

Studying the behaviour of heterosexual Cis Gender People towards LGBTQIA+ Community through interviews and TV series.

Author:

Zoya Khan

MA in English Literature

Symbiosis College of Arts and Commerce, Pune

Pune, Maharashtra, India

Corresponding Author:

Ms Swarali Joshi

Assistant Professor,

Department of English,

Symbiosis College of Arts and Commerce, Pune.

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Abstract

This research paper attempts at studying the behaviour of heterosexual people towards people from LGBTQIA+ community by applying the Queer Theory by Teresa De Lauretis . The paper mainly focuses on the aspects of coming out and its aftermath . To keep the study relevant Interview process has been used to collect the Secondary data thereby providing transparency and giving a fair chance to people from both the sides to express their feelings and emotions . Thus this quantitative study is based upon the interview responses of 16 individuals ; based on two separate questionnaire . The study also considers representations of queer identity in the Hindi film Kapoor & Sons (2016) and the Netflix series Mismatched (2020). Even in the 21st century individuals are hesitant to come out in the society due to the fear of judgement . Teresa De Lauretis's Queer theory further helped the research by providing a clear focus in the vast fields of Queer theory's . Even though her theory mainly focused on the prominent Gay and Lesbian communities ; it sure paved ways for further interpretations and exploring. Given the small sample and interview-based approach, the findings are exploratory rather than generalisable.

Key Words - Queer , LGBTQIA+ Community , Heterosexual , Experience , Homophobia , Gender Identity , Sexuality .

Introduction

We often claim that we are moving forward or rather becoming more modernised with time but do we really stand by that in context to accepting different gender identities and sexualities ? Most of the masses are still unaware or rather ignorant towards the queer community . Acknowledgement acts as the first step for any

Movement to work ; and sadly the youth is still hesitant to do the same . Though most of them are well aware of terms like Lesbian , Gay , Bisexual and Transgender ; they often don't know what terminologies like Intersex , Asexual and the "+" sign denote . Henceforth to explore all these problems and to get a better understanding of the thought process of heterosexual community and to gain firsthand knowledge about the feelings of queer community an interview was conducted ; and this research paper is an attempt to determine the current state of the society in regards to these issues .

To further expand and support my studies I have taken the Queer Theory by Teresa De Lauretis as my primary text. And along with this have taken instances from the Bollywood movie Kapoor and Sons (2016) and a Netflix Series called Mismatched (2020) ; both of these provide firsthand experiences of queer communities , henceforth generating the very much required awareness in the society

Teresa de Lauretis and Queer Theory

Teresa De Lauretis is a key figure in the field of queer theory ; she have significantly contributed in the ideas that challenge the normative understandings of gender , sexuality and identity . She is often associated with the development of the queer theory in the 1980's and 1990's .Therefore her works are considered as pivotal in the development of Queer studies.

Her studies mainly focus on politics of sexuality and cultural representation. In her work she mainly argues over sexual identity stating that its not a fixed or stable category . She further emphasizes that the identities of Lesbian , Gay and Queer are a result of constructed social norms and cultural narratives. She stresses on the performative nature of gender and sexuality ; supporting Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity largely emphasising that gender identity is something that is enacted with time and not necessarily inherited . (De Lauretis)

Her another point of focus was on the Politics of Representation , this mainly focused on how the marginalised sexualities are portrayed in media and literature . She critically analyses the ways in which mainstream representations either reinforce normative sexualities or fail to adequately represent LGBTQ+ experiences. Furthermore she was the one who transformed the Queer word. She encouraged the use of the word and made it popular as earlier it was seen as a derogatory term .

Kapoor and Sons (2016)

The movie Kapoor and Sons (2016) was definitely ahead of its time as it acutely depicted the stigma surrounding the identity of a Gay man in Indian society . It highlighted the fact that no matter how modernised a family claims to be ; the family always faces a hard time in accepting the identity of their children . A similar scenario was seen in the movie as well . Rahul is in a love relationship with a man, but the main plot of the movie doesn't specifically mention this. A moving scene in the movie where Rahul's sexuality is depicted as a component of his inner conflict and emotional complexity makes the reveal. Since it examines issues of acceptance, identity, and the difficulties of staying true to oneself in a family that may not fully comprehend his sexuality, Rahul's character is noteworthy in the way it is handled. This face of his personality deepens his inner turmoil and his tense familial relationships. And it would be fair to say that a lot of people actually face the same problems in coming out to their families .

Mismatched (2020)

Similarly in Mismatched (2020) a bisexual characters struggles are depicted , which is a significant step in the representation of LGBTQ+ characters in Indian shows and films, as the portrayal of bisexuality is often overlooked or misunderstood. The show does reflect the challenges that LGBTQ+ individuals face in navigating their identity in a society that may not always be accepting. It was a bold step to introduce the concept of LGBTQ+ storyline , especially in the Indian context where generally giving any importance to these topics are sidelined.

Methodology

This is an exploratory study and it uses interview responses from 16 participants , divided equally between heterosexual participants and LGBTQIA+ Community participants. Two separate questionnaires were circulated to get the perspective from both the groups. The responses were interpreted thematically and considered alongside queer theory and selected screen representations. Queer Theory by Teresa De Lauretis . Certain TV series and movies with the same theme will also be analysed to provide a broader understanding of the topic , this study seeks to understand how queer community suffers in the hand of the society by getting the point of view of both oppressed and oppressors . Using Queer theory this study will investigate how LGBTQIA+ community suffers in the hands of the society often unknowingly ; providing more diversified gaze into the matter .

The responses were interpreted thematically and considered alongside queer theory and selected screen representations. Because the study primarily interprets participants' responses and reported experiences, it is best described as qualitative and exploratory unless numerical data were systematically analysed using statistical methods. The sample is small and should not be treated as representative of all heterosexual or LGBTQIA+ people. Participants are referred to by letters rather than names to preserve anonymity.

Demographic Details :

Participant group	Number	Age range	Sex/gender information
Heterosexual participants	8	20-25	All participants identify as straight
LGBTQIA+ participants	8	20-25	6 participants identify as Bisexual , 1 participant identify as gay , 1 participant identify as Lesbian.
Total	16	—	—

APPENDIX A

(QUESTIONNAIRE ADMINISTERED TO HETEROSEXUAL PARTICIPANTS)

1. How do you personally feel about LGBTQIA+ community?
2. Would you be comfortable with a close friend or family member coming out as a member of LGBTQIA+ community?
3. How would you react if you found out that one of your close friends or family members is from LGBTQIA+ community?
4. Do you believe that LGBTQIA+ people should have the same rights and protections as heterosexual people? Why or why not?
5. In your opinion, how do stereotypes about LGBTQIA+ individuals affect their lives and relationships?
6. Do you ever feel uncomfortable or unsure about how to interact with LGBTQIA+ individuals? If yes, can you explain why?
7. Have your views or understanding of LGBTQIA+ issues evolved over time? If so, how?

APPENDIX B

(QUESTIONNAIRE ADMINISTERED TO LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY PARTICIPANTS)

1. Did you ever felt mistreated / discriminated in the hands of heterosexual people ? If so, how ?
2. How do you navigate your identity in different spaces (work, school, social circles)? Are there situations where you feel the need to hide or modify your identity?
3. Can you describe the aftermath of coming out in the society ?
4. What role has your family played in your journey? Were they supportive or did you face challenges from them?
5. How do you personally cope with challenges related to your identity, whether it's societal discrimination, internalized biases, or personal struggles?
6. How do you handle conversations about your identity with people who might not understand or are uninformed about LGBTQIA+ issues?
7. What advice would you give to a younger person who is coming to terms with their LGBTQIA+ identity?

Literature Review

The research paper “Heterosexism and Homophobia – How Homophobia Hurts us all” by Waren J. Blumenfeld highlights that both LGBTQ people and society at large suffer from homophobia and heterosexism.

Lesbian, homosexual, bisexual, and queer persons are directly oppressed by homophobia, but heterosexuals are also harmed, according to Blumenfeld (1992). Intimate connections are hindered, strict gender norms are enforced, and people who are viewed as LGBTQ—including their friends and family—face stigma. Furthermore, homophobia makes LGBTQ lives less visible, particularly in school-based sex education, which can leave LGBTQ kids in particular without access to crucial information about sexual health. This marginalisation is further reinforced by heterosexism, the idea that heterosexuality is the norm.

According to Blumenfeld (1992), oversexualizing LGBTQ people, presuming that everyone is heterosexual, and dismissing the validity of bisexuality are examples of behaviours that are important expressions of heterosexist views. These viewpoints prevent LGBTQ persons from expressing themselves authentically and reduce them to stereotypes. LGBTQ people may also suffer from forced marriages and self repression as a result of the pressure to fit in with heteronormative standards.

According to Meyer (2003) and Herek (2009), these biases support structural injustices and social exclusion. Blumenfeld promotes a more accepting society where variety is valued rather than stigmatised and LGBTQ individuals can live freely and truthfully in order to address these problems. In order to combat these damaging social norms, it is imperative to establish secure, encouraging environments and encourage education that recognises sexual diversity.

Furthermore, a similar research was done in Russia on Gender identification and attitudes toward gay people: Gender and sexuality differences and similarities by Olga Gulevich , Vladislav Krivoshchekov & Anastasia Sorokina. Their paper studied about the views towards gay persons have repeatedly demonstrated that heterosexual people generally have more unfavourable opinions than sexual minorities, including bisexuals, and that men tend to have more negative attitudes towards gay people than women (Kite & Whitley Jr., 1996).

Additionally, research shows that attitudes towards gay individuals are significantly influenced by gender identification, especially its cognitive component (the sense of similarity with one's gender group) (Herek, 1988). More negative sentiments are typically associated with stronger gender identification, particularly among men (Falomir-Pichastor & Mugny, 2009). Few research, nonetheless, have looked at how these patterns change depending on cultural setting and sexual orientation.

The current study, which was carried out in Russia, adds to the body of literature by emphasising the ways in which attitudes towards homosexual men and lesbian women are influenced by the interaction of gender and sexual orientation with gender identification. According to this study, gender identification-focused interventions may lessen homophobic sentiments by encouraging more nuanced perspectives on members of the outgroup (Prati et al., 2020).

Findings

After circulating 2 different questionnaires amongst Heterosexual and Queer people, a better understanding of the queer theory and personal struggles and perceptions of different individuals came to light. The interview was conducted on a total of 16 people; equally dividing them to prevent any bias while analysing the data.

The following interpretations came into light -

Heterosexual Participants Interview Responses

Though heterosexual people came up to as very supportive towards their queer counterparts , a significant amount of confusion in fully understanding the complexities regarding gender and sexuality was seen . Almost all of them recognised the queer community and showed respect , they even supported the idea of equal rights for them . Participant D clearly stated that their thoughts and life choices does not align with the idea of LGBTQIA+ community but they still advocated for equal rights and protection for the queer community on humanitarian grounds . This implies that no matter where your personal ideology stays ; humanity defies all bounds .

Participants A,B,E,F and H expressed about their comfort in openly interacting with the queer community this indicates their open mildness and accepting nature . Most of them reported initial hesitation in approaching a queer person but that comes solely from the thought of accidentally hurting their feelings and sentiments . Thus this further shows that the society is getting more accepting with time .

Participant B and C highlighted the role played by stereotypes in shaping the minds of the society and thus making it hard for the community to survive peacefully while co-existing with Heterosexuals .

Participants B,E,F,H reported that their understanding regarding LGBTQIA+ issues have evolved quite a lot in recent times through exposure , while participant G proposed that they are still learning and navigating their way through new terminologies and concepts .

The overall response of the participants was positive . No major disapproval against the queer community was detected and they all were open to change . However more awareness needs to be spread regarding the more complex terminologies . This study highlights the fact of acceptance along with the need of betterment and awareness in further understanding LGBTQIA+ issues .

This was only one side of the story ; the next questionnaire threw light on what a member of LGBTQIA+ community feels in the society .

LGBTQIA+ Community Participants Interview Responses

Many participants expressed facing subtle discriminations in the hands of Heterosexual community . Bisexual participants expressed that they are often misunderstood for their actions and the society treats them differently after coming out , so much so that their identity gets called out upon being a mere confusion .

Some participants felt supported by their close friends while their families faced a hard time in accepting their identities . Due to this fear a lot of them haven't came out to their families, due to conservative family settings .

Coming out was recorded as a mixed experience ; while some felt liberated and empowered the others felt judged , confused or rejected. Hence all of the participants chose to come out to their close friends . Family reactions was also recorded as mixed ; although only a handful of them accepted their identities while the others faced challenges such as silence and avoidance .

A constant support from LGBTQIA+ community and friends was seen as a coping mechanism . While participant D reported to have find solitude in writing . All the participants were open to educate others and spread awareness about the queer community and complex terminologies .

Conclusion

In conclusion, the interviews show that the LGBTQIA+ community goes through a complicated and multidimensional process of self-discovery, which frequently involves familial dynamics, societal prejudice, and the pursuit of acceptance. The guidance and coping mechanisms offered emphasise the value of self-acceptance, patience, and forming dependable connections. Even though social acceptability is gradually increasing, many people continue to encounter major obstacles, especially in more traditional settings.

Because of their sexual orientation, many people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and with other non-heterosexual orientations (LGBQIA+) face discrimination, stigma, or prejudice. Minority stress and identity formation theories suggest that these experiences may be a factor in issues with sexuality self-acceptance (Meyer). Negative mental health outcomes are thought to be associated with lower levels of self-acceptance. The findings of the study reveals that even though participants don't explicitly show their homophobia and claim that they support the community; the queer peers felt otherwise with reported instances of homophobic comments, subtle discrimination and struggle for accepting the queer identities of their counterparts. Homophobia has served as a strong pillar against the acceptance and rights of the LGBTQIA+ community. While people are claiming that they are evolving and getting more opened to the idea of queer community; the progress seems to be very slow. Hate and discomfort towards the queer community is still very potent in the society. And subtle discrimination still prevails in almost every setting. With the advent of claimed modernisation there is still a hope that people will under the concept of gender and sexuality with a broader perspective and will make a safe space of living for their queer counterparts.

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