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Sexual Identity Veil – Concealment and Disclosure of Sexual Orientation of Lesbian and Gay

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Abstract

Sexuality is a fundamental aspect of human identity, and its expression plays a significant role in personal, relational, and societal engagements. Expressing sexuality allows individuals to explore and understand their desires, preferences, and boundaries, contributing to a stronger sense of self. However, it is important to navigate sexual expression with respect for oneself and others, considering cultural, social, and safety context. Sexual minorities and Gender minorities are historically marginalized community in whole over the world and they are target multifaceted violence. Sexual orientation is a stigmatizable characteristic, which may lead to a person being discredited when it is revealed (Chrobot- Mason et al., 2001), and gays and lesbians are called "invisible minorities" because sexual orientations cannot be easily identified from physical appearance only (Fassinger, 1991). Some lesbians and gay men maintained separate public and private lives, presenting as heterosexual in public while being open about their orientation in private or within trusted circles. Demonstrating socially agreeable behavior mostly provides a safe and comfortable environment to a great extent. Sexual minorities interact with the surrounding diligently without giving any chance to be caught. It should be noted that, taking false identity is only for survival, as a coping strategy, and it's not like devolution of sexual orientation and curing method, and also it does not mean that the mental health of lesbian and gay individuals is good or bad. There are myriad studies done to explore the psychological and mental health of sexual minorities; however this article only focused on the strategies taken the lesbian and gay individual for their survival and existence.

Introduction

Sexual diverse individuals are not distinguishable from people without disclosing their identity, they are the authoritarian of their sexual identity and decided display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when, and where". Living in a heteronormative society where heterosexuality is considered as the default sexual orientation, sexual diverse youth encounter situations where they need to disclose or conceal their sexual orientation for many reasons, such as seeking intimacy, social support, and avoiding rejection, discrimination (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010). Those who are contradicting to the heteronormativity will be experiences negligence, discrimination, invalidation, controlling and atrocities. The heterosexual people don't need any kind of openness about their sexuality, but LG individuals do coming out in different situation in their life and is not ephemeral. The coming out of the sexual orientation may result in different problems from society, family, job environment and virtual place. The perception of different barriers and difficulties in expressing sexuality may lead them to forming other identity which is real to them and non-real to others. The prime motive of developing a veil is to avoiding discrimination, rejection from family, for safety concerns; avoid religious and cultural conflict with identity, maintaining the emotional connection with family and other people. Developing the veil around their sexual orientation is a form of coping strategy and navigating without any difficulties in their life. This article is not focusing on the emotional and physical difficulties faced by the non-heterosexual people due to non-disclosure of sexual identity.

As one of the pivotal milestones in sexual orientation development (Calzo et al., 2011), these identity management processes require extra cognitive, behavioral, and affective effort (Cortopassi et al, 2017; Pachankis, 2007), and thus, are associated with risk (e.g., stigma-based victimization; Timmins et al., 2020) and resource (e.g., social support; Salway et al., 2018), and contribute to psychological, health, and educational outcomes (e.g., Walch et al., 2016). Therefore, research on the disclosure and concealment process among sexually diverse youth is necessary to understand the positive development of sexually diverse youth. Concealment refers to the active prevention of one's stigmatized identity from being known by others, while disclosure or outness is understood as the extent that one has revealed one's

stigmatized identity to others [Meidlinger, Hope]. Sexual orientation is defined as the cognitive, behavioral, and affective romantic or sexual attractions to other people. The study conducted based on dichotomous assumptions is concealment and disclosure. The concealment is trying to hide their sexual identity from others to secure from atrocities, discriminations and neglecting. The latter one is the management and expression of sexual orientation with comfortable individuals and groups. These two factors are congruence and set aside their typical sexual orientation with their gender and disclose sexual orientation to a non-harmful person and environment. The strategies included counterfeiting a false heterosexual identity, avoiding the discussions on sexuality altogether, and set asiding non-heterosexual identity in the work context.

Most gay men and lesbians have to choose how to handle information about their sexual orientation in their day-to-day encounters with other people. The strategies included counterfeiting a false heterosexual identity, avoiding the issue of sexuality altogether, and integrating a gay identity into the work context (SCOTT B. BUTTON). In some cases, these efforts are supported by participating in activities that are socially defined as gender appropriate and by carefully avoiding interests or mannerisms that are stereotypically associated with being gay or lesbian (Woods, 1993). There are many researchers observes that, Lesbian and gay individual decided to not disclosing their sexual orientation to their family, academic and professional life, social life, virtual and other engaged space due to the anticipated consequences (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Wardell, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953). Studying concealment in adolescence is especially relevant because sexual orientation and gender identity exploration, disclosure, and concealment are a key part of this developmental period [S.T. Russell, J.N. Fish]. Comprehensive understanding of disclosure and concealment among sexual diverse youth requires a multidimensional approach to the disclosure and concealment. Disclosure and concealment need to be conceptualized as two distinguishable yet related concepts assuming sexual diverse people manage disclosure and concealment simultaneously and interactively.

Due to structural oppression and marginalization of non-heterosexual identities and experiences sexually diverse individuals have to continuously and consciously manage and present their identities in their interactions with others by either disclosing or concealing their sexual orientation. Disclosure is generally conceptualized as sharing identity (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Meidlinger & Hope, 2014). In contrast, concealment is conceptualized as hiding information from being communicated (Jackson & Mohr, 2016).

Concealment of Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation concealment is the process of withholding information in a deliberate, conscious, and active manner to hide one's sexual minority status, and is commonly used to evade the psychological stress that the anticipation or expectation of a stressor creates (Brennan et al., 2021; Meyer, 2015; Pachankis, 2007). In contrast, the other commonly used constructs, disclosure and outness, conceptualize the degree to which a sexual minority orientation is revealed (Jackson & Mohr, 2016) and the degree to which an individual is open about their sexual orientation (Feinstein et al., 2019), respectively. Sexual orientation concealment is associated with adverse mental health outcomes, including depressive symptoms (Brennan et al., 2021; Pachankis et al., 2020). Gay men and lesbians are engaging in sexual orientation concealment to avoid negative experiences of stigma and prejudice (Meyer, 2003, 2015; Pachankis, 2007). Rather than assuming sexual orientation concealment as inherently maladaptive, researchers have begun to delineate mechanisms involved in the effect of concealment (Larson et al., 2015; Pachankis, 2007). Underlying the analysis of the mechanisms is a proposition that identity concealment itself is not intrinsically harmful to a concealer's well-being; rather, concealment can sometimes be adaptive and protective (Goh et al., 2019; Pachankis, 2007). The judgment on homosexuality as unnatural – depravity is prevalent in Kerala society, therefore sexual minorities not been received any protection from mainstream, and it is not indicated that there is no movement and pretest behind that invisibility. Sexual minorities using different strategies and opportunities for find out the pleasure and confirm identity. (Reshma)

This study primarily aims to explore the strategies employed by sexual minorities to mask their sexual identity, using an identity veil as a means of ensuring their safety and shielding themselves from discrimination and homophobic responses. The social mores are only supporting heteronormative social functioning. Understanding aloofness of sexual minorities in heteronormative social gathering and artifice socially acceptable identity without deceive themselves. Another key factor driving the concealment of their sexual identity is the perceived loss of social standing or costs. Examining the behaviors and signals displayed by sexual minorities to safeguard their access to societal resources is essential.

Methodology

The study followed the qualitative approach for the exploration of maximum data from the respondents. The semi structured interview guide and observation checklists were used as the tool of

study. The targeted population for the study was highly significant and difficult to find out. The researcher used purposive and snowball sampling method to find out the right samples and confidentiality of their personal details secured in all sense. Participants of the study found from personal contact and social media. The inclusion criterion for the sample is following.

- The participant should be lesbian or gay residing in the state of Kerala.
- The age of the respondent should be between 21 and 40
- The respondent shall not be perform coming out in publically and in virtual space

There are 12 case histories taken from different parts of Kerala: five lesbian and seven gays respectively. Seven interviews taken as face to face interview and observational methods also employed to gather information, which include non-verbal communication and facial expression of the participants. Rest of the interview has taken through phone according to the preference of the respondent. Monologue of their experiences collected through interview and recorded using the recorder device. After the transcription, the researcher read each case history precisely and find out the major themes through thematic analysis. The global themes find out from the analysis are – Veil on public, family, professional and academic engagements and virtual space and the basic themes are also discussed in the discussion part. As a part of ethicality of researcher, the researcher ensures the awareness of participants about the research, and purpose of the study and interest of the researcher in this area. The oral consent provided by the researcher to the participants for the confidentiality of personal details. The limitation of this study was very important for future researches. The researcher unable to find out a sample with the characteristics of - Dailt- lesbian, who is not disclosing her identity in public. The researcher anticipating that, the experience of that specific person would be far from the fence of social division.

Results and Discussion

The Veil of Ignorance: Understanding Sexual Minorities and Public Space

Sexual identity concealment among lesbian and gay individuals in public spaces is a complex behavior driven by a mix of personal, social, and environmental factors. It often stems from the need to navigate safety, acceptance, or professional/personal boundaries in settings where being openly lesbian or gay might invite stigma, discrimination, or even danger. Concealing a minority sexual orientation status often creates anxiety in anticipation of being exposed, and isolation due to intentional separation from individuals of the same stigmatized minority group causing the individual to feel incongruent from their true self (Pachankis, 2007). Concealment may lead to limited social engagement and hinder the opportunity to relate to others sharing a similar experience, which causes an enduring feeling of loneliness (Hu et al., 2016; Jaspal, 2020; Mereish et al., 2017; Newheiser et al., 2017).

As societal awareness and acceptance of diverse sexual orientations have increased and improved in the past few decades, sexual diverse people are becoming more visible in society (Stewart et al., 2019). Coming out is not a short-term process and not end when she/he disclose to anyone about their sexual orientation. Coming out is one of the important stages of living in sexual minorities. “coming out” is not a new term in academic, which is used to denote self disclosure of sexual identity or gender identity of person who belongs to LGBTQIA+ community. Coming out is not a short term process, it is not end with five or six disclosure: it is long term process in their life. Individual who desired to open up his/her sexual orientation may choose different platforms: personally with parents, social media, professional environment, and public space (Rosati et al 2020). Result of coming out maybe not positive always, it would be negatively affect the individual. The responses which against their wish sometimes resulted in find out alternate options for expressing their sexuality.

“Showing affection towards my romantic partner maybe noticeable by public and interpret as I belongs to lesbian. It's more difficult to avoid disclosing personal information that could reveal your sexual orientation, however it’s manageable. Even though, my emotional health is deteriorating while I am going through struggles of hiding my sexual identity, the perception on the difficulties boost me to conceal some aspects of myself”- (Dhanya L27)

From her word, there are many of sexual minorities are living around without noticeable. Sexuality also drives power dynamics. Patriarchy ties it to caste and class—endogamy (marrying within caste) preserves social order, while sexual “purity” polices women’s bodies. Honor killings, though illegal, persist in cases of “deviant” love. Sexuality in Indian society is a layered and often paradoxical topic, shaped by a rich historical tapestry, religious diversity, colonial legacies, and modern shifts. Its importance lies in how it intersects with identity, family, morality, and power—though it’s rarely discussed openly due to cultural taboos. As a precaution, engagements with the public are precisely controlled by themselves and moving to find out the safe environment to display from sexuality is sometime invite more dangerous situation. Engaging with the heterosexual people and talking intentionally about heterosexual relationships is kind of approach developed by

sexual minorities to make their space secure. On the other hand, some non-heterosexual individuals deliberately refuse to stay with heterosexual environment by giving developed excuses: it sometimes can be planned and not planned. Vediak who is 28 year old lesbian shared, *"finding out the possibilities to keep distance from the intruded questioning from heterosexual environment usually comes naturally without even a prior thinking, otherwise make purposefully make justification for relive the environment".* Similarly some of the respondents shared natural way of avoiding uncomfortable situations. From this, the researcher could come to the point as concealing strategies mostly comes from natural, according to their wishes, desires and dreams, in some cases they design cope up mechanisms.

Social Media as a Veil

As we know all there are many social media platforms using by the people as entertainment, time-killing, socialization, flirting, and business as well. However there are a lot of fake accounts using in every virtual platforms for finding their personal needs. Lesbian and Gay people counterfeit in social media at their initial stage of sexuality expression for various purposes: socializing, entertainment, community surveillance, identity expression, emotional support, sexual gratification, and romantic relationships (Chong et al., 2015; Gudelunas, 2012; Van De Wiele & Tong, 2014). They are using their "fake identity" to know him/her in-depth, share feelings and LG related issues. The important benefit of virtual disclosures with "fake profile" of their identity won't affect their day to day life. Apart from using general social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), they engage in LGBT social media platforms (e.g., Grindr, Jack'd, Her) for various purposes: socializing, entertainment, community surveillance, identity expression, emotional support, sexual gratification, and romantic relationships (Chong et al., 2015; Gudelunas, 2012; Van De Wiele & Tong, 2014).Some of these applications also utilize the global positioning system (GPS) to allow users to connect with other LGBT individuals in their immediate vicinity (Goedel & Duncan, 2015; Van De Wiele & Tong, 2014).Study also revealed that sexual minority men in China used gay-specific social networking platforms (i.e., Blued) to search for health information (Chen & Ding, 2020). Second, LGBT individuals use social media for self-discovery and identity construction (Paceley et al., 2022).

They feel safer exploring their sexual identity on LGBT social media as they may not be comfortable expressing themselves in face-to-face interaction (Gudelunas, 2012). Interaction and communication with other LGBT users can be valuable in guiding sexual identity development (Harper et al., 2016). Third, LGBT individuals seek community connections and establish social relationships on social media. As LGBT individuals often experience rejection and have hardship obtaining support in their offline environment, social media allows them to maintain online connections and build friendships with like-minded people by safely expressing their authentic identity (Brandt & Carmichael, 2020; Chan, 2021).

"When I realized as I am different from others, I wasn't able to talk about it anyone. During the chat with my alternative Facebook profile with a lesbian helped me to know more about diverse sexual orientation and ascertain my identity. Moreover it made me to think about the consequences of "coming out" from a typical family, so I decided to stay with the alternative social media profile until I become independent"

Creating alternative social media account is one of the imperative movements for some LG individual who do want to stay in bracket of heterosexual and explore in virtual world. Virtual world is safe from physical harm, keep it as a secret at the tip of fingers, anytime can log in and log out and moreover it help and social media profiles can offer sexual minorities a safer space to express themselves and connect with supportive communities. Alternative profiles allow individuals to use pseudonyms or remain anonymous, protecting their identity from potential attackers or harassers. These profiles can help users connect with like-minded individuals or supportive groups, fostering a sense of belonging and reducing isolation. Alternative platforms often provide resources, such as mental health support, legal advice, or crisis intervention, tailored to the needs of sexual minorities.

"social media platforms should not be limited to a safe space. Moreover, virtual spaces can be defined as a starting point for all kinds of movements, for being part of various discussions that aim to establish identity, for developing a sense of entitlement"- Daya L35

Social media platform can also be used as to join with different association and part of their activities. Keep connected with the peer groups and allies is also kind of strategy to conceal sexual identity. Open up the sexual identity to the trusted people is considered as an approach to avoid following difficulties.

Unveiling Invisibility: Sexual Minorities in Professional and Educational Environment

Sexual minority individuals may experience discrimination when seeking a job, may have concerns over their job security were colleagues to discover their sexual identity, and may earn reduced wages as compared to heterosexually-identified counterparts (Embrick, Walther, & Wickens, 2007, Bouzianis, Malcolm, & Hallab, 2008). Although

blatant discrimination (e.g., denying service) may be less likely in the public commercial setting, such as hotels and restaurants, due to legal ramifications, subtle forms of interpersonal discrimination (e.g., avoiding eye contact, increasing rudeness) are more likely to occur (Harris et al., 2005; Hebl et al., 2002). Sexual diverse youth may also apply different disclosure and concealment strategies to share their sexual orientation based on the social environment (Goldbach & Gibbs, 2017).

I have many friends in my office, however I never did any movement as let others know my sexual orientation. The homo-social groups in my office always share about their heterosexual relationships, flirting, and portray sexist comment of girls. Even though I don't have any emotional connection towards girls, I used to engage with them, share any buildup stories about, and manifest as I belong to heterosexual" Anurag G28.

Sexual diverse individuals are not distinguishable from people without disclosing their identity, they are the authoritarian of their identity and decided display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when, and where" () Kishore Kumar has written in his autobiography: He was a complete introvert in college. He was not interested in sports or flirting with girls. He was afraid that if he got closer to people, they would know his identity. He had the syndrome of being alone in a crowd that non-heterosexuals experience. He dealt with it through reading, studying, and music. Kishore Kumar's autobiography serves as both a personal testament and a cultural commentary on the complexities of navigating identity within a restrictive societal framework. His journey underscores the resilience found in creative expression and the critical need for supportive communities for marginalized individuals (Kishore 2017).

In workplaces or professional settings, lesbians might avoid discussing their personal lives or relationships to prevent discrimination or bias. When discussing relationships, lesbians might use gender-neutral terms (e.g., "partner" instead of "girlfriend") to avoid revealing their sexual orientation. Lesbians might participate in heterosexual social norms, such as attending events with opposite-sex partners or avoiding public displays of affection with same-sex partners.

Silent Struggle: Navigating Sexual Minorities in the Family Dynamics

Sexual minorities in India are largely stigmatized and disempowered socially, culturally, politically and often legally and economically too says Ashok Row Kavihe[1]. Disclosing sexual orientation to family members may not be as easy as disclosing to friends due to differential relational power between sexual diverse youth and the disclosure receiver (Grafsky, 2018; Li & Samp, 2019).

Even though there are many discourses happening around the homosexuality in Indian context, the family system of India still stay away from the inclusivity of lesbian and gay identities. The reflection of family towards lesbian and gay individual would be isolation, rejection, taken them to medication, and forceful for heterosexual marriages as a curing practices. The isolation from the blood connection becomes intrinsic to the existence of a large number of lesbian and gay adolescents, and this feeling is often accompanied by self-loathing and confusion as to their future. Majority of lesbians and gay men manage information related to their sexual orientation during their daily interactions with others as a precaution. Previous literature has defined concealment as the active avoidance of revealing personal information that is perceived as disgraceful or unfavorable (Larson & Chastain, 1990, p. 440). On the one hand, stigmatized individuals may perceive concealment as a self-protective measure to avoid discrimination, rejection, and harassment (Goh et al., 2019; Pachankis, 2007); on the other hand, concealment demands continuous effort by concealers to hide a stigmatized identity and in turn likely creates psychological burdens (Pachankis et al., 2020). While a person's decision to conceal a stigmatized identity could be driven by situational factors (Pachankis et al., 2020). Identity disclosure may take the form of active and explicit expression of an individual's identity, while those engaging in concealment may deliberately counterfeit or avoid being discovered (Meidlinger & Hope, 2014).

"My family never going to accept my sexual orientation ever, but they loved me more than anything and I like them too. I don't want to wet their eyes. I know it's not easy to live in double role forever, maybe I will disclose my sexual orientation with them in future, and currently it's not possible I just want to be independent between. I never engaged with them in the discussion about heterosexual marriage, albeit we came in healthy discussion on non-heterosexual relationship. I think they need little bit time to know more about diverse sexuality" Neha L22.

While a developmental process experienced by all individuals, sexual minorities face the unique and specific challenge of deciding if it is safe (physically and economically among other reasons)

[1] Ashok Row Kavihe is the editor of Bombay Dost ("Bombay Friend"), the Quarterly gay magazine published in India.

to disclose their sexual orientation to their parents. Thus, concealment is not only the absence of disclosure or outness, but the active prevention of disclosure or outness. However, sexual diverse adolescents' concealment or disclosure of their identities is an ongoing and shifting process that differs based on individuals they interact with (e.g., peers, teachers, family members) and varying contexts they navigate (e.g., school, home) [A. Dewaele, M. Van Houtte, N. Cox, *et al.*].

Beyond the Veil: Intersectional challenges of Sexual Minorities

Lesbian women are considered to be a doubly marginalized minority and have experienced more obstacles and discomfort; and therefore conceal their sexual orientation more often than gay men (Bowes, 1996). Deepa 2003, the existence of lesbian in Kerala was considered as a myth or western imported concept, however the enquiry about the suicides of lesbians in Kerala done by the Sahayathrika an organization for the support of lesbian in Kerala, changed the myth to reality. The study revealed the vulnerable stage of lesbian lives in Kerala. Anjana, coming out as bisexual women to her family, decided to end her life to stop the torture and dubious practices of conversion methods in 2020. Two girls also ended their lives by jumping from the bridge to the river without revealing any clues. Rather than typical reasons like financial crisis, relationship failure, trauma, and etc, the sexuality expression and living with a publicly accepted identity is also be a reason behind the suicides. The study conducted by the Sahayathrika revealed that the majority of girls who end their lives are coming from a non-privileged environment. This points out that there are many female sexual minorities existing surrounding with dejecting to express sexuality and false identity moreover innocuous. Veena "they are suppressing their sexual orientation and expression due to the fear of domestic and public form of violence.

Devika (2003), noted that, even though Kerala Development Model received worldwide attention on the improvement of quality of life of Keralites, accepted marginalized communities including Adivasis, Dalits, women, and fisherman and non-accepted marginalized sexual minorities, sex workers and HIV/AIDS patients were subsided. Sexual minorities are considered as an 'abjected' population in developmental practices as welfare practices. Social norms in Kerala still remain conservative despite the 'progressive' title accorded to it by mainstream developmental discourses (Devika, 2013). In this conservative Kerala society, Women and sexual minorities are the main victims of sexual morality that are embedded in the public. The double oppression still made the lesbian individual invisible or stay in the closet. Lesbian women are considered to be a doubly marginalized minority and have experienced more obstacles and discomfort; and therefore conceal their sexual orientation more often than gay men (Bowes, 1996). Family, workplace, academic institutions and virtual places are potentially negative environments for lesbian individuals.

"I was born in a typical religious family which taught as homosexuality as disorder which needs to be cured. During my adulthood, I never spoke about romance, love, family and children. That made them think of me as asexual and unromantic. Actually it was a mask on my real identity to protect from anticipated inappropriate curable methods to same sex attraction. Even though my parents and friends mocked me as an emotionless person, I was safe from persecution"- Sayi L26

This suggests a conservative or traditional upbringing where non-heteronormative identities were stigmatized, likely rooted in religious doctrine and this perspective was normalized within their family or community, hinting at a broader cultural context that may have reinforced these beliefs. Choosing silence over discussion regarding romance, love, family, and children within the conservative group, sometimes led to misinterpretation of identity or labeling them as asexual or un-romantic. Perception of anticipated inappropriate curable methods is loaded with implication and it points to an awareness of potential interventions possibly conversion therapy or other coercive practices, commonly associated with environments that pathologies homosexuality. Sayi's decision to hide their true self was thus a calculated move to avoid "persecution," a strong word that evokes not just disapproval but active harm or punishment. Moreover the tension between external perception and internal reality is palpable here, Sayi was neither emotionless nor unromantic, but circumstances demanded they play that role. Goffman(1994) forward that, people belongs to minority group or vulnerable group would employ available strategies like self concealment, a habitual way to reduce the perceived risk in their life. A participant, who is lesbian women, shares, *"even though I couldn't agree with the apolitical teasing or discussion within the heteronormative group*." Coming out lesbian or gay within the dependable group would be a stressful situation, to avoid that sexual minorities use self concealment as a strategy (McIntyre et. al, 2014).

Another contentious theme coming from the analysis is caste and sexuality. The theory of intersectionality emphasis that, social divisions like gender, class, caste, race, sexual identity and gender identity are not exclusive to each others, but they are intertwined in great extent. Like any other community, the LGBTQIA+ community is forever impacted by caste. Fraternity, according to Ambedkar, is "essentially an attitude of respect and

reverence towards fellow men" and "primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience." Gaurav demonstrates how the two identities he straddles have built-in hierarchies. His Dalit identity was still seen as outdated, even though his queer identity made him more approachable, contemporary, and likeable. Many queer Dalits feel compelled to conceal their caste on mainstream queer platforms due to fear of discrimination. For instance, individuals like Pawar have reported that revealing their caste often leads to exclusion or negative judgments on dating apps, where caste-based preferences are common. This necessitates a form of "caste closeting," where they prioritize their queer identity over their caste identity to find acceptance within the LGBTQIA+ community[2]

"I belong to Dalit community and lower middle class family. At this stage of my life I don't have any plan to disclose my identity to family and the public yet. I want to hold both of my identities in my life, and well know that they are vulnerable too. Caste is everywhere, LGBTQIA+ community are also not exceptional." (Kannan G26)

Being Dalit in India already places you in a historically marginalized position. Caste isn't just social—it's economic, cultural, and deeply personal. As a lower-middle-class individual, you're likely balancing financial precocity with familial expectations, where stability often trumps individual expression. Add an LGBTQIA+ identity, and you're carrying two "vulnerable" markers in a society that can punish both. The Dalit community, while diverse, isn't immune to patriarchal and a heteronormative norm, caste oppression doesn't means to solidarity with sexual minorities.

Wanting to "hold both" speaks to resilience. The Dalit identity ties you to a legacy of resistance- as Ambedkar's fight against caste, and your LGBTQIA+ identity is a personal truth you're not discarding, just guarding. That duality is power, but it's also a tightrope. Concealing one doesn't erase it; it's a shield, not surrender. The vulnerability comes from knowing both could be weaponised against you- caste slurs from queer spaces, homophobia from caste kin, but she is still claiming them internally. A Dalit lesbian and gay person experiences the compounded effects of both caste and sexual orientation-based discrimination. This intersectionality means that the challenges she/he faces are not simply cumulative but are intertwined in ways that exacerbate her marginalization. For example, she may face discrimination within LGBTQ+ spaces due to her caste identity and within Dalit communities due to her sexual orientation. Caste and sexual identity are inseparable. The intersection of these identities can lead to unique forms of violence, exclusion and rejection.

The concealing strategy or selected disclosure is crucial for Dalit-Queer-Women. Greene(1994) proposed the term "triple minority" to address the issues faced by queer women regarding their sexism, racism and homophobia. Preponderance of caste also need address in the arena of Kerala. Queer movements is frequently critiques for being "caste blind" ie. It is fail to acknowledge how caste impacts the lives of queer individuals. Dalit- Queer person experiences a dual marginalization facing both caste discrimination and queer-phobia. This intersectionality complicates their representation within both the queer and Dalit movements, leaving them feeling alienated from both.

It's important to note that these strategies were often born out of necessity due to societal pressures and the risk of harm, discrimination, or ostracization. While many lesbians and gay feel more comfortable being open about their sexual orientation, they still face social challenges that may lead them to conceal their identity in certain contexts and lead life with inconspicuous identity.

"I can anticipate about the list of question I had to answer when I am started to express my sexual identity in the public domain. Even I could to answer all of them; I know they would not accept me. Why should I waste my energy for the unnecessary situation? Heterosexuals didn't have to waste their energy for assert their sexual identity in any sense." Sayi L26

This foresight reveals a heightened awareness of societal attitudes, likely informed by their earlier experiences in a religious family that viewed homosexuality as a disorder. She believes that no amount of explanation or justification would sway the opinions of those around them. "Heterosexuals didn't have to waste their energy for assert their sexual identity in any sense." This observation is both an indictment of societal norms and a lament of inequality. The phrase "in any sense" emphasizes the universality of this privilege, amplifying frustration. It's a critique of heteronormativity, where one group's identity is assumed and unquestioned, while others must justify theirs at great personal cost. Identity concealing considering as a political stand, this suggests Sayi isn't alone in their reticence, others in their circle also withhold their identities, but frame it as a deliberate stance, perhaps tied to ideology or resistance.

Conclusion

Disclosing sexual orientation to the peer groups and totally comfortable spaces is also kind of concealing attitude. LG individual express their emotions only within the trusted space and moreover it is not a public place, therefore sexual minorities are free from all form of social violence

and rejections. Concealing one's sexual orientation is a deeply personal and complex decision that individuals may make for various reasons, including cultural, religious, familial, or societal pressures. In many parts of the world, LGBTQ+ individuals face discrimination, stigma, or even violence due to their sexual orientation, which can lead some to hide this aspect of their identity for safety or acceptance. This process, often referred to as "being in the closet," can involve avoiding discussions about one's personal life, presenting oneself in ways that align with societal expectations, or even entering into heterosexual relationships to maintain appearances. While concealing one's sexual orientation might provide temporary protection or social acceptance, it can also lead to emotional and psychological challenges, such as feelings of isolation, anxiety, or internalized shame. It's important to recognize that everyone's journey is unique, and individuals should be supported in making decisions that feel safest and most authentic to them. Over time, many people find empowerment and freedom in coming out, but this is a deeply personal process that requires time, self-reflection, and a supportive environment.

The strategies employed by lesbian and gay individual to conceal their sexual orientation reflex a complex interplay between personal safety, social dynamics and emotional stability. Understanding these strategies is crucial for fostering supporting environment that encourages openness and acceptance. Whenever someone conceals their sexual orientation in the face of perceived rejection, homophobic reactions, violence, laughter, or satire, it is seen as a sign of security and freedom from harm. Sexual diverse as an intangible identity, disclosure is only way to know one's sexual desires. At the same time disclosure of sexuality to trusted person is also kind of cope up mechanism to avoid unnecessary situations. Rather than heterosexual time passing activities, lesbian and gay individuals engaging self improvement activities like reading, writing, music and academics.

Disclosing one's sexual identity based on the context is a method of managing identity concealment. Sharing this information with trusted individual or LGBTQIA+ allies provide a sense of safety and precaution from anticipated rejection and homophobic attitudes, which can help mitigate internalized homophobia. Many sexual minorities choose to distance themselves from their home to escape discussion about marriage and heterosexual relationship. Those living within the heteronormative families or social circle may create believable narrative about their partner "not-existing" that fit the expectations of their environment. Ultimately, these strategies are aimed at ensuring safety and survival.

Compulsory heterosexuality is significantly impacted the lives of lesbian. The double oppression faced by the lesbian due to the interplay of gender identity and sexual orientation and may be it exacerbated by the factors of caste and class. In the same time they are not free from the disturbance from patriarchal institutions. Hiding sexual identity is possible and expressing Dalit identity in public. Albeit, Dalit identity can be hide in the virtual spaces in some extent and express their sexuality. Navigating between non-heterosexuality and caste is crucial for sexual minorities. For Dalit-queer identities, their caste identities complicate their romantic relationships. Dalit queer individuals may compelled to hide their sexual identity to escape societal stigma while simultaneously grappling with the implications of their caste identity. Sexual minorities those who are aware about their vulnerable surroundings may perceive "Unscathed Identity". Through this an identity that remains intact, unharmed, or unaffected by external challenges, trauma, or societal pressures. It implies resilience and the ability to maintain one's sense of self despite adversity. By, developing "unscathed identity" could describe the process of growing and evolving one's identity while remaining resilient and true to oneself, even in the face of challenges or external pressures. It might emphasize the importance of self-awareness, authenticity, and emotional strength in navigating life's complexities.

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