INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN PSYCHIATRY

Madhurima Roy
M.Sc. Student in Applied Psychology, Swami Vivekananda University, Delhi, India

Dr. Nilanjana Mitra
Assistant Professor & Head, Department of Psychology, Swami Vivekananda University, Delhi, India

Impact of body image, social support, and psychological well-being on gender identity

Madhurima Roy and Nilanjana Mitra

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22271/27891623.2025.v5.i1a.55

Abstract
Gender is a social construction. From the ancient time to till date society is always on an exploration of the concept of gender and sexuality. The studies on these topic is very much needed in modern times as the concepts are changing with the flow of the time. The present study has opted a mixed-method approach whereby the quantitative part of the study aimed to determine whether body image, social support and psychological well-being can predict the gender identity of a person. Hence, the three variables are measured through the following scales: Body Self-Image Questionnaire-Short Form, Social Support Questionnaire-Short Form and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale. In the first part of the study, the Snowball sampling technique was used. The sample was divided into two groups, each consisting of 30 participants, whereby one groups consisted of LGBTQ+++ individuals and the other of CIS gender individuals. Logistic Regression analysis showed that the sub-domains of Body Self-Image Questionnaire such as Overall Appearance Evaluation (OAE) and Investment in Ideals (II) along with Psychological Well-being can predict Gender identity.

Keywords: Body image, psychological well-being, social support, LGBTQ+++ community, CIS-gender.

Introduction

Anthropologist Kathryn March commented 'sex is to gender as light is to colour'. 'Sex' is a biological identity defined at the time of birth based on the anatomical and physiological differences between males and females that are genetically determined. Whereas 'Gender' is all those factors such as roles, preferences, personality, behaviours, expectations associated with an individual's sex in a given culture. In other terms sex is a biological identity where gender is a social construct. Gender differences can be based on physiological factors, social learning or both. For example, Riya is a girl by birth. She writes her sex as female on every official document. After graduation she will marry her boyfriend Neel. Her sex is female, her gender is feminine and she is attracted to the opposite gender so her sexual identity is heterosexual. Now Riya realises she is in love with her childhood best friend Titas who is biologically female. When Riya confesses her feelings to Titas, she says she feels the same way as Riya. Titas also reveals that she does not like to be a girl, rather she likes to see herself as a man and do manly things. Also she is attracted to women only. Now here it can be seen that it is not necessary that the sexual identity and the gender identity will be the same. A biological female identifies herself as 'male', in terms Titas is 'transgender male'. Similarly, a biological male, identifies himself as 'female' is 'transgender female'. Here Neel who is biological male and identifies himself as male means his gender identity is based on his biological identity, in terms he is 'CIS male' on the basis of sexual orientation Riya who can be attracted towards both male and females, in terms she is bi- sexual, Titas who is attracted towards the same gender, in terms she is homosexual. Neel who is only attracted towards females, in terms he is heterosexual. In modern days the gender activist says gender is like fluid, it has no shape. Gender activists use many terms of identification of gender and sexual orientation. There are more than 70 genders besides male and female. There is evidence of male attracted towards male or female attracted towards female in previous ages. But the 70+ gender identity is more like a modern day concept. There is evidence that in ancient ages the ancestors of Homo sp. used to be involved in various sexual relations also have multiple sexual partners. Monotonous love is very much an early age concept.

Correspondence
Dr. Nilanjana Mitra
Assistant Professor & Head, Department of Psychology, Swami Vivekananda University, Delhi, India

Did gender identities and sexual orientations exist in the ancient ages? If not then how gender identity and sexual orientation has become an important part of our social life. Which factors are responsible to determine this various number of gender roles and sexual orientation. The conflicts and query will remain, and the search will run its course as well.

As the middle age concept of sex, gender, sexual orientation, monotonous love between men and women is still perceived as 'normal' to this day. On the other hand, the need to be free from the middle age concept of gender, sex, sexual orientation is increasing day by day. There are studies, supporting the facts that the new concepts regarding sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation is under the margin of normal and more studies in this field is needed.

Here in this study I attempted to watch if the body image, psychological well-being and social support can determine gender roles.

Maintaining body image, controlling food habits to be in good shape and maintain the beauty standards is one of the most common phenomena all around the world. There are lots of cases of gruesome trends and beauty standards all around the world. The concept of good health and a healthy diet is so vague to the public that people mix up good health with beauty standards. Rather it can be said that the propaganda of 'being in good shape' is highly vigorous that misled the public. Nowadays people do not want good health. People are more desperate to have a 'good looking body'. In previous studies disclosed that the self-claimed LGBTQ+++ individuals and other gender minority individuals have the highest amount of insecurity about their body image. The need of maintaining the body image and being in shape is also positively correlated [7, 8, 9]. The gender minority individuals are evidenced to develop eating disorders and other poor food habits [7]. The studies show the fact that the number of Vaginoplasty (medical procedure of creating female organs in a male body) and Mastectomy (medical procedure of removing female organs and creating male organs in female body) is increasing day by day[9]. This evidence indicates the fact that body image is becoming a major concern among gender minority individuals.

This almost became a fact that social support and psychological well-being are positively correlated [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6]. In other words, humans are social organisms. Being in a groups, following social groups is their congenital attribute. In such case social support is an important variable that determines an individual's psychological well-being. Recent studies among a groups of CIS gender individuals and LGBTQ+++ and gender minority individuals in Italy reveals the fact that the CIS gender individuals are having high level of social support as well as psychological well-being that gender minority individuals [10].

A recent study by Chang et.al in 2021 also claimed that discrimination or social support has a crucial role on mental health outcomes through outness of sexual minorities. Outness means the degree to which an individual expresses their sexual identity. In the study greater outness was associated with lower depressive symptoms and borderline personality disorder [3]. Another study by Ryan J Watson depicts how social support from different groups make impact on gender minor individuals. The study reveals that parental support is highly related to higher self-esteem and lower depressive symptoms in young individuals [11]. For the

lesbians no form of social support was associated with higher self-esteem [11]. Various studies have demonstrated that most of the gay man suffer from stress related issues [5]. A study by Adam W. Fingerhut et.al, on gender minors where it has been found that friend's support has a significant impact on coping with distress [5]. A few recent studies revealed how self-esteem and satisfaction mediates with harassment or rejection on body appearance. In 2015 a study on gender minor individuals by Ariella R Tabaac depicts that the personal, social and mental health variables are linked with health behaviour [2].

Objective
The objective of this study is to find out the impact of the body image, psychological well-being and social support on gender role.

Methodology
In this study, a multistage procedure is employed to determine a significant relationship between body image, social support, psychological well-being and gender role. The method used to analyse the obtained data is the Quantitative approach.

Site and Population
Here 30 people who identify themselves as 'straight' or CIS gender, more specifically people who identify themselves according to the social construction of gender identity and another 30 people who belongs to the LGBTQ+++ community or people who doesn't follow the social construction of gender identity. The participants are around 18 to 35 years old, currently living in Kolkata, India and belongs to Bengali household. Individuals with physical or developmental disability or psychiatric consultation history were excluded.

Sampling Design
In the present study Snowball Sampling technique has been used. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling method where new units are recruited by other units to form part of the sample. Here a Google form was created. Participants were asked to fill the Google form and spread the form among their known circles.

Tools and Scales
The following tools were selected for the present study:
1. Information schedule: General information was taken by this form to differentiate the inclusion and exclusion criteria.
2. Short-form version of the Body Self-Image Questionnaire [BSIQ-SF]
3. Social Support Questionnaire - Short Form [SSQSR]
4. Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scales [PWB], 42 Item version

Ethical Issues
Participants were told about the purpose of the study. Consent were taken before administration of the test.

Research Hypothesis
- Overall Appearance Evaluation is a significant predictor of sexual orientation.
- Health Fitness Influence is a significant predictor of sexual orientation.

- Investment in Ideals is a significant predictor of sexual orientation.
- Health-Fitness Evaluation is a significant predictor of sexual orientation.
- Attention to Grooming is a significant predictor of sexual orientation.
- Height Dissatisfaction is a significant predictor of sexual orientation.
- Fatness Evaluation is a significant predictor of sexual orientation.
- Negative Affect is a significant predictor of sexual orientation.
- Social Dependence is a significant predictor of sexual orientation.
- Social support is a significant predictor of sexual orientation.
- Psychological wellbeing is a significant predictor of sexual orientation.

Data Collection and Analysis
The administration of the test questionnaires, scoring of the responses, tabulation and interpretation of results were carried out in an orderly manner which has been discussed underneath. The participants in the present study were selected on the basis of the predetermined criteria. Consent to administer the questionnaires were taken from them. They were made to understand the nature of the tests, and were assured of the confidentiality of the data and the results. In the present study Snowball Sampling technique has been used for data collection. The data collection via Google form and virtual circulation. Data for each questionnaire were scored following their respective scoring schedule. The scores were then tabulated and statistical analyses in the form of Logistic Regression. The whole process took 6 months to complete.

Result and Analysis
Binomial Logistic Regression

Table 1: Model performance metrics and statistical significance

Model	Deviance	AIC	BIC	R² MCF	χ²	DF	P
1	48.6	72.6	97.7	0.416	34.6	11	< .001

Table 2: Predictors' estimates with standard errors and significance

Predictor	Estimate	SE	Z	P
Intercept	-11.3590	4.9241	-2.307	0.021
OAE	-0.7929	0.3255	-2.436	0.015
HFI	-0.2498	0.1626	-1.536	0.124
II	0.8008	0.2745	2.917	0.004
HFE	0.2720	0.1775	1.533	0.125
SD	0.1585	0.2194	0.722	0.470
HD	0.1226	0.1249	0.981	0.327
FE	-0.0882	0.1697	-0.520	0.603
NA	0.2852	0.1666	1.712	0.087
AG	-0.1057	0.2079	-0.508	0.611
SSQSR	-0.0598	0.0583	-1.025	0.305
PWB total	0.0629	0.0255	2.464	0.014

Summary of The Result: From the statistical analysis, Logistics Regression the results are as follows:
The significance of subscales under Body Self Image Questionnaire Short Form (BSIQ-SR) are:

- Overall Appearance Evaluation (OAE) has a significant difference between two gender groups that means OAE is a predictor for determining gender role as well as sexual orientation.
- Investment in Ideals (II) has a significant difference between two gender groups that means II is a predictor for determining gender role as well as sexual orientation.

Psychological well-being has a significant difference between two gender groups that means psychological well-being is a predictor for determining gender role as well as sexual orientation.

The significance of the rest of the subscales under Body Self Image Questionnaire-Short Form (BSIQ-SR) are

- Health Fitness Influence (HFI) has no significant difference between two gender groups that means HFI is not a predictor for determining gender role as well as sexual orientation.
- Health-Fitness Evaluation (HFE) has no significant difference between two gender groups that means HFE is not a predictor for determining gender role as well as sexual orientation.
- Attention to Grooming (AG) has no significant difference between two gender groups that means AG is not a predictor for determining gender role as well as sexual orientation.
- Height Dissatisfaction (HD) has no significant difference between two gender groups that means HD is not a predictor for determining gender role as well as sexual orientation.
- Fatness Evaluation (FE) has no significant difference between two gender groups that means FE is not a predictor for determining gender role as well as sexual orientation.
- Negative Affect (NA) has no significant difference between two gender groups that means NA is not a predictor for determining gender role as well as sexual orientation.
- Social Dependence (SD) has no significant difference between two gender groups that means SD is not a predictor for determining gender role as well as sexual orientation.

The social support has no significant difference between two gender groups, which means social support is not a predictor for determining gender role as well as sexual orientation.

Discussion
Under Body Image Scale the subscales overall appearance and investment in ideals are found to be the factors that mediate with gender role. Recent studies have already proven that the body image, outness, self-esteem, well-being these factors are linked even discrimination or social support depends on appearance. Here the study depicts that in gender minor individuals the body image especially overall appearances and investment of ideals can mediate gender role and psychological well-being is linked as well. For the trans individuals where the external self-image (sex identity) and internal self-image (gender identity) does not match, conflict arises. This conflict leads to low self-esteem, psychological distress.
In the human society where majority means normal and the norms become steadfast, the minor automatically become

'away from normality'. In this time and age where the heterosexual monotonous love is considered to be normal and gender minors are treated as 'not so normal'. The discrimination of normal and abnormal is true for any other aspect of the society such as race, ethnicity, language, etc. coming back to the point the bias is true for the gender identity as well. Since birth a child is growing up watching and learning these concepts of 'normal' and 'abnormal' that are pre-decided by society. When the individuals come to know that there are other options than this so-called 'normal' and 'abnormal', another conflict arises between the individual's present self and the self they aspire to be. These conflicts lead to psychological distress and lower psychological well-being for the social prejudice, based on appearances, the gender minor individuals tend to be overly concerned about their appearances. With this fact it can also be said that their vision of ideal appearance is naturally high.

The psychological well-being is related to gender role. When the personal belief does not match with the social beliefs, the individuals faces prejudices in order to not comply with the social norms especially in social situations. Sometimes the prejudice leads to hatred and abandonment by the society. Human's one of the primary nature is to be in a groups. When an individual faces prejudices in a groups or feel abandoned by groups that leads to psychological distress and poor psychological well-being.

This study also indicates that the social support may not truly intervene to determine the gender role. It can be said that the urge to express the internal self or mental self is higher than the need of social support.

Conclusion
Apart from the limitations the present study modelled potential link between 1. Overall Appearance Evaluation (OAE) 2. Investment in Ideals (II), 3. Psychological well-being and gender identity. That indicates the preceding 3 variables can predict Gender identity.

Further Recommendation
- Future research with larger sample sizes would also be able to remove the effects of these demographics or to determine whether these demographics moderate the relationships among key components of the model.
- Future research should include sample groups from rural areas.
- Future study should include related variables
- As the topic gender is vast, more studies regarding the topic is must needed.
- Future studies should be considerate enough to be part of the exploration of the gender Identities and include all the gender identities and proceed with further research

Implications
- The present study has been able to found the link between 1. Overall Appearance Evaluation (OAE) 2.Investment in Ideals (II), 3. Psychological wellbeing and gender identity.
- The present study can be used in related researches
- The study widened more research opportunities regarding the topic

Conflict of Interest: No conflict of interest.

Reference
1. Tabaac AR, Perrin PB, Benotsch EG. Discrimination, mental health, and body image among transgender and gender-non-binary individuals: Constructing a multiple mediational path model. J Gay Lesbian Soc Serv. 2018;30(1):1-16. DOI:10.1080/10538720.2017.1408514.
2. Tabaac AR, Perrin PB, Trujillo MA. Multiple mediational model of outness, social support, mental health, and wellness behavior in ethnically diverse lesbian, bisexual, and queer women. LGBT Health. 2015;2(3):265-269. DOI:10.1089/lgbt.2014.0110.
3. Chang CJ, Kellerman JK, Fehling KB, Feinstein BA, Selby EA. The roles of discrimination and social support in the associations between outness and mental health outcomes among sexual minorities. Am J Orthopsychiatry. 2021;91(5):607.
4. McConnell EA, Birkett M, Mustanski B. Families matter: Social support and mental health trajectories among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth. J Adolesc Health. 2016;59(6):674-680. DOI:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2016.07.026.
5. Fingerhut AW. The role of social support and gay identity in the stress processes of a sample of Caucasian gay men. Psychol Sex Orientat Gend Divers. 2018;5(3):290-297. DOI:10.1037/sgd0000279.
6. Puckett JA, Woodward EN, Mereish EH, Pantalone DW. Parental rejection following sexual orientation disclosure: Impact on internalized homophobia, social support, and mental health. LGBT Health. 2015;2(3):265-269. DOI:10.1089/lgbt.2013.0024.
7. Kalash N, Harb H, Zeeni N, El Khoury M, Mattar L. Determinants of body image disturbance and disordered eating behaviors among self-identified LGBTQ individuals. J Eat Disord. 2023;11:12. DOI:10.1186/s40337-022-00716-8.
8. Marmara J, Hosking W, Lyons A. Body image disturbances as predictors of reduced mental health among Australian gay men: Being in a relationship does not serve as a protective factor. Arch Sex Behav. 2018;47(4):1229-1238.DOI:10.1007/s10508-017-1131-3.
9. Skórzewska M, Kurylcio A, Rawicz-Pruszyński K, *et al.* Impact of mastectomy on body image and sexuality from a LGBTQ perspective: A narrative review. J Clin Med. 2021;10(6):1323. DOI:10.3390/jcm10061323.
10. Scandurra C, Esposito C, Fantacci F, *et al.* Social support, identity affirmation, and psychological well-being: A developmental and intersectional comparison between Italian CISgender and nonbinary people with bisexual orientation. Int J Environ Res Public Health. 2023;20(4):3237. DOI:10.3390/ijerph20043237.
11. Watson RJ, Grossman AH, Russell ST. Sources of social support and mental health among LGB youth. Youth Soc. 2019;51(1):30-48. DOI:10.1177/0044118X16660110.