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Thinking Gender Papers

Title

Perspectives on Internalized Homophobia: Qualitative Research on Chinese LGBTQ Students in the U.S. and China and Their Romantic Relationships

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Author

Li, Haoran

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Introduction

Internalized homophobia, defined as a “gay person’s direction of negative social attitudes toward the self, leading to a devaluation of the self and resultant internal conflicts and poor self-regard,” often negatively affects the psychological, physiological and social well-being of both the individual experiencing it as well as the larger LGBTQ community (Meyer, et al., 1998).

In this study, I seek to examine how Chinese LGBTQ students attending universities in the U.S. and China score on the Global Men’s Health and Rights Study (GMHRS) Internalized Homophobia Scale. I propose that they experience internalized homophobia, which affects their romantic relationships to a severe degree. Since university students are typically involved in the process of building their identity through experimenting with romantic relationships, it is important to focus a study on this population.

Background



As these statistics show, In China, internalized homophobia is not only an issue of LGBTQ rights, but also women’s rights and children’s rights. It is likely that such problems are common in other cultures where the familial and political environments are similar to that of China.

Literature Review

1

Entering and Establishing Romantic Relationships (Rowen, et al., 2015)

Internalized homophobia is associated with lower levels of self-esteem, emotional stability and higher levels of sex guilt. Furthermore, it is also linked to alcohol abuse, shame, depression and HIV risk behaviors. All of these issues hinder LGBTQ individuals’ ability to establish and maintain romantic relationships.

2

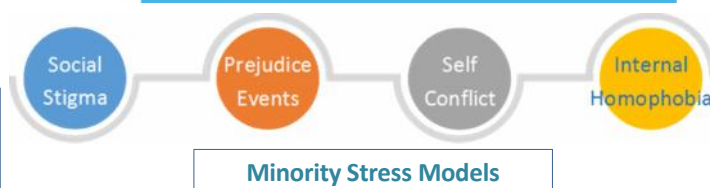
After LGBTQ Individuals Establish Romantic Relationships (Meyer, et al., 2009)

Internalized homophobia can still present harm to them and their partners. People with internalized homophobia are more likely to experience relational victimization, sexual compulsivity and relationship problems.

3

Those Who Wish to Escape From Existing Romantic Relationships (Carvalho, et al., 2011)

Internalized homophobia can also create a number of obstacles when trying to leave relationships, particularly seeking psychological help. There is a negative association between internalized homophobia levels and their victims’ willingness to seek help.



Research Methods

My research will mainly use qualitative methods.

The key independent variable—level of internalized homophobia—will be measured and controlled based on the aforementioned GMHR Internalized Homophobia Scale.

I will conduct semi-structured interviews to assess participants’ subjective feelings regarding romantic relationships.

I plan to recruit a total of 20 participants—Chinese college students from UCLA and Nanjing University—who consider themselves members of the LGBTQ population.

There will be 10 participants from China and the United States respectively.

Due to the sensitive nature of this topic, I will use snowball sampling to collect interviews to be conducted both face-to-face and online.

Discussion

I anticipate that students with higher degrees of internalized homophobia will experience more difficulties surrounding their romantic relationships. With an increase in the degree of internalized homophobia, people will have a wider variety of subjective feelings and personal approaches to cope with. I suspect my participants will face more serious problems in their relationships, such as low self-confidence, mood swings, violence, distrust, etc.

This research will hopefully lead to more discussion on student perspectives regarding their own internalized homophobia. More importantly, the comparative aspect of this research will contribute to the understanding of LGBTQ communities across national borders and help members of these communities pinpoint problems they must address.

Apart from my broader goals with this proposed project, I hope this will help set the stage for my future research to combat and remedy the detrimental effects of this phenomenon according to the needs of different populations.

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Contact Information

Haoran Li
Email: lihaoran1027@ucla.edu
Phone: 707-888-1132