Sexual Minority Discrimination Today; implications for Relationship Satisfaction, Passionate Love and Communication Apprehension

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Thank-you.

A point to remember;

Little by little we accomplish things. It's a marathon, not a sprint.

Contents

Abstract

The aim of this study was to evaluate quality of relationships between opposite sex couples and same-sex couples, post marriage referendum in Ireland, across variable of relationship satisfaction, communication and passionate love. A second aim was to determine if sexual minorities do experience greater discrimination, and how it effect relationship quality. The design implemented was mixed methods including quantitative and qualitative questions. A partially cross-sectional and correlational design was executed to determine significance for the numerous variables. Online snowball sampling using survey techniques was applied to collect data. Measures included the Couple Satisfaction Index, Passionate Love Scale and the Situational Communication Apprehension measure. Results showed that sexual minorities experience significantly higher levels of discrimination than heterosexual couples. Passionate Love and Communication were shown to predict relationship satisfaction. Statistical analysis reported no significant difference in relationship satisfaction based on sexual orientation. Qualitative questions were able to provide more detailed data on discrimination.

1 Introduction

The study of Lesbian and Gay psychology does not associate homosexuality with pathology or mental illness, the aim of the accumulative literature is to combat discrimination, prejudice and stigma that this sexual minority have faced (Coyle & Kitzinger, 2002). This area of study has been hindered in various aspects; homosexuality was once classified as a mental illness. It was not until 1973 that the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.* A major setback of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) movement in Ireland was that homosexuality was illegal up until 1998; it was then decriminalised under the Employment Equality Act and the Equality Status Act (2002). A recurrent argument for the LGBT movement was that homosexuality was not a choice which individuals made but was of biological disposition (Coyle & Kitzinger, 2002). In May 2015, The Marriage Equality Referendum was passed in Ireland which legalised marriage for two same-sex partners (Tobin, 2016). This event piqued interest to further investigate this topic for same-sex couples.

Although progressive steps towards equality have been taken for the LGBT community, discrimination and stigmatisation are still connected to this minority group. Mounting empirical research spanning three decades has been gathered stating that sexual orientation does not affect parenting skills. Golombok, Tasker and Murray (1997) found that children parented by lesbian families had good psychological adjustment similarly to heterosexual mothers, stating there was no difference in the likelihood of behavioural or psychological difficulties. Biblarz and Savci (2010) concur that sexual minorities parenting skills are on par with their heterosexual counterparts and Farr (2017) found child adjustment and family functioning did not differ regarding parental sexual orientation, with children

equally developmentally adjusted. Farr (2017) emphasised these results go beyond family structure to focus more on family functioning and processes which were shown to be influential to childhood development such as parental stress and couple adjustment.

Although there is mounting evidence suggesting that sexual orientation does not negatively impact child development and legal improvements have been made in the form of marriage equality, the LGBT community seems to still experience stigma and prejudice. Meyer (2003) described the negative impact of this stigma in the form of 'minority stressors' which builds upon social evaluation theory suggesting that humans learn about themselves from others (Pettigrew, 1967) and social identity theories which expand on the understanding of intergroup relations which postulate that categorization of social groups triggers intergroup processes, such as discrimination (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

The legal progression of LGBT equality has occurred but this equality has not transferred socially. Frost (2013) articulates how same-sex couples experience social devaluation of their relationships on a substantial widespread scale. More research needs to be conducted to better understand the complexities of same-sex relationships. This introduction will articulate relevant theory and its association to relationship satisfaction. It will explore LGBT history, evaluate the current stance relating to marriage and subsequently evaluate the implications of discrimination. Finally, the variables investigated will be discussed along with aims and hypotheses.

1.1 Theory

Humans coexist in society through the relationships that they form with others. Some relationships are more intimate than others; it is these intimate relationships which are of interest to this research. Intimate relationships are defined as "strong, frequent, and diverse

interdependence that lasts over a considerable period of time" (Kelley et al. 1983, p.38).

Two main theories that are linked to relationship psychology are Interdependence theory

(Thibaut & Kelley 1959; Kelley 1979) and Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1973).

Interdependence Theory has been a dominant theory applied to close relationships since the

1980's (Kelley et al., 1983) which postulates that social situations have an array of

variations on many different dimensions and it is these variations which influence

relationship processes and outcomes between individuals (Kelley et al., 2003). Within this

theory, dependency on one another within the relationship is explained where the less

dependent partner has more power, whereas mutual dependency allows a balanced,

cooperative and less conflictual behaviours between partners.

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1973) lies within developmental psychology used

to explain infant-caregiver attachment. The theory was adapted in the 1980's to explain

intimate relationships between adults (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Attachment theory

hypothesises that in adulthood, individuals develop close emotional bonds with significant

others in the form of romantic partnerships which they are innately motivated to preserve

over time (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Attachment theory is built upon the concept that in

times of stressful, upsetting or intimidating situations individuals pursue proximity to their

primary attachment figure (Bowlby, 1973). The psychological security that a person

experiences knowing that their attachment figure is available lends them the capacity to

challenge themselves, take risks and achieve personal growth. Thus, applying Bowlby's

(1973) theory to intimate relationships, those built upon secure attachment are those that

facilitate growth, acceptance and maturity.

The importance of studying intimate relationships is shown in the effect these

relationships have upon a couple's children. Children initially learn about relationships from

their parents and it is through these observations that children apply, adapt and conceptualise their schemas of how relationships should be. Bandura (1989) put this concept into theory with Social Learning Theory specifying that through observation, children learn to imitate the interactions between parents. Since Bandura (1989), research has progressed to show children do not only observe and imitate parental behaviour but process this information on a deeper level to construe meanings and beliefs related to parental behaviour (Davies, Harold, Goeke-Morey & Cummings, 2002). Seemingly, it is these first impressions of the perceived quality of the relationship between a child's parents which serve as the foundation for future intimate relationships (Einav, 2014). Taking into account the preceding theory explained, including Attachment Theory (1973) and Social Learning theory (1989), the repercussions of parental relationships can be deduced to be of importance not only for a child's physical development but also their emotional and mental development. Therefore, the study of adult relationships reaches beyond their own mental health or legal policy, effecting children and family structure.

Although literature (Moore & Stambolis-Ruhstofer, 2013; Fedewa, Black & Ahn, 2015) have attested to the evaluation that sexual orientation does not affect parenting abilities, LGBT couples still face discrimination due to their minority status. Meyer (2003) elaborated on social stress theory to conceptualise minority stress, which is categorised as excess stress, in the form of abandonment from society, due to a stigmatised position. Durkheim (1951) supported the view that the effect of feeling alienated from society can cause detrimental effects to a person's health including the risk of suicide. Meyer (2003) explained the types of excess stress facing sexual minorities using a distal-proximal model which proposes a distinction between the social conditions and individual structures. The three key areas Meyer (2003) addressed, begin at the distal and progress towards the

proximal. The first area is external stressful events which effect LBGT individuals; secondly the expectation of these events occurring cause worry with additional pressure of constant vigilance. Finally, internalisation of the negative societal view of same-sex couples occurs. These components enhance anxiety, stress and pressure of conformity for sexual minorities effecting identity and health.

Tajfel and Turner (1986) provide theory regarding intergroup relations and the impact of being marginalised from society due to minority status. Pettigrew (1967) furthered this focus of theorisation using social evaluation theory which posited that humans learn about their characteristics through comparisons with others. Individuals in minority groups often compare themselves unfavorably to the majority which construes negative image of themselves. This leads to internalisation of stereotypes which is malevolent to mental health and their sense of identity (Pettigrew, 1967). The theories provided explain the relevance of minority discrimination and its implications.

1.2 LGBT History

To understand the full extent of discrimination which the LGBT community has overcome and to comprehend the major progressive steps taken towards equality, it is necessary to provide context and to give a brief history of the LGBT movement. Lesbian and gay psychology originally developed as an objection towards the prominence of mainstream psychology that focused on heterosexism (Coyle & Kitzinger, 2002). Homosexuality has existed for centuries along with discrimination and outright violence towards those minority individuals. Activism in this area encountered stumbling blocks throughout history; Nazism banned books referring to homosexuality, burned The Institute for Sexual Science in 1933, while also murdering homosexual individuals (Coyle & Kitzinger, 2002). Prominent past historical figures have been disadvantaged due to their

homosexuality. Mathematician, Alan Turning, who broke the Nazi Code during World War II, was victimized due to homosexuality (Coyle & Kitzinger, 2002). Frank Kamey, a gay PhD Harvard graduate was dismissed from the army due to homosexuality in 1957. He then became a prominent figure for gay civil rights who campaigned for homosexuality to be declassified as a mental illness (Adam, 1987). The history of LBGT movement was hindered by repetitive burning of historical documents in an attempt to oppress this minority and impede progression of later generations through ignorance of previous attempts towards equality. During the 1970s the majority of psychological literature, both American and European, focused on homosexuality as pathological considering sexual minorities as the byproduct of an unconventional, disturbed upbringing (Rosario, 1997).

Psychological textbooks defined homosexuals with regards to 'sexual deviation', 'sexual dysfunction' or having a sickness (Hall, 1985). Methods were used to convert these individuals to heterosexism through systematic desensitization, aversion therapy and even castration (Rosario, 1997). In 1973 progressive steps were taken whereby homosexuality was declassified as a mental illness in the *Diagnostic Manual of Mental Disorders* by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). By 1975, the APA supported a policy which stated that homosexuality no longer implied mental illness. The APA encouraged health professionals to stop viewing homosexuality as a mental health impairment.

By the 1990s psychological discipline no longer sought to oppress homosexuality. Disparities in educational and legal equality remained; nothing of substance was being taught in relation to homosexuality at an undergraduate or clinical level on psychology courses (Pilkington & Cantor, 1996). The impact on therapy was immense; newly qualified psychologists were not equipped with the training or skills required to deal with issues relating to LGBT relationship difficulties and their experiences with adoption and fostering.

Homosexual psychological literature was not widely available. May 2015 marked the biggest step in LGBT history as same-sex marriage was legalised by popular vote via the Marriage Equality Referendum (Tobin, 2016). Ireland was the first country to legalise marriage via popular vote, a monumental moment in LGBT history. While this was a huge stride towards legal equality, social equality had not progressed as steadily.

1.3 Current Debate: Marriage

The right to marry is a fundamental right which until 2015 was denied to LGBT couples (Tobin, 2016). The legalization of same-sex marriage is a major achievement for the LGBT community, as homosexuality was once classed as a mental illness (Coyle & Kitzinger, 2002). The marriage equality act has caused debate as to whether or not marriage is the epitome of what the LGBT community has stood and aimed for in their campaign for equality. Lyon and Frohard-Dourlent (2015) frame the two sides of the debate competently; on one hand marriage is viewed as the final step towards equality to legitimise same-sex relationships on par with heterosexual couples. Alternatively, marriage devalues relationships models that deviate from the 'normative' relationships type which focuses on nuclear families and reproduction (Butler, 2002). Marriage therefore it a heterosexual normative view of how intimate relationships between two adults should focus on monogamy, a binary sex-gender system and natural reproduction (Rosenbury, 2007). During the tumultuous times in the campaign for civil rights and equality for LGBT individual's, marriage became the embodiment of equality. Legal equality did not transfer to social equality as parental rights for LGBT parents do not correspond within marriage (Butterfield & Padavic, 2014). Within work settings, marriage equality has not had the desired effect to diminish intense scrutiny and stigma that same-sex couples experience (Spade & Willse, 2013).

It may be viewed that pressure is placed upon LGBT individuals to marry now that it has been legalised. The pressure is to legalise a relationship as it allows acceptance in society and to receive the social and financial support that accompanies legal marriage (Lyon & Frohard-Dourlent, 2015). Considering the magnitude of legalising marriage, it could be assumed that LGBT individuals would have sought to marry but his has not transpired. Lyon and Frohard-Dourlent, (2015) found that LBGT individuals choose not to marry for a number of reasons including; sheer indifference and pressure not to marry from the LGBT community due to their ideological perspectives of marriage as a heterosexual norm. Marriage is seen as a long-lasting life commitment but many LGBT individuals have chosen to waive their right to marry. Refraining to marry is paradoxical to the movement of civil rights for LBGT couples which have advocated for this right for decades. In turn this leads to the question as to whether marriage was the correct avenue to pursue for LGBT equality; although legal equality has been accomplished it does not equate to social equality.

1.4 Implications of Discrimination

Despite progressive steps towards equality being taken LBGT couples still face discrimination. Research shows that LGBT relationships are not recognised as being equal to heterosexual couples as they frequently experience discrimination (Meyer, Schwartz & Frost, 2008). Herdt & Kertzner (2006) found that negative stereotypes exist regarding intimacy in LGBT couples, which seek to support heterosexual norms, structures and values while depreciating the intimacy ambitions of gay and lesbian couples. LGBT discrimination occurs on a spectrum varying from violent hate crimes to daily harassment (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). Barrantes, Eaton, Veldhuis and Hughes (2017) found that the minority stress variable, 'internalized homonegative' had a negative association with couple's relationship satisfaction and stigma creating negative relationship implications. Implications

of stigma for couple's relationship is risk of higher relationship dissolution (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

An implication noticed is the health disparities evident between LGBT individuals and heterosexuals (Van der Star & Branstorm, 2015). Other implications of discrimination refer to sexual minority youth. Those experiencing hostile and violent social environments have severe negative mental health implications (Burton, Marshal, Chisoln, Sucato & Friedman, 2013). Mental (Meyer, 2003) and physical health disparities (Lick, Durso & Johnson, 2013) have been noted between LBGT individuals and heterosexuals. Marshal et al. (2013) found that sexual minority youth have higher rates of depression and suicide compared to heterosexual youth.

Children are also affected by LBGT discrimination. Decades of research indicates that children of LGBT parents develop and are supported similarly to those with heterosexual parents, yet LGBT parents are still criticised and stigmatised for their parenting skills (Farr, 2017). McLanahan and Sawhill (2015) supported this finding that children raised by same-sex couples progressed no worse than children raised by heterosexual couples. Although the research indicates no difference in parenting abilities (Biblarz & Savci, 2010), LGBT couples still face greater barriers for adoption. Kinkler and Goldberg (2011) found that same-sex couples face difficulty sourcing accessible gay-friendly adoption agencies due to the psychosocial impact of negative stereotypes. The barriers which face LGBT couples who are adopting are both social, such as negative ideologies of same-sex parents and legal, where certain countries prohibit same-sex adoption (Kinkler & Goldberg, 2017).

1.5 Variables

1.5.1 Relationship Satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction is paramount for longevity of a couple's relationship, it is defined as the level of satisfaction an individual's holds their relationship to be (Cusack, Hughes & Cook, 2012). Strong relationship satisfaction contributes to positive mental health, well-being and survival (Fitzsimons, Finkel, & vanDellen, 2015). Cusack, Hughes and Cook (2012) studied relationship satisfaction between 90 lesbians and 213 heterosexual women and found that sexual orientation did not have an effect on relationship satisfaction. Anticipated events were found to be one of the unique predictors of current and future relationship satisfaction (Baker, McNulty & VanderDrift, 2017). Therefore, sexual minorities experiencing discrimination and uncertainty about their future, could result in low relationship satisfaction. Till, Tran and Niederkrotenthaler (2017) studied risk factors for suicide with regard to relationship status. It found that single individuals were at higher risk than those in a happy relationship with the highest risk factors attributed to those in a dissatisfactory relationship (Till, Tran & Niederkrotenthaler, 2017). Consequently, this gives precedence to study relationship satisfaction among a population which have been known to be discriminated against (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). The aim of this study will be to evaluate the level of discrimination which sexual minorities face and if this effects relationship satisfaction. Thus far, research has not been conducted comparing sexual minorities to heterosexual couples, post marriage referendum, to determine their current relationships satisfaction levels.

1.5.2 Communication

Communication is a variable contributing to relationship satisfaction which in turn merits its own analysis in terms of its contribution to relationship quality. Various studies provide evidence that communication and relationship outcomes are intertwined. Litzinger and Gordon (2005) found that couples who communicate effectively with their partners have higher levels of relationship satisfaction compared to those couples who have the inability to communicate effectively. Litzinger and Gordon (2005) reported that positive communication coupled with sexual satisfaction were related significantly to relationship satisfaction. Oka, Whiting and Reifman (2015) conducted research on the effects of negative communication for couples with regard to relationship satisfaction and found that women who had poor relationship quality also reported more hostile interactions with their partners. A longitudinal study on 210 couples during their first 5 years of marriage showed that quality of premarital communication had correlations with divorce rate and distress (Markman, Rhoades, Stanley, Ragan, & Whitton, 2010). They reported that negative communication was associated with greater divorce rates. Lavner and Bradbury (2012) supported this point; they also found that negative communication was a risk factor which contributed to divorce even for couples who when originally wed were satisfied. Previous studies have focused primarily on heterosexual couple's relationship satisfaction levels (Whiting & Reifman, 2015). This study aims to be inclusive of all sexual orientations and provide updated data on couple's relationship satisfaction levels. McCroskey and Richmond's (1985) situational communication apprehension measure (SCAM) seems to be the most appropriate scale currently available to measure intimate couple's communication who are not currently married. Low measures on this scale display satisfactory communication levels whereas high measures exhibit a person's anxiety when

communicating with their partner (McCroskey & Richmond, 1985). Other communication measures which encompass marriage in their scales, such as the *Dutch Marital Satisfaction and Communication Questionnaire* (DMSCQ; Van Den Troost, Vermulst, Gerris & Matthijs, 2005), are not appropriate when researching sexual minorities as they have not had the right to marry until recently (Tobin, 2016). In conclusion, the purpose of this study is to collect data regarding communication from a segment of the population that has not been appropriately represented in regards to this variable. The correlation between sexual minority communication levels and low relationship satisfaction will potentially follow the same trend as studies conducted with heterosexual couples (Oka, Whiting & Reifman, 2015).

1.5.3 Passionate Love

The second variable relating to couple satisfaction is passionate love. Passion is one of the 3 components of Sternberg's (1977) triangular theory of love, along with intimacy and commitment, which are indicators for relationship satisfaction. Sternberg (1986) defined passion as the necessary component which drives physical attraction, romance and in turn sexual attraction. Sternberg (1986) hypothesised that the amount of love and satisfaction which a couple experiences is dependent on these three components which interact with each other. Brown, Ramierez & Schniering (2013) used Sternberg's theory as a foundation for their investigation into relationship satisfaction in gay men where they explored different stages within their relationship; passionate intimacy was one of the key areas in relationships when exploring sexuality. Cusack, Hughes and Cook (2012) measured passion in their study and reported that, along with intimacy, it was a predictor of relationship satisfaction for both heterosexual and lesbian couples. As couple satisfaction will already be measured using CSI, the one dimension of Sternberg's (1986) triangular theory; passion was chosen to

compliment the use of CSI and communication. Previous research has supported the link of passion as an indicator of relationship satisfaction. Coupled with the communication measure this research aims to measure couple satisfaction using these variables which may predict relationship satisfaction. The objective is to gather data that represents a comprehensive overall view of relationship quality.

1.6 Aim of Research:

As stated LBGT couples face discrimination and stigma due to their sexual orientation causing negative consequences (Meyer, Schwartz & Frost, 2008). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to firstly investigate whether sexual orientation has an effect on relationship satisfaction. Previous research has indicated that sexual orientation does not have an effect on couple's satisfaction, this research aims to support this research (Cusack, Hughes & Cook, 2012). It is imperative to collect a fully comprehensive perspective of relationship quality. This research will examine levels of communication and passionate love to explore different aspects which influence relationship satisfaction. Thirdly, this research aims to investigate, post marriage equality, whether minorities still face greater societal stigma and discrimination today than heterosexual couples (Cusack, Hughes and Cook, 2012). This research intends to investigate that if discrimination occurs will it have an effect on relationship satisfaction. It is necessary to study if minorities are being affected by minority stressors (Meyers, 2003) as it is affects their mental health and relationship satisfaction. To reiterate, it is the consensus of this research that sexual orientation does not have an effect on relationship satisfaction. In concord with this conclusion it is also the assumption, due to previous research (Lyon & Frohard-Dourlent, 2015) that although marriage has been legalised it has not translated to social equality.

1.6.1 Hypotheses:

1. Relationship satisfaction will differ based on sexual orientation.

2. Communication and Passionate love will be predictors of relationship satisfaction.

3. Sexual minorities face more discrimination than heterosexual couples.

4. Bias will have an effect on levels of relationship satisfaction, communication and passionate love.

Research Questions:

1. Do individuals perceive sexual orientation to have an effect on relationship satisfaction?

2. Have you ever been discriminated because of your sexual orientation?

2 Method

2.1 Participants

This research sample consisted of Irish adults currently in a relationship; inclusive of all sexual orientations. The sample consisted of 187 individuals; 107 heterosexuals, 40 lesbians, 21 gay men and18 bisexuals. In total, 80 participants were from the LGBT community.115 participants stated they were female, 32 stated they were male while 40 omitted their gender. Online convenience sampling in tandem with a snowball sampling technique was used to recruit participants. Twitter, Facebook, Lesbian groups on Facebook, LGBT Facebook pages, LGBT chat rooms and LGBT online forums were used to access the population by posting a link for the survey. Age ranged from 18-65 years, the mean age was 25 years (SD =7.9). Length of relationships ranged from less than 1 year to 44 years; 38.5% were in a relationship a year or under, 38% were 2-4 years, 11.8% were 5-7 years, 4.3% were 8-10 years, 3.8% were 11 years and above.

2.2 Design

The design implemented for this research was a mixed-methods design using both quantitative and qualitative questions. A partly cross-sectional design was used for hypothesis one, three and four, whereas a partly correlational design was implemented for hypothesis two. The independent variable for Hypothesis 1 was sexual orientation and the dependent variable was relationship satisfaction. The predictors for hypothesis 2 was PLS scale and SCAM scale, the criterion was relationship satisfaction. Hypothesis 3 used bias as the independent variable and sexual orientation as the dependent variable. Hypothesis 4 used discrimination as its independent variable and relationship satisfaction, communication and passionate love as the dependent variables. Research question 1 asks; Do individuals

perceive sexual orientation to have an effect on relationship satisfaction? Research question 2 asks; Have you ever been discriminated due to sexual orientation? Note that qualitative research question 2 will be asked through Hypothesis 3 quantitatively and then further explained qualitatively. Participants were grouped according to their sexual orientation for analysis

2.3 Materials

Materials used were demographics, three scales and two qualitative questions. Demographic questions related to age, gender, sexual orientation and other questions relating to relationship status. Sexual orientation was a compulsory question as it is imperative for later analysis and grouping participants. The cover page explained the purpose of the study and participants were asked to give consent by ticking 'yes'. Participants had to also be over 18 years of age. Those who did not meet these criteria were directed to the last page. See Appendix 1 for cover page and demographic questions. The final page contained a debrief page and contact numbers for the Samaritans and LGBT support groups.

2.3.1 The Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI-16)

The Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI) a 32-item scale, shrunk to the 16-item format, for the purpose of this survey, was the first scale used. This scale measures overall couple satisfaction. Participants were asked to respond to questions on varying 6-point Likert scales. See Appendix 2 for the CSI and scoring method. Funk and Rogge (2007) created the CSI as they wished to create a measure which exhibits strong convergent validity and has more precision in assessing couple satisfaction than previous scales such as the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976) and the Marital Adjustment Test (Locke & Wallace,

1959). CSI also correlated highly with the other measures of relationship satisfaction such as the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMS; Schumm et al., 1983), Quality of Marriage Index (QMI; Norton, 1983) and the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS; Hendrick, 1988). Graham, Diebels and Barnow (2011) conducted analysis on multiple measures of relationships satisfaction and found that the CSI scale had a moderately high reliability, the average Cronbach's Alpha was .940. This measure was more inclusive of non-heterosexual and nonmarried couples compared to other measures focused on marriage and thus was the most suitable measure for this study. Scores on this scale range from 0-81, high scores indicate higher levels of relationship satisfaction, scores below 51.5 indicate relationship dissatisfaction (Funk & Rogge, 2007).

2.3.2 The Situational Communication Apprehension Measure (SCAM)

The Situational Communication Apprehension Measure, a 20-item scale, was the second measure. McCroskey and Richmond (1985) developed the scale to measure communication apprehension in a variety of contexts. Cronbach's Alpha was calculated between .85 and .9 (Berry, 2007). This scale was chosen as it measures 'situational communication apprehension' which relates to the level of fear or anxiety associated with anticipated or real encounters (Berry, 2007). Usually this measure is used in the context of supervisory role in work settings but it can be used in a variety of contexts. This measure was used to measure communication within couple's relationships; as levels of apprehension may indicate low relationship satisfaction. This scale asked participants to state how they felt the last time they interacted with their partner/significant other and respond to the 20-items on a 7-point Likert scale. See appendix 3 for SCAM and scoring. SCAM has no norms due to the variety of contexts which generate different score ranges, standard deviations and

means. Berry (2007) stated that a general consensus accepts that scores ranging from 39-65 are low, 66-91 moderate and 92 and above high.

2.3.3 The Passionate Love Scale (PLS)

The Passionate Love Scale (PLS) is a 15 or 30 item scale, 15-item version was used for this survey to measure passionate love. Participants are asked to respond to questions on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 'not at all true' to 'definitely true'. Scoring is measured from 15-135; 15-44 thrill is gone, 45-65 tepid infrequent passion, 66-85 occasional bursts of passion, 86-105 passionate but less intense and 106-135 wildly, even recklessly, in love (Hatfield & Spreacher, 1986). The Cronbach's Alpha for the 16-item measure is .91(Hatfield & Walster, 1978). The scale measures passion through a cognitive, emotional and behavioural component. The scale's validity can be noted by it correlation to other measures of love and intimacy such as the Love Attitudes Scale and Sternberg's (1988) Triangular Theory of love (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). See Appendix 4 for PSI and scoring.

2.3.4 Qualitative Questions

Two qualitative questions followed the three scales. Qualitative questions 1 asked; Do individuals perceive sexual orientation to have an effect on relationship satisfaction? Qualitative question two asked; Have you ever been discriminated because of your sexual orientation? The first question was chosen as the researcher wanted to gain greater insight into individuals perception of the influence sexual orientation has on relationship satisfaction. The second objective of this research is to gather data on whether sexual minorities still face discrimination. It was concluded that the best way to gain appropriate data was by using open-ended questions to receive more comprehensive responses.

2.4 Procedure

Before commencement of survey creation and distribution, full ethical approval from Dublin Business School Ethics Committee was obtained. The PSI Code of Ethics was taken into account when creating the survey. Participants right to withdraw without penalty, confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent and possible negative implications of the survey were all taken into consideration. The survey was then completed on google forms and the link was distributed online through social media. Online snowball sampling was used as they allowed information to be collected from LGBT participants that are not as easily accessible. Participants followed the survey link online and completed the questionnaire through google forms.

The cover page of the questionnaire specified that the survey consisted of questions regarding relationship satisfaction, communication and passionate love, it was titled 'Relationship Satisfaction Questionnaire' but omitted references to sexual minority discrimination to mitigate for bias while answering the open-ended qualitative questions. The final debrief page specified that the aim of questionnaire was also to assess levels of minority discrimination and how this affected overall relationship satisfaction. Contact details for Samaritans and LBGT support groups were available here. See appendix 5 for debrief page.

Midway through data collection, the survey was reviewed to allow answers from sexual minorities couples only. This was due to too many heterosexual responses and LGBT participants were underrepresented. All responses were downloaded to a secure excel file. Quantitative answers were coded and tidied up in excel for analysis in SPSS. Qualitative answers were separated for analysis using NVivo.

4 Results

4.1 *Descriptive Statistics*

Descriptive statistics were analysed using SPSS statistics 24. Once unusable data was taken out of the dataset, due to non-consent or invalid answers,187 participants remained; 115 females (61.5%), 32 males (17.1%) and 40 (21.4%) omitted their gender as it was a non-compulsory question. Sexual orientation was a compulsory question due to its crucial role in the study thus all respondents answered; there were 107 heterosexuals (57.7%), 40 lesbians (21.4%), 21 gay men (11.2%), 18 bisexuals (9.6%). Figure 1 displays the distribution of sexual orientation showing sexual minorities in the expanded segments.
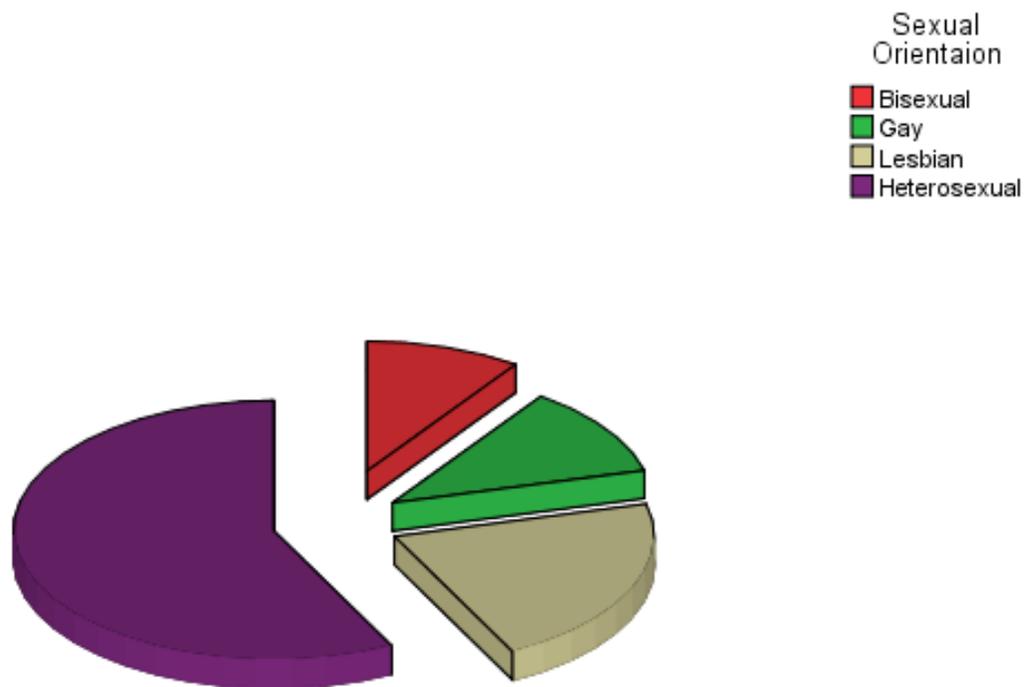
Figure 1: *Sexual orientation demographics*

Participants age ranged from18-65 years (SD =8.0), with a mean of 25 years. Figure

2 displays the distribution of age groups, 87 participants (46.5%) fell within the 21-25 age

group and 46 participants (24.6%) fell within the 18-20 age group (SD = 1.1). Relationship

length ranged from less than 1 year to 44 years, the mean length of relationship was 3 years

(SD = 4.7). 72 participants (38.5%) were in a relationship up to one year, 71 (38%) were in a

relationship for 2-4 years, 22 (11.8%) were in a relationship for 5-7 years, 8 (4.3%) were in

a relationship 8-10 years, 7(3.8%) were in a relationship above 11 years. Relating to

cohabitation status 129 (69%) participants were not currently living with their partner, 45

(24.1%) were living were a partner, 12(6.4%) were legally married and 1 (0.5%) was a

domestic spouse.
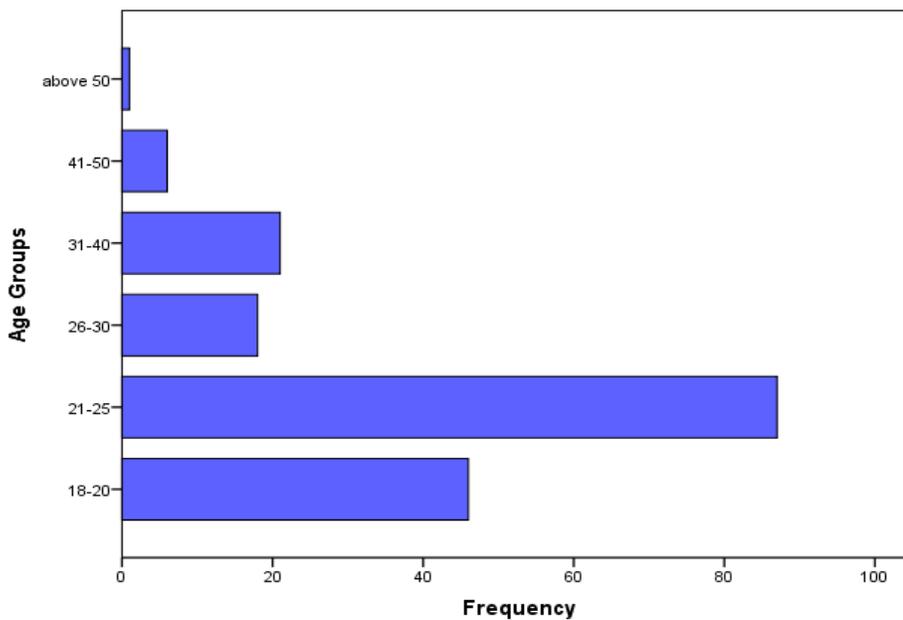
Figure 2: *Age Groups Distribution*

The mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum, skewness and kurtosis for each

psychological measure can be seen in Table 1. The mean for the *Couples Satisfaction Index*

was 63.75 (SD = 14.53) which indicates that the groups relationship satisfaction was higher

than average indicating moderate satisfaction. Cronbach's Alpha reported .963 which

demonstrated high internal consistency and validity. The *Passionate Love Scale* indicated

the overall group fell in the highest category of 'wildly, even recklessly in love' with a

maximum score of 135 indicating the overall group was deeply in love (M= 109.84,

SD=18.06). Cronbach's Alpha reported high validity of .9 for this measure. The

accumulative score for the *Situational Communication Apprehension Measure* was very

low, with the minimum possible score being reported demonstrating that the group overall

did not feel anxious or apprehensive when communicating with their partner (M= 45.5, SD=

23.45). When Cronbach's Alpha was conducted for this measure it was .565, as this score

was lower than expected a secondary analysis was conducted using Guttman's Lamboda 2

which Callender and Osburn (1979) have stipulated to be as dependable for estimating

internal consistency reliability as Cronbach's Alpha. Guttman's Lamboda 2 reported a

reliability score of .753 which shows higher consistency than previously reported using

Cronbach's Alpha.

Table 1: *Descriptive Statistics for Psychological Measures*

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
CSI*	165	63.75	14.53	12	81	-1.2	1.01
PLS**	184	109.84	18.06	41	135	-1.4	1.91
SCAM***	159	45.5	23.46	20	130	1.5	2.2

*CSI=Couples Satisfaction Index **PLS=Passionate Love Scale ***SCAM=Situational Communication Apprehension Measure

4.2 *Inferential Statistics*

Hypothesis 1: "Relationship satisfaction will differ based on sexual orientation"

A One-way ANOVA was performed to test Hypothesis 1 to determine if there was a difference in levels of relationship satisfaction based on sexual orientation. One way analysis of variance showed that levels of overall relationship satisfaction did not differ significantly based on sexual orientation ($f(3,160) = 1.29$, $p = .279$). Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected. Table 2 displays the mean and standard deviations for the different groups showing they are all very similar; bisexuals had a lower mean (M= 57.5) but had the highest standard deviation (SD = 18.2).

Table 2: *One-way ANOVA between Relationship Satisfaction and Sexual Orientation*

Variable	Sexual Orientation	N	Mean	SD	F	DFS	P
Couple Satisfaction	Heterosexual	92	64.83	14.9	1.062	4	.377
	Lesbian	36	64.61	11.9			
	Gay	19	62.94	13.4			
	Bisexual	17	57.5	18.2			

Hypothesis 2: "Communication and Passionate love will be predictors of relationship satisfaction."

Multiple regression was used to test whether passionate love and communication apprehension were predictors of couple satisfaction. The results of the regression indicated that two predictors explained 34% of the variance ($R^2 = 34\%$, $F(2, 140) = 37.82$, $p = < .001$). It was found that high levels of passionate love significantly predicted couple satisfaction (β

= .44, p = < .001, 95% CI = .24 – .45) and low levels of communication apprehension also

predicted couple satisfaction (β = – 0.32, p = < .001, 95% CI = –0.28 – –0.11). Therefore,

hypothesis 2 was accepted. The tolerance value for multicollinearity was checked, it was

.963 which is above the .1 cut-off, indicating that the assumption is met. The VIF value

(1.04) was below 10, also indicating that there was no multicollinearity between the

independent variables.

Hypothesis 3: "Sexual minorities face more discrimination than heterosexual couples."

Chi-square was used to interpret the level of discrimination reported by each group,

dependent on sexual orientation. A Chi-square test of association found that there was a

strong positive relationship between sexual orientation and discrimination (X_2 (1, N=186) =

61.73, p < .001). Therefore, the null hypothesis can be rejected. All participants answered

whether they had even been discriminated due to their sexual orientation, 78.5% responded

'No' and 21.1% responded 'Yes'. Of that 21.1% that stated 'Yes', 21% were sexual

minorities. Table 3 depicts the number of those who stated 'Yes' and 'No' to discrimination

in each sexual orientation group and the level of discrimination reported for each of their

individual groups.

Table 3: *Chi-square showing levels of discrimination among different sexual orientations*

Sexual Orientation	N	Have you been discriminated		Total Discrimination for Group
		YES	NO	
Heterosexual	106	1	105	0.9%
Lesbian	40	20	20	50%
Gay	21	10	11	47.6%
Bisexual	18	8	10	44.5%

H4: Bias will have an effect on levels of relationship satisfaction, communication and passionate love

Independent samples t-tests were used to analyse whether bias had an effect on participant's levels of satisfaction, passionate love and communication. An independent samples t-test found that there was no significant statistical difference in couple satisfaction for those that were discriminated (M = 64.05, SD = 14.68) and those who were not (M = 63.55, SD = 14.54) (t(162) = .185, p = .854, CI (95%) -4.87 -> 5.88). An independent samples t-test found that there was no significant statistical difference in passionate love for those that were discriminated (M = 113.73, SD =19.24) and those who were not (M =108.79, SD =17.72) (t(181) = 1.51, p = .134, CI (95%) -1.54 ->11.44). Finally, an independent samples t-test found that there was no significant statistical difference in communication for those that were discriminated (M = 46.27, SD =22.81) and those who were not (M =45.29, SD =23.72) (t(157) = .215, p = .830, CI (95%) -8.01 ->9.97). Therefore, the null is accepted and hypothesis 4 is rejected.

4.3 *Qualitative Analysis*

Braun and Clark's (2006) Thematic Analysis was used to analyse the data and recognize patterns in the qualitative questions. A semantic approach was used to analyse meaning on a surface level whereby meaning is understood from participants literal response and not through interpretation of underlying meaning. Theorizing patterns within the data was influenced by the previous literature which has stated that sexual minorities are stigmatized and treated differently to heterosexual couples. Thus, data was partly theory driven although latent methods there were used to interpret the data to reflect different underlying patterns. Both deductive (top-down) methods and inductive (bottom-up)

methods were used to analyse the data. Deductive methods were developed by previous knowledge of sexual minority stigma and discrimination which influenced coding. Whereas the inductive method developed the codes into more nuanced detail of sexual minority discrimination and perceptions of sexual orientation for relationship satisfaction.

Braun and Clark's (2006) 6 step process was used as a template for familiarising the dataset, coding the data, defining and redefining patterns and the overall analysis. NVivo, Microsoft Word and pen/paper were all used for coding and then redefining themes and subthemes. 18 participants responded to question 1 and 26 participants responded to question 2. Below themes are reported for the two qualitative questions. A full list of qualitative questions can be seen in Appendix 6.

Question 1 *"In your opinion, does sexual orientation have an effect on a person's ability to have a satisfied relationship?"*

Theme 1 -Personal detractors to relationship satisfaction

A number of responses referred to personal factors which attributed to low relationship satisfaction. Within this theme participants from sexual minorities presented opposing factors for relationship satisfaction originating from their own internal and interpersonal intimate struggles. Two main sub-themes which emerged were *searching for sexual identity* and *interpersonal sexual misconceptions*. *Searching for sexual identity* encompassed the thoughts of being uncomfortable with one's own sexuality causing dissatisfaction. Participant 174 explained "*If a person is questioning their sexuality/identifies as homosexual but does not feel comfortable to be in a homosexual relationship…it would definitely effect any relationship they would find themselves in*." Participant 146 said *"I don't always feel comfortable being this way*" referring to her sexuality as a lesbian.

Interpersonal problems when communicating with a partner which lead to '*sexuality misconceptions*' was another deterrent discussed. Participant 123 stated "*Because I'm a bisexual woman and my partner is a heterosexual man I sometimes feel that because my sexuality is questioned so much it made me think about love and how I choose to see/express love.*" These relationships experience excess stress as bisexuality is misunderstood and unaccepted.

Theme 2- External factors and deterrents to relationship satisfaction

This theme relates to the societal actions and stereotypes towards sexual minorities which act as opposition to relationship satisfaction. Theme 2 also expresses difficulties associated with same-sex relationships. Two main sub-themes emerged; *bias/prejudice* which takes the form of bullying, societal pressure and homophobia and *difficulties associated same-sex relationships* which included secrecy, compatibility, no support system and settling for someone because the pool of possible partners is smaller for sexual minorities. Examples of *bias/prejudice* are mentioned below which depict the societal pressure to conform to heterosexual norms or face bias which causes negative effects for relationships.

"*The pressure in same sex relationships to prove people wrong can effect the quality of the relationship*" (Participant 17)

"*Because of homophobia*" (Participant 130)

Examples of some of the difficulties that same-sex couples face are;

"*Her mom doesn't know so we have to be hush about it*" (Participant 169)

"*Because I have no gay friends to seek advice from, never stood a chance*" (Participant 170)

Theme 3- Positive promotors for relationship satisfaction

Respondents mentioned positive reinforcers for relationships satisfaction which were emphasized under two sub-themes; *acceptance* and *attractiveness.* These themes enhance relationship quality. A supportive network was considered to be a beneficial factor for relationship satisfaction despite being part of a sexual minority. Examples include;

"Being accepted" (Participant 30)

 "*I was in denial about my sexuality and only came to accept it due to being surrounded by other gays and an accepting family*" (Participant 176).

Being sexually attracted to your partner was also mentioned as a positive contributor to a satisfying relationship that empowers the person.

"*Yes as you must find the person attractive and certain this about the attraction*" (Participant 37)

"I previously had a relationship with a boy for over a year… I always felt something just wasn't there I didn't have an uncontrollable attraction to him… I broke it off because I wanted to explore my attraction to girls, I instantly felt more comfortable and I am extremely satisfied within my relationship at present. (Participant 43)

Theme 4-Same-sex relationship empowerment

Despite being part of a minority, this theme encapsulates that there is a sense of belonging and unity which empower couples to stick together in times of uncertainty and prejudicial stereotyping which causes strengthening of relationships. Theme 4 highlights that sexual minorities can remain hopeful, positive and motivated to create long-lasting, satisfying relationships which they consider to be more powerful than heterosexual relationships. For example; Participant 154 stated they were "*another level compared to a*

heterosexual relationship". There is an accepting, loving mentality presented in sexual minorities which promotes growth and satisfaction for same-sex relationships. Examples include;

"Love is different things to different people" (Participant 123).

"I feel I can be myself which I did not feel when in a relationship with the opposite gender." (Participant 43)

"*Brings you closer, more intimate, you feel more loved*" (Participant 40).

"*Almost deeper connection as often even being in one has been a struggle and finding each other or confiding in each other is usually about a shared sexual orientation*" (Participant 177)

Theme 5- Open-mindedness & Acceptance

This theme depicted more positive, open-minded perspectives as to how people express their love. A number of those from a sexual minority expressed that love is a construct to be expressed in different ways, it can be explored as it is fluid and it should not be judged. Theme 5 is a collection of positive attitudes towards relationships. Examples are provided below.

"*Because people have the right to love who they want*" (Participant 118)

"*It's not OK to pass judgement on someone else's way of expressing love*" (Participant 123)

Figure 3 displays the relationship between the 5 main themes and their sub-themes in relation to the qualitative question.
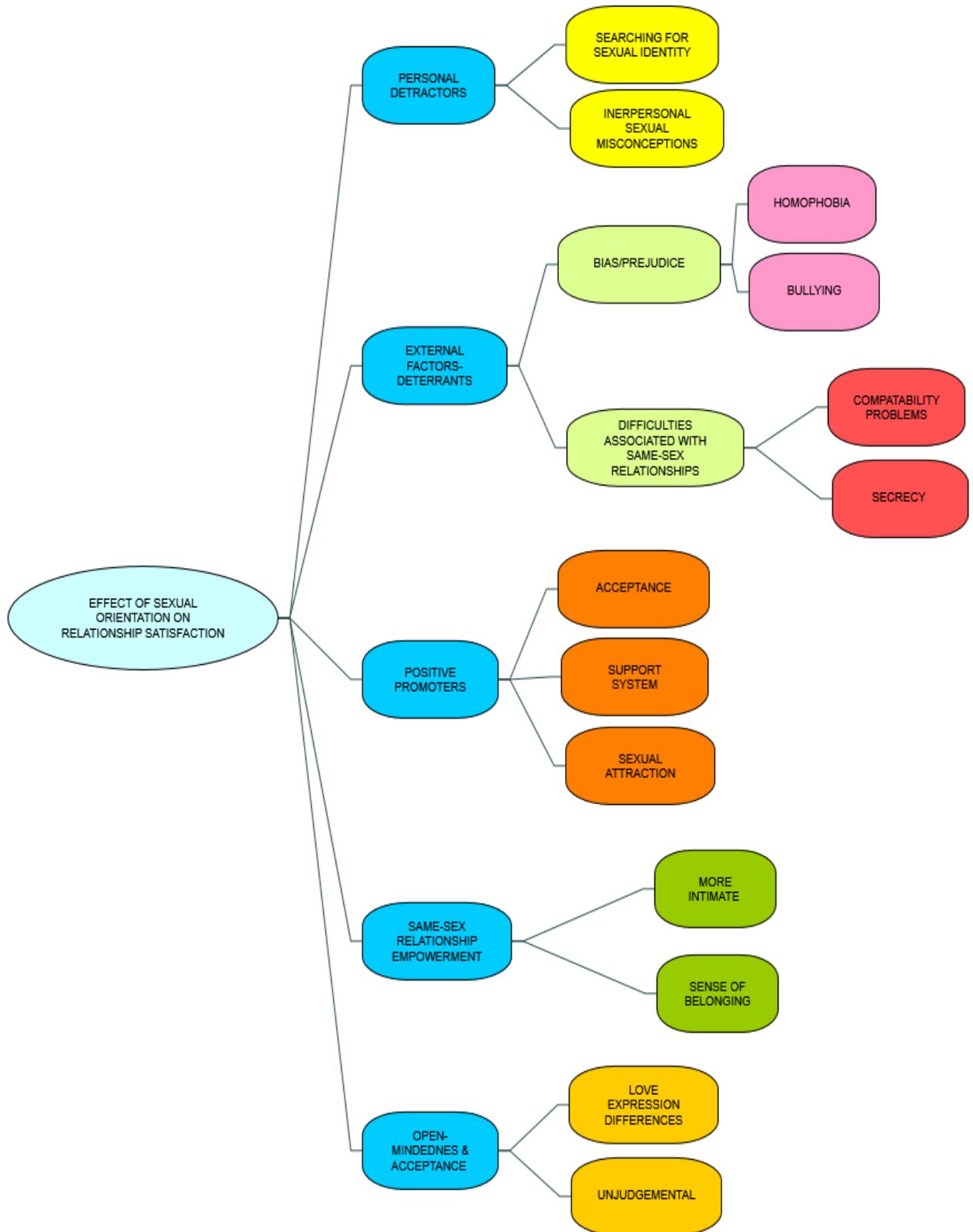
Figure 3: *Mind-map representing the effects of sexual orientation on relationship*

satisfaction

Question 2 *"Have you ever been discriminated because of your sexual orientation?"*

Theme 1- Social negative attitudes

Theme 1 relates to the negative social attitudes and implications which can cause harm or discomfort to sexual minorities. Some of these social interactions have implications for mental health and others cause physical harm. A range of negative interactions in public settings have been described ranging from discrimination on "*public transport*" (Participant 178), to "*bullying in school*" (Participant 115), "*at work I had to leave because of the bullying*" (Participant 130), "*getting harassed at bars*" (Participant 169) to extremes of "*being raped*" (Participant 141). These social situations depict negative attitudes experienced in many aspects of life for sexual minorities.

Theme 2- Negative verbal expressions

Verbal abuse and stereotyping is a theme itself evidenced by the repeated responses by sexual minorities of their experiencing negative verbal abuse regularly. The regular occurrence of verbal abuse depicts the stereotyping still associated with discriminating LBGT couples. Often these verbal expressions occur in public with disregard for the person's mental health. Examples include;

"*I've been unfairly called a slut, indecisive, attention seeking*" (Participant 123)

"*Due to off-hand comments even if they are not directed at me*" (Participant 134)

Theme 3- Bisexuality misconceptions

Theme 3 was expressed by the majority of bisexual participants who reported that bisexuality is often misunderstood. Participant 121 reported "*have had gay men and straight women tell me bisexuals don't exist/are actually straight/looking for attention*". Complete

disregard or disbelief of a person's sexual orientation causes excess stress on a relationship and has negative implications for mental health. LBGT couples all face discrimination with particular emphasis has been put on bisexual couples who seem to face more stigma and misconceptions that the rest of the minority group. Examples of participants experiences;

"*people believe being bi isn't a real orientation*" (Participant 19)

"*in general people are more likely to "test" my sexuality by asking lots of invasive questions than be accepting*" (Participant 123)

Theme 4- Negative implications

Participants repeatedly responded with negative implications associated with being discriminated. This theme encapsulates the biased attitudes of public and family members and the consequences of these actions. These answers were categorized into two sub-groups; *perceived as an outcast* and *unsupportive close network.* Sexual minority individuals felt as though they were being judged. They perceived equality to not yet be present in Ireland causing negative impacts on mental health and the wellbeing of individuals. The family home was identified as a problem for LGBT individuals as without this support system they felt isolated, unloved and disrespected. Examples include;

"*Equality is not yet 100% in Ireland and people often judge my gay relationship with my partner*" (Participant 73)

"*My parents are homophobic, so I have had to deal with living my life secretly*" (Participant 179)

A mind map is presented in Figure 4 to show the relationship between the themes and patterns of discrimination for sexual minorities.
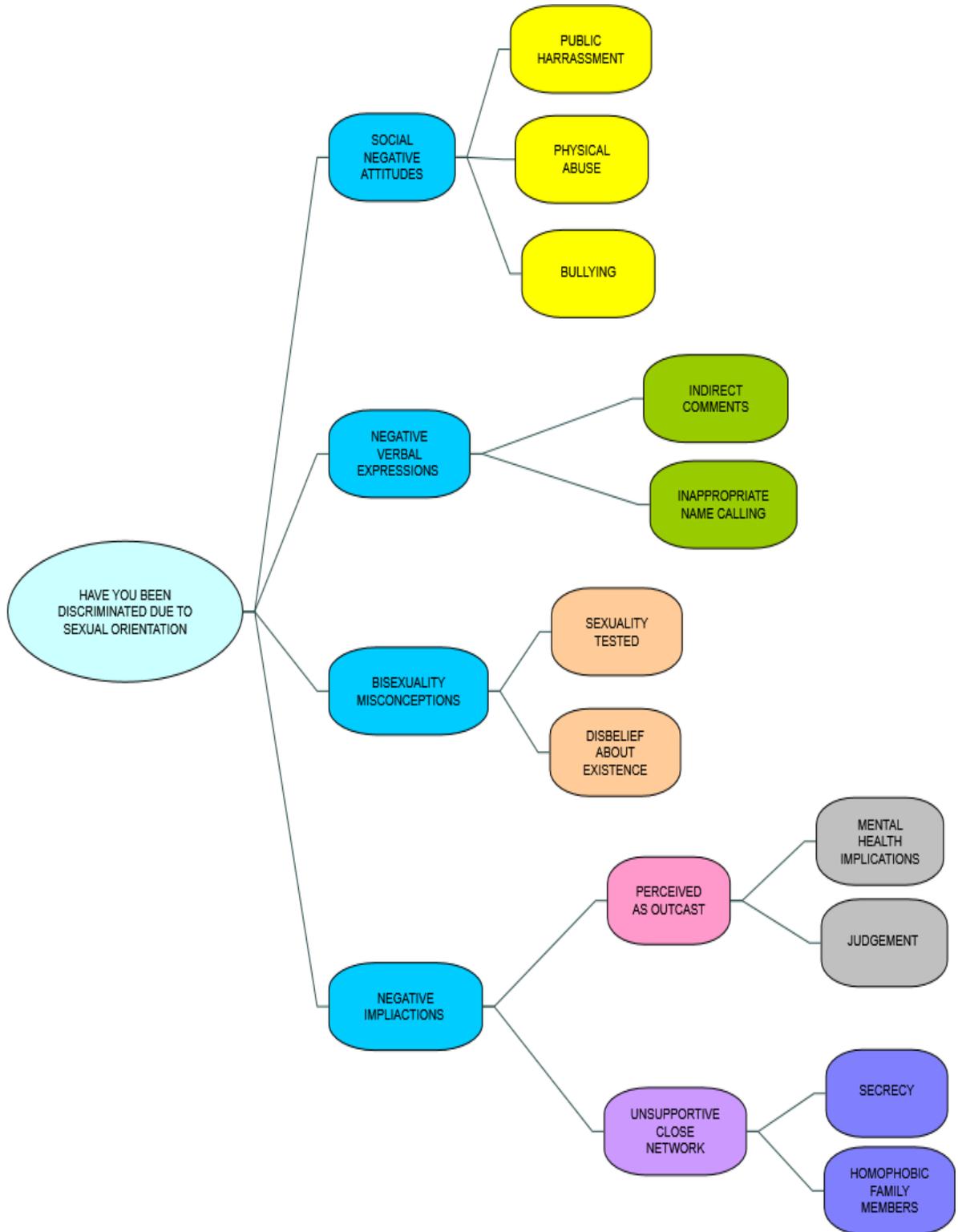
Figure 4: *Mind-map displaying patterns of discrimination*

4 Discussion

4.1 Summary of findings

The aim of this research was to evaluate the quality of relationships in same-sex and opposite sex couples, post the marriage referendum, across variables of relationship satisfaction, passionate love and communication. A secondary objective was to explore whether sexual minorities still experience greater discrimination than heterosexual couples do, the effect on relationship quality and what form it takes. This research found that sexual orientation did not affect relationship satisfaction and the majority of couples reported satisfactory levels of relationship quality. Passionate love and communication were found to be predictors of relationship satisfaction. Sexual minorities reported significantly higher levels of discrimination than heterosexual couples. Those who experienced bias did not report significantly lower levels of relationship quality. The qualitative question regarding individual's perceptions of whether sexual orientation effected relationship satisfaction produced 5 main themes which included personal detractors for satisfaction, external deterrents from society, positive promoters and the consensus that same-sex relationships create a sense of belonging or empowerment. The second qualitative question portrayed sexual minorities facing societal discrimination, physical and verbal prejudice causing multiple negative implications.

Hypothesis 1 was not supported as sexual orientation did not have a significant effect on relationship satisfaction, this result was expected. Hypothesis 2 was accepted as communication and passionate love were predictors of relationship satisfaction. Hypothesis 3 was also accepted as sexual minorities significantly experienced more discrimination than heterosexuals. This was further investigated with qualitative question 2. Hypothesis 4 was

not supported as there was no significant difference in levels of overall relationship
satisfaction for the variable of bias.

These research findings are in concordance with previous research. Cusack, Hughes
and Cook (2012) reported no difference in relationship satisfaction between lesbians and
heterosexual women. This research supported the findings of hypothesis one and furthered
solidified the idea that sexual orientation does not impact relationship satisfaction by
widening the sample to include gay men and bisexuals. Funk and Rogge (2007)
recommended that CSI in future studies should be conducted across subgroups of the
population for consistency. This study used CSI on the sexual minority subgroup and found
high consistency with a Cronbach's Alpha of .963. Litzinger and Gordon (2005) reported
that positive communication related to relationship satisfaction. Brown, Ramierez and
Schniering (2013) found passionate intimacy to be an important area for relationship
satisfaction. Correspondingly, this research also found communication and passion to be key
areas in relation to relationship quality. The relevance of this research relates to exhibiting a
more representative sample of the population. Litzinger and Gordon (2005) used a sample of
heterosexual couples while Brown, Ramierez and Schniering (2013) conducted their study
on gay men. A limitation of these studies was whether results would generalise to sexual
minorities. This study was more inclusive by considering comparisons of heterosexual,
bisexual, gay and lesbian couples. Furthermore, this research provided conclusions similar
to subsequent research on different samples.

Herdt and Kertzner (2006) found that negative stereotypes exist regarding sexual
minority couples. Peplau & Fingerhut (2007) found that negative attitudes towards LGBT
couples takes various forms including daily harassment and violent physical abuse.
Hypothesis 3 and qualitative question 2 reiterated these findings, as almost half of each

sexual minority subgroup responded 'Yes' to discrimination and qualitatively described

their experiences with discrimination. An accumulating body of evidence supports this

finding that sexual minorities face stigma and discrimination (Meyer, 2003; Frost, 2013).

This being said, bias was not found to significantly effect relationship satisfaction which

contrasted with previous evidence. Barrantes, Eaton, Veldhuis and Hughes (2017) found that

minority stress did negatively effect relationship satisfaction. There are possible reasons for

this discrepancy; firstly, the majority of respondents willing to answer may be in a satisfying

relationship who aren't affected by bias. Whereas those deeply affected by discrimination

may not feel comfortable answering a questionnaire relating to relationship satisfaction.

Secondly, bias may in fact affect relationship satisfaction but there was no baseline in this

study to compare levels pre and post discrimination. Finally, only 28 participants responded

'Yes' to being discriminated; this is relatively small and may not reflect the entire minority

group. In conclusion, legal progression has lessened the inequality gap for LGBT couples

but it can be deducted from the research presented that social inequality remains an issue for

couples affecting some more than others.

Qualitative question 2 regarding discrimination reported negative verbal expressions,

physical abuse, social prejudice, mental health implications and bullying as some patterns of

discrimination experienced. Although homosexuality is no longer associated with 'sexual

deviation' (Hall, 1985) or 'mental illness' (APA, 1973) the residue of these stereotypes may

still affect individual's perceptions of this minority today. Qualitative question 1 attempted

to gauge individual's perceptions regarding sexual orientation's effect on relationship

satisfaction. Negative implications were reported but interestingly, a similar amount of

positive implications was stated. Respondents specified that although they experience

struggles, it was through these experiences that strengthened their relationship. A main

theme which emerged related to same-sex relationship empowerment which defied homosexual norms allowing a sense of belonging, unity and acceptance within in the minority group. This theme resonates with previous research conducted by Frost (2013) which found that some LGBT couples who experienced stigma perceived it to be relevant but external to their daily lives. Lyon and Frohard-Dourlent (2015) reported that some LGBT couples chose not to marry due to a sense of comfort within their own sexuality that defied the need for legal titles. Although negative results of discrimination were obtained, the positive responses exhibit a resilience in the minority group which was not hypothesised.

4.2 Implications

Results of this study confirmed that sexual minorities still face substantial stigma surrounding their identity and experience various forms of discrimination. The implications are acknowledged within the qualitative results whereby individuals stated it affected their mental health and relationship quality. There is mounting evidence to support this. Till, Tran and Niederkrotenthaler (2017) found that those with low relationship satisfaction were at higher risk of suicide than those in a fulfilling relationship. Barrantes, Eaton, Veldhuis & Hughes (2017) found that stigma has significant negative effects on lesbian relationship satisfaction. Karney and Bradbury (1995) concluded that this stigma increases risk of couple dissolution. Besser and Priel (2009) found that threats to attachment with a significant other, coupled with social rejection can result in anxiety and depression. The severity of the implications that discrimination has on subsequent mental health problems is blatantly apparent. The applications of this data include; creating better support systems for minority groups in the form of nonjudgmental charity organisations and more pertinent mental health services for sexual minorities provided by the HSE. Although legal progress has been made with regard to the right of sexual minorities to marry, there still remains a disparity at a

social level (Tobin, 2016). An application of this research attempts to lessen the discriminatory gap in society by openly talking about sexual orientation in a non-judgemental manner and incorporating government dialogue which may lead to legislation that prohibits verbal and physical violence towards minority groups.

4.3 Strengths and limitations

Firstly, the limitations of this study will be addressed. A survey design was employed to collect data however imputing data is susceptible to human error. While making the scale in google forms, one option from the 7-point Likert scale was omitted. Cronbach's Alpha was conducted on the scale and resulted in a measure of .565. As this score was lower than expected a secondary analysis using Guttman's Lambda 2 was conducted producing a measure of .753 which was substantially higher. Callender and Osburn (1979) have proposed an argument that Cronbach's Alpha is not the only measure for reliability and that there are other options available which produce powerful measures. Despite omitting one option from the Likert scale, it is possible that fault lies within some of the questions in the questionnaire itself. The statement 'I was loose' included in the scale has ambiguity as to the certainty of what it was referring to; especially as the scale is used in different contexts. Furthermore, the scale itself may not be the most reliable scale for measuring communication apprehension within couples. However, at the time this study was conducted it was the most appropriate measure of communication available for unmarried couples. Another limitation relates to the disadvantage of using online survey techniques which can be difficult to validate given data, Alessi and Martin (2010) have referred to this point in reference to online questionnaires. This study tried to mitigate for invalid data by reviewing the data once it was fully collected. An answer given to the question of relationship length as '700 years' were blatantly implausible and thus omitted from analysis.

Strengths for this study also lie within the use of online questionnaires as it allowed the researcher to gather data from sexual minority groups not easily accessible. This online questionnaire was completely anonymous allowing participants who are not publicly open about their sexual orientation to answer honestly. If the researcher is present during pen/paper questionnaires, participants may feel pressure to answer in ways that may not be completely honest which may lead to respondent bias. Another advantage of an online survey design is due to reduction in time as data can be automated and easily converted to excel, SPSS and NVivo for later analysis (Wright, 2017). Finally, the inclusion of bisexual, lesbian, gay and heterosexual couples strengthened the study's ability to compare different groups and be more inclusive than previous studies. This study is able to provide updated information, post marriage referendum, regarding couple relationship satisfaction, passionate love and communication.

4.4 Future Directions

Future studies should engage in experimental studies, using pre and post conditions of individuals experiencing discrimination to see if this has an effect on relationship satisfaction. It is possible to have cofounding variables contributing to discrimination therefore experimental studies have the ability to account for this. A base line of relationship satisfaction must be taken to gauge if differences are being attributed to discrimination alone. Replication of this study incorporating a larger sample and more sexual minority participants would be beneficial to examine if the results reported in this study are generalisable to the wider population. This study did not take into account the implications for children of those discriminated. Future studies need to evaluate these consequences using qualitative interviews of parents and children, which can elicit more nuanced detail into this subject compared to cross-sectional surveys.

In addition, longitudinal follow up interviews of families would be beneficial to understand how these factors effect overall couple satisfaction and life satisfaction over a long period of time following patterns of discrimination. This study did not incorporate single individuals for comparison. Future studies should incorporate singles to allow for comparison data on support systems and implications for mental health in this subgroup. Finally, studies need to evaluate how sexual minorities continue to cope with discrimination and find ways of creating better coping mechanisms. As social media and society evolve, it is impossible to tell how the patterns of discrimination may change. Therefore, future directions of study need to evaluate the implications of online bullying and discrimination.

4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study aimed to measure sexual minority couples and heterosexual couples across variables of relationship satisfaction, communication and passionate love. Furthermore, the objective was to gauge whether LGBT couples still experience prejudice despite legalisation of marriage for same sex couples. There is still definite bias and discrimination towards sexual minority couples which is causing negative implication to physical and mental wellbeing. Interestingly, despite this discrimination thematic analysis of qualitative questions found that same-sex couples often felt empowerment from their minority status. This small proportion of individuals depict a resilient aspect to same-sex couples.

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6 Appendices

6.1 Appendix 1- Cover Page and Demographic Questions

Relationship Satisfaction Questionnaire

You are invited to take part in this study.

My name is Meagan Hanley and I am conducting research in the Department of Psychology at Dublin Business School that explores relationship satisfaction. This research is being conducted as part of my undergraduate thesis studies, thus it will be submitted for examination purposes. The data gathered from this study may be used for future publications.

Participation is completely voluntary, you are not obliged to complete the survey. You may decide to stop the survey at any point without penalty.

There are a few questions which are obligatory such as sexual orientation and length of relationship if you do not feel comfortable answering these questions you do not have to complete the survey.

Participation is completely anonymous and confidential. Thus, responses cannot be attributed to any one participant. For this reason, it will not be possible to withdraw from participation after the questionnaire has been submitted.

While the survey asks some questions that might cause some minor negative feelings, this has been kept to a minimum. If any of the questions do raise difficult feelings for you, contact information for support services are included on the final page.

It is important that you understand that by completing and submitting the questionnaire that you are consenting to participate in the study.

Should you require any further information about the research, please contact via email to xxxxx@mydbs.ie. My supervisor is Pauline Hyland, if you would like to contact her you can via email

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Do you consent to participate in this study? ***

YES

NO

Demographic questions

What is your sex?

MALE

FEMALE

What age are you?

_____

*What is your sexual orientation? ****

Heterosexual

Gay

Lesbian

Bisexual

Other: _____

What type of relationship are you currently in?

 Heterosexual (man and woman)

Gay (man and man)

Lesbian (woman and woman)

Bisexual (with opposite sex)

Bisexual (with same sex)

Other: _____

How long have you been in your relationship? Please state in years? ***

_____

What is your cohabitation status?

Not currently living with partner

Living with partner

Married

Domestic Spouse

Other: _____

Please note *** indicates a question which required a compulsory answer.

6.2 Appendix 2- Couple Satisfaction Index and Scoring Method

Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

Extremely Unhappy 0	Fairly Unhappy 1	A Little Unhappy 2	Happy 3	Very Happy 4	Extremely Happy 5	Perfect 6

	All the time	Most of the time	More often than not	Occa-sionally	Rarely	Never
In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?	5	4	3	2	1	0

	Not at all TRUE	A little TRUE	Some-what TRUE	Mostly TRUE	Almost Completely TRUE	Completely TRUE
Our relationship is strong	0	1	2	3	4	5
My relationship with my partner makes me happy	0	1	2	3	4	5
I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner	0	1	2	3	4	5
I really feel like **part of a team** with my partner	0	1	2	3	4	5

	Not at all	A little	Some-what	Mostly	Almost Completely	Completely
How rewarding is your relationship with your partner?	0	1	2	3	4	5
How well does your partner meet your needs?	0	1	2	3	4	5
To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?	0	1	2	3	4	5
In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?	0	1	2	3	4	5

For each of the following items, select the answer that best describes *how you feel about your relationship*. Base your responses on your first impressions and immediate feelings about the item.

INTERESTING	5	4	3	2	1	0	BORING
BAD	0	1	2	3	4	5	GOOD
FULL	5	4	3	2	1	0	EMPTY
STURDY	5	4	3	2	1	0	FRAGILE
DISCOURAGING	0	1	2	3	4	5	HOPEFUL
ENJOYABLE	5	4	3	2	1	0	MISERABLE

SCORING: To score the CSI-16, you simply sum the responses across all of the items. The point values of each response of each item are shown above. NOTE – When we present the scale to participants, we do not show them those point values. We just give them circles to fill in (on pen-and-paper versions) or radio buttons to click (in online surveys) in place of those point values.

INTERPRETATION: CSI-16 scores can range from 0 to 81. Higher scores indicate higher levels of relationship satisfaction. CSI-16 scores falling below 51.5 suggest notable relationship dissatisfaction.

6.3 Appendix 3- Situational Communication Apprehension Measure and Scoring Method

Directions: Please complete the following questionnaire about how you felt the last time you interacted with *your partner/significant other.* Mark 7 (in the space before the statement) if the statement is extremely accurate for how you felt; 6 if moderately accurate; 5 if somewhat accurate; 4 if neither accurate nor inaccurate; 3 if somewhat accurate; 2 if moderately inaccurate; or 1 if extremely inaccurate. There are no right or wrong answers. Just respond to the items quickly.

_____1. I was apprehensive
_____2. I was disturbed
_____3. I felt peaceful
_____4. I was loose
_____5. I felt uneasy
_____6. I was self-assured
_____7. I was fearful
_____8. I was ruffled
_____9. I felt jumpy
_____10. I was composed
_____11. I was bothered
_____12. I felt satisfied
_____13. I felt safe
_____14. I was flustered
_____15. I was cheerful
_____16. I felt happy
_____17. I felt dejected
_____18. I was pleased
_____19. I felt good
_____20. I was unhappy

Scoring: To determine your score on the SCAM, complete the following steps:
Step 1. Add scores for items 3, 4, 6, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 18, and 19
Step 2. Add the scores for items 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 14, 17, and 20
Step 3. Complete the following formula:
SCAM = 80 - Total from Step 1 + Total from Step 2

Your score should be between 20 and 140. If your score is below 20 or above 140, you have made a mistake in computing the score.

6.4 Appendix 4- Passionate Love Scale and Scoring Method

We would like to know how you feel about the person you love most passionately. Some common terms for passionate love are romantic love, infatuation, love sickness, or obsessive love.

Please think of the person whom you love most passionately right now. If you are not in love, please think of the last person you loved. Try to describe the way you felt when your feelings were most intense.

If answering questionnaire on a mobile device, please scroll to the right for full list of answer options.

	Not True	Definitely True

I would feel deep despair if _____ left me. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Sometimes I feel I can't control my thoughts;

they are obsessively on _____. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

I feel happy when I am doing

something to make _____ happy. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

I would rather be with _____ than anyone else. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

I'd get jealous if I thought _____

were falling in love with someone else. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

I yearn to know all about _____. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

I want _____ physically, emotionally, mentally. . 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

I have an endless appetite for affection from _____. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

For me, _____ is the perfect romantic partner. .   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

I sense my body responding

when _____ touches me. .   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

_____ always seems to be on my mind. .   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

I want _____ to know me--my thoughts,

my fears, and my hopes. .   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

I eagerly look for signs indicating _____'s desire

for me. .   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

I possess a powerful attraction for _____. .   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

I get extremely depressed when things don't go right

in my relationship with _____..   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Scoring:

• 106-135 points = Wildly, even recklessly, in love.

• 86-105 points = Passionate, but less intense.

• 66-85 points = Occasional bursts of passion.

• 45-65 points = Tepid, infrequent passion.

• 15-44 points = The thrill is gone.

6.5 Appendix 5- Debrief Page

Thank you for your participation in this study!

This study investigated social perceptions surrounding sexual orientation and stigma or biases that sexual minorities face. Past research has shown that sexual minorities such as Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual couples have been discriminated and have faced more societal stigma compared to heterosexual couples. This study aimed to assess all couple's levels of relationship satisfaction for the purpose of comparison in regard to sexual orientation.

Individuals should not face stigma or biases due to their sexual orientation. This study assessed relationship satisfaction in relation to overall couple satisfaction, communication levels and passionate love.

The social perceptions aspect of this study was not divulged at the beginning of the study as honest and unbiased information regarding social perceptions of sexual minorities was needed. Divulging that aspect of the study may have biased respondent's answers.

All information provided is unidentifiable and thus answers cannot be attributed to any one individual.

If you would like to know the results of this study, you can email xxxxxxx@mydbs.ie and a short synopsis of the study and the results can be given to you.

In addition, here are support pages;

LBGT Helpline:
Call on:1890 929539
Instant message support service link: http://www.lgbt.ie/our-services/instant-messaging-support-service

Samaritans:
Call on: 116 123 (ROI)
Email: www.samaritans.org

6.6 Appendix 6- Qualitative responses

Qualitative Question 1 Answers

Participant 17 "the pressure in same sex relationships to prove people wrong can effect the quality of the relationship."

Participant 20 "Based on sexual orientation and ones past with dealings of bullying etc. it is hard for someone to let another person in or be open with someone in public"

Participant 30 "being accepted"

Participant 37 "Yes as you must find the person attractive and certain this about the attractive"

Participant 40 "Brings you closer, more intimate, you feel more loved"

Participant 43 "I previously had a relationship with a boy for over a year, he was always like a best friend to me and I always felt something just wasn't there I didn't have a uncontrolable attraction to him he was more of a really good friend who I could depend on. I broke it off because i wanted to explore my attraction to girls, i instantly felt more comfortable and I am extremely satisfied within my relationship at present. I feel i can 5 be myself which i did not feel when in a relationship with the opposite gender."

Participant 118 "Because people have the right to love who they want which will make them"

Participant 123 "Because I'm a bisexual woman and my partner is a heterosexual man I sometimes feel that because my sexuality is questioned so much it made me think about love and how I choose to see/express love. Though we're entirely monogamous he still worries about not understanding my sexuality and has misinformed ideas about what it's like to be a bisexual woman. Because he's heterosexual he follows quite strict guidelines about how he thinks a heterosexual relationship works because that's what society says is the right thing to do and he's never thought to question. It's taken a lot of work for me to try and get him to understand that love is different things to different people and you don't have to be in a relationship, with one person/gender for your whole life and that it's not ok to pass judgement on someone elses way of expressing love. As an individual I feel misunderstood by my partner when I (very infrequently) bring up my sexuality but because we're monogamous it's not an overwhelming issue but I would like to be able to acknowledge it without concern on his part."

Participant 130 "because of homophobia"

Participant 146 "I don't always feel comfortable being this way"

Participant 154 "I feel as though two women can have a very deep relationship. On another level compared to a heterosexual relationship."

Participant 169 "Her mom doesn't know so we have to be hush about it"

Participant 170 "It's so much harder to find someone, and then to find someone you're compatible with. I found that I settled for being treated so badly, Fell in love immediately, and because I have no gay friends to seek advice from, never stood a chance"

Participant 174 "If a person is questioning their sexuality/identifies as homosexual, but does not feel comfortable to be in a homosexual relationship for whatever reason, it would definitely effect any relationship they would find themselves in."

Participant 176 "I was in denial about my sexuality and only came to accept it due to being surrounded by other gays and an accepting family, I have had boyfriends and was never satisfied in them and didn't know why, if I wasn't surrounded by accepting people, being gay would have ever crossed my mind"

Participant 177 "Difficult question but I would say that same sex relationships have an almost deeper connection as often even being in one has been a struggle and finding each other or confiding in each other is usually about a shared sexual orientation"

Participant 181 "To have a good relationship it helps to be attracted to that person"

Participant 182 "Sometimes it can be difficult. I want to be with a my partner, but at the same time I'm sexually attracted to both sexes, despite not having had a sexual experience with a woman. It's important to explore your sexual identity/orientation."

Qualitative Question 2 Answers

Participant 17 "i have been called boring and common for being straight"

Participant 19 "people believe being bi isn't a real orientation"

Participant 24 "I don't think I need to explain being gay is enough of an explanation"

Participant 73 "Equality is not yet 100% in Ireland and people often judge my gay relationship with my partner. All family and friends treat me as expected but outsiders can judge"

Participant 115 "Bullying in school when I was younger."

Participant 120 "being affectionate to my partner in public has often given us backlash and abuse from strangers in the street."

Participant 121 "Have had gay men and straight women tell me bisexuals don't exist/are actually straight/looking for attention"

Participant 122 "Shouted at in street, heckling etc"

Participant 123 "I've been called a 5 unfairly called a slut, indecisive, attention seeking and don't feel comfortable bringing up my sexuality because in general people are more likely to "test" my sexuality by asking lots of invasive questions than be accepting"

Participant 130 "at work i had to leave because of the bullying"

Participant 134 "due to off hand comments even if they are not directed at me"

Participant 135 "Abuse in street and from family."

Participant 138 "I was kicked out and told I shouldn't waste myself on a woman"

Participant 139 "everyday"

Participant 141 "Calling me names, being raped"

Participant 147 "Looked down and dismissed because of someone's religion"

Participant 149 "Harrassement from neighbours"

Participant 152 "Within my place of work"

Participant 155 "People have tutted or made comments in public"

Participant 160 "I was bullied throughout high school physically

Participant 166 "Getting called names when your living your every day life. Being treated differently because of being gay."

Participant 169 "Getting harassed at bars etc (creepy guys asking to join in). When I'm not with her and guys hit on me and I say I have a gf they don't believe me and keep being pushy about it"

Participant 170 "Screamed at by strangers"

Participant 176 "I have been mocked"

Participant 177 "Never extreme but almost always in clubs or holding hands in public places in which I haven't been before"

Participant 178 "Public transport"

Participant 179 "My parents are homophobic, so I have had to deal with living my life secretly. It has caused a great deal of damage to me mentally. I sometimes feel like I am no capable of loving anyone because I receive very little love at home."