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## Body Image Satisfaction, Self-Esteem, and Sense of Belongingness amongst the People Belonging to the LGBTQ+ Community

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### Abstract

As a result of stigma, prejudice, and discrimination towards their minority population, the LGBTQ community often experiences higher levels of stress. 'Minority stress,' which encompasses not only discrimination, harassment, and victimisation, but also more internalised feelings like shame, could play a big part in LGBTQ mental health concerns and be linked to body image issues. This study investigates the relationship between body image satisfaction, self-esteem, and sense of belongingness amongst the homosexuals. Data were collected from 40 participants (15 males and 25 females). The participants completed a self-administered Google form, containing 19-Item Body Image Questionnaire by Bruchon and Schweitzer (1987), Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE) by Rosenberg (1965), and Challenged Sense of Belongingness Scale by Fuchs et. al. (2021). Correlation analysis was performed. A significant relationship was found between body image satisfaction and self-esteem amongst homosexuals (0.79). A moderate correlation was seen between self-esteem and sense of belongingness (0.44). A positive yet weak correlation between body image satisfaction and sense of belongingness was found (0.33). Certain limitations and suggestions were also included at the end of the study.

*Keywords:* Body image satisfaction, homosexuals, LGBTQ+ community, self-esteem, sense of belongingness.

Many people feel self-conscious about at least one bodily component. A poor cognitive assessment of one's body can reflect a bad body image. Body image is a multidimensional construct that includes a behavioural component involving body-related behaviours (e.g., checking behaviours), a perceptual

component involving the perception of body characteristics (e.g., estimation of one's body size or weight), and a cognitive-affective component involving cognitions, attitudes, and feelings about one's body.

Body dissatisfaction is the most important worldwide indicator of stress connected to the body, and it is described as negative thoughts and feelings regarding one's body. It has been demonstrated to be a predictor of the development of an eating problem in both people with mental illnesses such as binge eating disorder or social anxiety disorder and healthy people. It is one of the two poles of the satisfaction-unhappiness continuum of body image disturbance, which includes measures of satisfaction (e.g., satisfaction with specific body areas) and displeasure (e.g., dissatisfaction with specific body parts) (e.g., weight or muscle dissatisfaction;). The appearance orientation is a construct that reflects the cognitive-behavioral investment in one's appearance as an expression of the importance people place on their appearance. It is related to both the cognitive-affective and behavioural components.

A positive appraisal of one's body, in addition to negative body evaluation and the importance of looks, is part of the cognitive-affective component. Body appreciation, for example, is defined as accepting, appreciating, and having a positive impression of one's own body, as well as rejecting media-portrayed unrealistic body ideals. Body appreciation was found to predict indices of well-being beyond other measures of body image, and it happened at the same time as body dissatisfaction, demonstrating the two concepts' independence.

Gay men expressed significantly more body dissatisfaction than heterosexual men; and the amplitude of the association between weight-related peer teasing and self-esteem was stronger for gay men than for heterosexual men (McArdle and Hill 2007). Integration into the LGBT community, defined as involvement and perceived acceptability, may modulate the relationship between body image and self-esteem. (Levesque & Vichesky, 2006). The findings of the research conducted by Burnette et al., 2019 suggested that body image therapies for LBQ women should focus on social support, resilience, and self-esteem. This shows that the body dissatisfaction experienced by homosexual men heavily impacts their self-esteem.

A person's overall subjective sense of personal worth or value is referred to as self-esteem. Self-esteem, also known as self-regard, self-estimation, and self-worth, is the evaluative and emotional dimension of the self-concept (Harter, 1999). It refers to a person's overall assessment of his or her good or negative worth, based on the scores given to him or her in many roles and domains of life (Rogers, 1981; Markus and Nurius, 1986).

According to Branden (1969), it has two components: (a) considering oneself effective, trusting in one's ability to think, learn, choose and make correct decisions, and overcome challenges and produce changes, and (b) respecting oneself, the confidence in one's right to be happy, and the confidence that people are deserving of the respect, love, and self-fulfillment appearing to them. Your decision-making process, relationships, emotional health, and overall well-being are all influenced by your self-esteem. It also affects

motivation, since people who have a healthy, positive self-image are more aware of their capabilities and may be motivated to take on new challenges.

Constructive self-esteem is not only seen as a basic component of mental health, but also as a protective factor that, by acting as a buffer against negative effects, contributes to greater health and positive social behaviour. Individuals with high self-esteem are better able to embrace happy times, deal with bad events, deal well with challenges, engage in intimate relationships, and strengthen their strengths. High self-esteem is also thought to reduce the expression of faulty schemata and depressed symptoms throughout an encounter. An unstable self-concept and low self-esteem, on the other hand, can play a key role in the development of a wide range of mental illnesses and social issues, including depression, anorexia nervosa, bulimia, anxiety, violence, substance misuse, and high-risk behaviours. People with low self-esteem have emotions of worthlessness, inferiority, and emotional instability, resulting in life dissatisfaction (Ha, 2006). Furthermore, persons with poor self-esteem show a proclivity to have a general negative attitude about a variety of topics, including other people and personal circumstances which not only cause a lot of personal pain, but they also put a lot of strain on society (Mackinnon, 2015).

Hahm et al., 2017 looked at the behavioural intentions from a sense of belonging perspective of sexual minority attendees at an event. Attendees' social representations are investigated using emotional attachment at the event level and collective self-esteem at the community level, according to social identity theory. At a significant annual lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) event, a poll of 261 members of the sexual minority community was undertaken. Findings suggest effective links have a beneficial impact on satisfaction and behavioural intentions. Furthermore, collective self-esteem influenced behavioural intentions in a beneficial way.

Kousari-Rad and McLaren (2013), studied if a moderation and mediation model could be used to explain the relationships between sense of belonging to the homosexual community, body image dissatisfaction, and self-esteem among 90 self-identified Australian gay males. The moderation model was confirmed by the findings, which showed that the relationship between body image dissatisfaction and self-esteem was statistically significant only at average and high levels of LGBT community membership. Body image dissatisfaction partially mediated the sense of belonging-self-esteem relationship, according to the mediation model.

Sense of belongingness refers to the perception of belongingness, interdependence, and mutual commitment that links individuals in a collective unity (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Sarason, 1974). It serves as a foundation for social and communal activity, as well as a resource for social assistance and clinical work<sup>1</sup>. Building a feeling of community entails an emphasis on interdependence and connections rather than individuality. Individual and community quality of life are ultimately interdependent, according to community psychology. However, a strong feeling of community is not necessarily a good thing. It may entail separating

“insiders” and “outsiders” and can be bolstered by disregarding or opposing variety within a community, causing injustice, or enforcing a deathly uniformity. It isn't a panacea. In especially risky neighborhoods, withdrawal from the community may be adaptive for adults or children (Brodsky, 1996).

McMillan and Chavis identified four elements: membership (sense of boundaries, common symbols, emotional safety, personal investment, sense of belonging, and identification with community), influence (mutual influence of community on individuals and individuals on community), integration and fulfillment of needs (sharing values, satisfying needs, and exchanging resources), and shared emotional connection (shared dramatic moments, celebrations, rituals). These aspects aid in translating the overarching idea of a sense of community into researchable constructs and actionable goals. No one factor is the core reason; they all work together to reinforce one another.

The amount of power and position one holds within a group, as well as political values and identifications, all influence one's sense of "belonging" (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Yuval-Davis (2006) goes on to say that belonging isn't just about one's identification or social location; it's also about how people see their affiliations and how they believe they're judged. Those who feel marginalised are more likely to identify with other members of their marginalised group(s) in order to have a feeling of community and belonging (Daniel Tatum, 2003).

According to studies, a sense of belonging motivated sexual minorities to engage in activism (Friedman & Leaper, 2010; Waldner, 2001). Members of marginalised groups often feel compelled to belong to social groupings as a result of their marginalisation (Gorman-Murray et al., 2008). "LGBT communities and ethnic minority communities provide members with a safe space in which they can interact without fear of persecution, socialise with similar others, and access resources, as well as having been the heart of activism for LGBT and civil rights," write Lehavot, Balsam, and Wells (2009).

LGBTQ+ community often experience higher levels of stress as a result of stigma, prejudice, and discrimination against their minority population. 'Minority stress', which includes not just discrimination, harassment, and victimisation, however also more internalised feelings like shame, could be a significant role in the LGBTQ+ community's mental health issues and could also be related to body image issues. Siconolfi and colleagues (2015) state that internalised unfavourable attitudes regarding homosexuality and sexual orientation resulted in general body dissatisfaction, muscularity dissatisfaction, and body fat dissatisfaction in young gay males. Non-binary and binary LGBTQ+ people's body image reveals that harassment or rejection was linked to lower levels of body appreciation via lowering self-esteem and life satisfaction, says Tabaac, Perrin, and Benotsch (2017). Therefore, the present study was conducted to understand the relationship between body image satisfaction, self-esteem, and sense of belongingness amongst the homosexuals.

## Objectives

The objectives of the present study are as follows:

- To analyse the relationship between body image satisfaction and self-esteem of the members of the LGBTQ+ community.
- To analyse the relationship between body image satisfaction and sense of belongingness of the members of the LGBTQ+ community.
- To analyse the relationship between self-esteem and sense of belongingness of the members of the LGBTQ+ community.

## Hypotheses

The hypotheses undertaken for the present study are as follows:

- There is no significant correlation between body image satisfaction and self-esteem amongst the members of the LGBTQ+ community.
- There is no significant correlation between body image satisfaction and sense of belongingness amongst the members of the LGBTQ+ community.
- There is no significant correlation between sense of belongingness and self-esteem amongst the members of the LGBTQ+ community.

**Method**

## Sample

The sample consisted of 40 members of the LGBTQ+ community under the age group of 18-30 years (mean age= 21.025). 15 males and 25 females participated in the survey. These participants were distributed across India. Data was collected using convenience sampling and snowball sampling.

## Tools Used

The participants filled out a self-administered Google form, containing three sections. 19-Item Body Image Questionnaire by Bruchon and Schweitzer (1987), Rosenberg Self- Esteem Scale (RSE) by Rosenberg (1965), and Challenged Sense of Belongingness Scale by Fuchs et. al. (2021) was used in Section 1, 2, and 3, respectively. The 19-Item Body Image Questionnaire assessed body satisfaction associated with sex, health, and emotional adjustment, on a five-point Likert scale (where 1: very much, often; 2: fairly, fairly often; 3: in between, neither one; 4: fairly, fairly often; 5: very much, often). Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale is a 10-item

Likert scale based on a four-point scale from strongly agree (3 points) to strongly disagree (0 points). Challenged Sense of Belongingness Scale assessed participation, connectedness, identification, and congruence as the four elements of belongingness on a five-point Likert scale where 1 as strongly agree to 5 as strongly disagree, in a positive order.

## Design

A cross-sectional research design was used in order to understand body image satisfaction, self-esteem, and sense of belongingness of people belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. Results would be interpreted through qualitative analyses of the data obtained. 19-Item Body Image Questionnaire by Bruchon and Schweitzer (1987), Rosenberg Self- Esteem Scale (RSE) by Rosenberg (1965), and Challenged Sense of Belongingness Scale by Fuchs et al. (2021) were used to understand and assess body-image satisfaction, self-esteem, and sense of belongingness amongst homosexuals, respectively, towards the LGBTQ+ community. Before the final data collection, to assess the feasibility of the tools and detect problems, if any, in the research study, a pilot study was conducted and feedback was received. After the survey was conducted, the data was analysed and results were interpreted in light of the aim of the study.

## Procedure

The study was conducted to understand and assess the relation between body image satisfaction, self-esteem, and sense of belongingness amongst the people who associate themselves with the LGBTQ+ community. A Google Form was constructed and used pertaining to the current pandemic situation, containing three questionnaires (19-Item Body Image Questionnaire (Bruchon and Schweitzer, 1987), Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE) (Rosenberg, 1965), and Challenged Sense of Belongingness Scale (Fuchs et. al., 2021)) to measure each variable undertaken. Before the final data collection, to assess the feasibility of the tools and detect problems, if any, in the research study, a pilot study was conducted. Considering the feedback received from the pilot study, no changes were made in the Google form. Form was distributed through convenient and snowball sampling. A consent form was added at the beginning of the form assuring data confidentiality and anonymity of the participant and participants were requested to give their honest responses. Google Sheets were generated to compile and analyse all the responses and statistical tools were used for the results of the study.

## Results

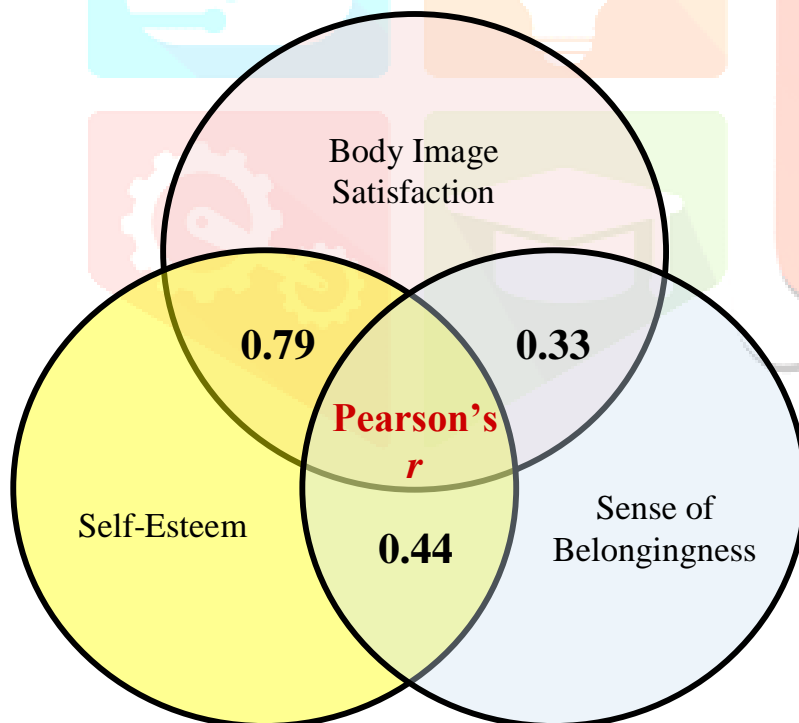
**Table 1**

*Overall Correlation of (i) Body Image Satisfaction and Self-Esteem, (ii) Self-Esteem and Sense of Belongingness, (iii) Sense of Belongingness and Body Image Satisfaction*

CORRELATIONS	BIS & SE	SE & SOB	SOB & BIS
	<b>0.79</b>	<b>0.44</b>	<b>0.33</b>

**Figure 1**

*Graphical Representation of the Overall Correlation of (i) Body Image Satisfaction and Self-Esteem, (ii) Self-Esteem and Sense of Belongingness, (iii) Sense of Belongingness and Body Image Satisfaction*



## Interpretation and Discussion

Body image is a multidimensional construct that includes a behavioural component involving body-related behaviours (e.g., checking behaviours), a perceptual component involving the perception of body characteristics (e.g., estimation of one's body size or weight), and a cognitive-affective component involving cognitions, attitudes, and feelings about one's body. Self-esteem, also known as self-regard, self-estimation,

and self-worth, is the evaluative and emotional dimension of the self-concept (Harter, 1999). Sense of belongingness refers to the perception of belongingness, interdependence, and mutual commitment that links individuals in a collective unity.

The aim of the present study was to assess the correlation between body image satisfaction, self-esteem, and sense of belongingness amongst the members of the LGBTQ+ community. The objectives of this study were to analyse the relationship between body image satisfaction, self-esteem, and sense of belongingness amongst the members of the LGBTQ+ community using the Body Image Questionnaire by Brunchon and Schweitzer (1987), Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale by Rosenberg (1965), and Challenged Sense of Belongingness Scale by Fuchs et. al. (2021).

On the basis of the entire population of N= 40 (15 males and 25 females), Table 1 illustrates the overall correlation between body image satisfaction and self-esteem (0.79), between self-esteem and sense of belongingness (0.44), and between sense of belongingness and body image satisfaction (0.33).

A positive and highly significant correlation between body image satisfaction and self-esteem is noted amongst the members of the LGBTQ+ community ( $r = 0.79$ ), thereby rejecting the null hypothesis undertaken. Review of literature states that gay men expressed significantly more body dissatisfaction than heterosexual men; and the amplitude of the association between weight-related peer teasing and self-esteem was stronger for gay men than for heterosexual men (McArdle and Hill 2007). Integration into the LGBTQ+ community, defined as involvement and perceived acceptability, may modulate the relationship between body image and self-esteem (Levesque & Vichesky, 2006).

The second hypothesis is rejected as a moderately positive correlation was found between sense of belongingness and self-esteem amongst the people associated with the LGBTQ+ community ( $r = 0.44$ ). Rad and McLaren (2013), studied if a moderation and mediation model could be used to explain the relationships between sense of belonging to the homosexual community, body image dissatisfaction, and self-esteem among 90 self-identified Australian gay males. The moderation model was confirmed by the findings, which showed that the relationship between body image dissatisfaction and self-esteem was statistically significant only at average and high levels of LGBTQ+ community membership.

A weak yet positive correlation was found between sense of belongingness and self-esteem ( $r = 0.33$ ), therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. According to Levesque and Vichesky (2006), although participation and presumed acceptance in the gay community did not independently recognise general body image dissatisfaction, there is evidence to suggest that the association between body image and self-esteem may abate by inclusion into the gay community, defined as involvement and perceived acceptance. Non-binary and binary LGBTQ+ people's body image reveals that harassment or rejection was linked to lower levels of body appreciation via lowering self-esteem and life satisfaction, says Tabaac, Perrin, and Benotsch (2017).



In conclusion, body image satisfaction, self-esteem, and sense of belongingness are positively correlated amongst the people associated with the LGBTQ+ community.

### **Limitations**

One of the major limitations to this study include that the sample size was very small as it consisted of only 15 males and 25 females, that is, 40 participants overall. Due to the pandemic, participants were not approached physically. Data collection took place through Google Forms and this increases the chances of errors when the sample size is small and the sample size can be considered as insufficient for statistical measurement. Apart from the limited sample size, the age range taken under consideration also creates a limitation to the applicability of the results obtained. Apart from the mentioned limitations, the scarce availability of the previous Indian researches related to this study also played a hindrance in supporting the study. Lastly, time constraints and the conflicts arising from cultural bias and other personal issues can also be counted as a considerable limitation to the results of this study.

### **Suggestions**

After acknowledging the limitations, some recommendations of possible ways to overcome these limitations in the future studies made on the basis of results of the study include that a larger sample than just 40 participants should be taken under consideration and the age range should also be expanded. A greater geographical area should be considered as well as cultural diversity should also be understood to bring the best possible results. To understand and gain more knowledge related to the correlation between body image satisfaction, self-esteem, and sense of belongingness amongst homosexuals, more Indian researches must be conducted similar to this study. Furthermore, other statistical measurements should be considered to obtain and confirm the results, time constraints, and the conflicts arising from cultural bias and other personal issues should also be considered to obtain more fruitful results.

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