

EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCE OF STIGMA IN THREE SEXUAL MINORITIES IN INDIA

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by

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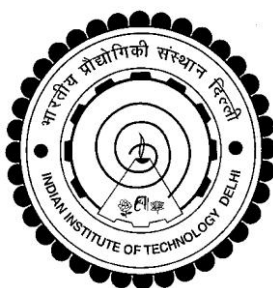
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents and my Guruji. Without their blessings, love, support and motivation it would not have been possible for me to pursue my higher studies and complete this degree. Secondly, I would like to dedicate this thesis to all the participants who helped make this research possible. Without their cooperation and trust in me it would have been next to impossible for me to choose such a sensitive issue, reach out to people and execute this research.

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled, “**EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCE OF STIGMA IN THREE SEXUAL MINORITIES IN INDIA**”, submitted by **Ms Sanchita Srivastava** for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, is a record of bona-fide research carried out by her under my guidance and supervision. I am satisfied that the thesis presented by **Ms Sanchita Srivastava** is worthy of consideration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The results of this thesis have not been submitted to any other University or Institute for award of degree or diploma.

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ABSTRACT

Stigma has been considered by researchers as a devalued social identity having negative consequences on self and wellbeing of the stigmatized. This thesis explores the significance of the degree of visibility/concealability dimension of stigma by examining the stigma experiences of three sexual minorities (gay, bisexual and transgender individuals) and its impact on self-esteem, social anxiety and life satisfaction. Another question the thesis examines is the role of degree of disclosure ranging from limited disclosure to disclosure to a large extent. Past research has not explored the mechanisms through which the stigma experiences result in various negative consequences. The present research also examines the role of guilt as a mediator and social support as a moderator between stigma experiences and its consequences (self-esteem, life satisfaction and social anxiety) for these sexual minorities. Two studies have been carried out to examine the degree of visible/concealable stigma attribute and also the role of degree of disclosure on their stigma experiences and its consequences.

Study 1 is a qualitative study which included semi-structured interviews of 60 self-reported gay, bisexual and transgender participants regarding their sexual orientation, gender related stigma experiences, their disclosure-nondisclosure decisions and its impact on their self-esteem and other aspects in life. Thematic analysis has been carried out and the results have been presented for three groups: limited disclosure, positive disclosure and negative disclosure. Results suggest that the degree of disclosure have much more impact in their lives than the visibility and concealability of stigma attribute. Parental reactions (rejection or acceptance towards one's stigma) have profound impact in determining their level of self-esteem and the impact of stigma experiences on them. Carrying a devalued stigmatized identity and decision to disclose with

significant others (parents and close ones) is influenced by parent child bonding. The results suggested that these groups share more similarities and few differences.

Study 2 included a survey of 186 (gay, bisexual and transgender) participants and examined the similarities and differences among gay, bisexual and transgender participants. It also explored the role of degree of disclosure and the consequences of stigma. The role of guilt as a mediator and social support as a moderator was examined. Correlation, MANOVA, mediation and moderation analysis have been done to test the hypotheses. The results confirm the similarities and differences among the three groups in their stigma experiences and its consequences except for self-esteem and guilt. Results also indicate the significance of degree of disclosure as both the groups (disclosed and limited disclosure) have shown differences on all study variables. Guilt is found to be a significant mediator in determining the relationship between perceived stigma and self-esteem in the case of limited disclosure group. Guilt also significantly mediated the relationship between perceived stigma and social anxiety in the case of both disclosed and limited disclosure groups. Social support moderated the impact of perceived stigma on self-esteem in the case of limited disclosure group. The implications of results and some limitations are also discussed.

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