Gender roles and Mental Health of Sexual Minority Groups

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It has been established and observed from several studies that individuals belonging to the sexual minority groups, e.g., gays, queers, and lesbians face a higher risk of mental health and stability problems as compared to their counterparts belonging to the heterosexual majority in a given society (Feinstein, 2017). Gender identity and self-awareness are often deeply complicated for people in minority groups and their relations.

A plethora of literature and concentrated research has been examining the conditions and perceptions regarding the mental states of the LGBTQ+ population and their well-being which is a direct outcome of their psychological health. Additionally, personality attributes and traits related to gender play a pivotal role in the societal response towards these minority groups.

The article consideration that this research paper attempts to summarize describes the emergence of psychological traits from the lens of 'gendered self' in a minority group of Chinese Lesbians. It contributes to the literature by examining the effect of gender roles and norms on the members of a minority group. The review of existing studies demonstrates that gender traits have uniquely been relegated to some specific attributes. For instance, there is a tendency among lesbians that they perceive their personalities to be more masculine than their heterosexual counterparts. On the other hand, gays describe their gendered selves as more feminine than straight men (Lippa, 2005). Furthermore, most of the associated aspects of life regarding the sexual orientation of sexual minority groups have largely been probed into. Yet, there is a lack of research findings that highlights the effects of gender on the psychological well-being of homosexual individuals and the LGTBQ+ communities.

This research specifically targets Chinese lesbians on a geographical basis and the emergence of symptoms associated with depression and anxiety in them. Gender roles and their

direct and indirect effects on the apparent symptoms of depression have been tested with self-esteem, acting as a mediating variable. Various studies have established that if an individual arrives at the threshold of low levels of self-esteem, the situation easily paves the way for depression (Orth, 2008). The integration of self-esteem as a subjective evaluation by an individual makes this research and its findings distinct from other studies illuminating the same dimensions of gender and psychology.

In many cultures across the globe, there is a general understanding that masculinity and femininity are diametrically opposite to each other, and the individuals' perceptions about their gendered self and the roles that they have to acquire and manifest in a society largely develop from the theories of gender schema (Bem, 1981). From mankind's beginning, communities and societies have had a propensity for associating instrumental roles with men and communal roles with women. Until recent years, gender traits like strength, leadership, and courage were affiliated with men, emphasizing the power and dominance exerted by men in the world. On the other hand, there are widely accepted judgments about women regarding their personality traits, domestic behaviors, physical appearances, and occupations.

Diversion from the socially accepted theories and content of the gender schemas was perceived as a transgression of the norms and values of a heteronormative society. The accused had to undergo some form of punishment. However, the recent emphasis on the correct use of all the labels about gender and sexual identities has also drawn the attention of psychologists and researchers of social sciences to assess the mental health of individuals in sexual minority groups as a direct result of gender.

This research assesses self-esteem as a mediator in the relationship between gender roles and depression.

The study had three hypotheses:

1. The relation between masculinity/femininity and depression where:

    a) Masculinity and/or androgyny would have a positive link with self-esteem and a negative link with depression

    b) Femininity would have a negative link with self-esteem and a positive link with depression

2. Association of gender roles with depression would be through the mediation of self-esteem where:

    a) Masculinity and high levels of self-esteem would have a significant association resulting in low levels of depression

    b) Femininity and low levels of self-esteem would have a considerable association resulting in high levels of depression

3. Each type of gender role would have impacted differences in the direct and indirect outcomes of depression.

The research method constituted the recruitment of participants from five local LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual) organizations in Hong Kong and the University of Hong Kong between December 2014 and March 2015. The ethics committee of research centers at the University of Hong Kong and the LGBT organizations approved the study.

The research methodology revolved around disseminating an online survey through social media networks and electronic mail. Utilizing the snowball sampling method, also known as chain sampling or referral sampling, an ample number of participants became part of this study to arrive at harmonious results. Snowball sampling is a preferred technique for sampling in this kind of study because it recruits acquaintances of the initial participants, thereby increasing the

likelihood of locating hidden populations having the same traits and low cost of time and resources.

Female citizens of Hong Kong between the ages of 18 and 35, who identified their gendered selves as lesbians, were the target subjects of this study, and prior consent was taken from all the participants. The total number of participants who completed the online survey turned out to be 438, and all of them were associated with different occupations. A majority had a full-time job (54.3%), a significant chunk was full-time students (35.6%), and others were part-time employed (5.5%) or unemployed (3.0%). There was also a variation in the religious preferences and inclinations of the participants.

20 masculine gender role items and 20 feminine gender role items forming the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) (Bem, 1981) were employed in the online survey to assess the respondents' identification and endorsement of the gender traits. In addition, a 7-point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (never true) to 7 (always true), was used to measure the degree to which the respondents could associate their gender traits with the prevalent stereotypes.

For incorporating the mediating role of self-esteem in the model, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) (Rosenberg, 1965) was used, as it has become one of the most widely used tests for evaluating personal feelings attributing to self-esteem. The outcome of the gender roles and depression was gauged using the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS) (Zigmond, 1983) which determines the emergence, presence, and severity of the symptoms of depression in an individual.

According to the results generated through ANOVA and structural equation modeling (SEM), the hypothesis was largely supported as the respondents with strong androgynous and masculine

traits delineated significantly high levels of self-esteem. On the other hand, the participants with feminine traits exhibited low levels of self-esteem.

This research paper uses a recent research finding that casts light on the prevalence of depression as a causal outcome of gender roles in sexual minority groups (Lo, 2019). Being a scarcely examined dimension of 'psychology of gender'- mental health associated with gender identity was the potential choice for this research paper and this article fulfilled the criteria.

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