of the concepts related to the LGBT community and their attitude towards the same. The questionnaire was served to 120 respondents including 85 students and 35 teachers.

The responses of teachers and students were compared to see if there was any gap between the understanding and attitude of the teachers and the students.

## 5 Discussion and Results

For attitude towards gender's roles referenced to Table 3:

**Teachers' Attitude:** Means of the items related to the attitude of teachers towards the roles of the genders clearly show the attitude of teachers relatively positive towards the understanding of the roles and importance of different genders including the third gender representing the LGBT community. The lowest mean score for item 5 (1.77) shows the teachers do not believe that breadwinning, decision making, and maintaining strict discipline are the tasks of only men, unlike

the traditional notion. The lower SD for the same item establishes the homogeneity of the responses further strengthening the positivity. The highest mean score in this section is item 3 (4.14) showing teachers believe that men and women have separate roles to play in society.

**Students' Attitude:** The Means of the items related to the attitude of the students towards the roles of the genders clearly show that the attitude of the students is non-negative but can't be called positive. The high SD values further establish the heterogeneity of the responses pointing towards a wide range of attitudes towards the concept.

**Table 3:** Mean and SD of the responses of teachers and students for the items in the questionnaire depicting Attitude towards Gender Roles

Item No.	Item	Students' Responses		Teachers' Responses	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1	One is born homosexual, straight, or bisexual.	3.46	1.47	3.66	1.28
2	Intersexual people are nature's mistakes.	1.91	1.35	1.91	0.98
3	I believe men and women have separate and complementary gender roles to play in society.	2.89	1.40	4.14	0.84
4	The tasks of childbearing, nurturing and providing emotional support are for women.	1.96	1.18	3.69	1.02
5	The tasks of breadwinning, strict discipline and decision-making are for men.	2.08	1.35	1.77	0.77
6	The role of men and women are to procreate for the continuation of our species.	2.46	1.18	2.14	0.81
7	To NOT conform to traditional gender roles is to go against nature and biology.	2.10	1.19	2.49	1.04

**Table 4:** Mean and SD of the responses of teachers and students for the items in the questionnaire depicting Attitude towards the LGBT community and Homosexuality

Item No.	Item	Students' Responses		Teachers' Responses	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
8	I am comfortable interacting with a gay/lesbian person.	3.21	1.70	4.40	0.55
9	I don't mind being friends with a gay/lesbian/transgender/bisexual person.	3.36	1.67	4.09	0.78
10	LGBT people's sexual acts or gender expressions are against what the Creator or God intended.	2.32	1.38	2.40	1.29
11	LGBT people's sexual orientation is unnatural.	2.28	1.38	2.51	1.12
12	LGBT people are mentally sick or never grew up to be mature heterosexual men and women.	2.90	1.71	2.09	0.95
13	Homosexuality, bisexuality, and transgenderism are a result of too much freedom in a country.	2.58	1.66	2.54	1.29
14	Bisexuality is a choice.	2.39	1.44	3.77	1.06
15	Transgender people choose to be transgender.	2.09	1.27	2.60	1.26
16	Marriage should only be between a man and a woman.	1.88	1.11	2.46	1.20
17	There are public areas or occupations where homosexual and bisexual people should be excluded (e.g., not allowed to teach young children in public schools).	2.25	1.28	1.74	0.61
18	LGBT couples should have the right to adopt children.	2.85	1.63	3.37	1.48
19	Parents of students taking sex education should have options to allow these students to learn about heterosexuality, homosexuality, and/or transgenderism.	3.52	1.60	3.86	1.17
20	Students should be taught about tolerance/acceptance of LGBT people to reduce bullying and suicides among youth.	2.86	1.66	4.63	0.55
21	There are public areas or occupations where transgender people should be excluded (e.g., not be allowed to serve in the military).	1.83	1.22	1.97	0.95
22	Students should be exposed to age-appropriate lessons about LGBT historic figures in their history and social science courses.	2.98	1.69	3.89	0.75

For attitude towards the LGBT community and homosexuality, referenced to Table 4:

**Teachers' Attitude:** The attitude of the teachers towards LGBT people and homosexuality is quite positive as is evident from the mean scores of the responses to the items 8, 9, 20, and 22 and the low SD values for the items i.e. 0.55, 0.78, 0.55 and 0.75 respectively show the homogeneity of the responses further establishing that teachers have quite a positive attitude towards LGBT people. They accept the individuality of the LGBT community and respect their rights. They have no inhibitions in talking to the people of The LGBT community or being friends with them. They in fact believe that students and children must be told about homosexuality and the third gender and must be encouraged to respect the individuality and the rights of the LGBT people. The low mean scores in items 17 and 21 i.e. 1.74 and 1.97 respectively further establishes that the teachers absolutely do not support the viewpoint that LGBT people must be disallowed to take part in the occupations like teaching children and military services.

**Students' Attitude:** The Mean of the items related to the attitude of the students towards LGBT people and homosexuality shows that the attitude of the students is relatively less positive than the attitude of the teachers. The overall responses of the students to items 8, 9, 12, 19, 20, and 22 are more or less 'neutral' depicting the confusion in the mind of the students. It can be inferred from the table that the attitude of the students is non-negative but also non-positive.

## 5.1 Comparison of Means

The teachers' attitude towards the gender roles and the LGBT community is quite positive whereas the attitude of the students is non-negative and non-positive.

The overall mean score of the teachers' attitude (22 items) combined = 3.0

The overall mean score of the students' attitude (22 items combined) = 2.5

The overall mean score of the teachers' attitude is clearly higher than the overall mean score of the students' attitude. When seeing statistically if the difference between the mean scores of the teachers and the students is significant by applying the paired samples t-test.

### Paired Samples T-Test Results

Value of  $p = 0.006$  i.e., smaller than 0.05

T observed = 3.04

T critical = 2.08 (T-Value table - df 21 and Confidence Level 95%)

**Observations:** T observed is greater than T critical

$p = 0.006$  i.e.  $< 0.05$

**Result:** The difference is significant.

## 6 Conclusion

The responses of the teachers and the students to the items related to the attitude towards the gender roles and the people of The LGBT community were recorded and analysed. The teachers



have quite a positive attitude towards the gender roles and also towards the people of the LGBT community. They don't mind talking to LGBT people or making friends with them. They also strongly want that the children and students must be told about the existence of the third gender and should be encouraged to respect the alternate gender or sex. This is very important to instill the feeling of acceptance and respect in the students for the people of the LGBT community to curb the instances of bullying against the LGBT people. It is quite satisfying to see that the teachers have this kind of attitude towards the LGBT people because as teachers they motivate hundreds of young children and students and if the attitude of the teachers towards LGBT people is positive then, obviously, the same can be instilled in the students too which will further increase the acceptance of the LGBT community in society.

The attitude of the students, however, is relatively more towards neutrality. Their attitude is not negative but at the same time, it is not positive too which depicts a kind of confusion in them in relation to the LGBT people.

It was observed that there was a considerable difference between the attitude of the teachers and the students. It was further established by the paired samples t-test that the difference was indeed significant.

The major limitation of the study could be its scale itself since it may be distorted in many ways. The respondents might have exercised acquiescence bias wherein they may have selected either agree to disagree for almost all the statements. The topic is quite sensitive and therefore, chances are that the respondents have tried to portray themselves in a positive light, however, using an anonymous survey instrument must have gotten rid of this kind of limitation. It is usually assumed that the respondents have responded honestly but there are always chances that the respondents might skew down the results by making some respondents "flatter themselves," or to "appease what they may perceive as an unseen authority behind the questionnaire" (Hashimoto, 2002, p. 35).

## 7 Availability of Data and Material

Data can be made available by contacting the corresponding author.

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