



## NEWSLETTER

# MINDSCAPE- WHERE MIND MEETS MATTER

July to September 2024

## GENDER & SEXUAL DIVERSITY

Senior Editor : Dr Jyoti Kapoor

Editor : Aishwarya Raj

Asst. Editor : Mehak Thukral

"If I wait for someone else to validate my existence, it will mean that I'm short-changing myself." Zanele Muholi

### NEWS AND VIEWS

#### INTERNATIONAL

- A study by University of Michigan reported that lack of sleep makes it difficult to retain information and form memory.
- Eating a poor quality diet might lead to brain changes that are associated with depression and anxiety, a study by University of Reading reported.
- A new study by University College of London reported, Adolescents with an internet addiction undergo changes in the brain that could lead to additional addictive behaviour and tendencies
- Climate change, and its effects on weather patterns and adverse weather events, is likely to negatively affect the health of people with brain conditions, reported University College of London.

#### NATIONAL

- Basics of colour psychology drives the car colour choices in Indian Automobile market, reported in an article by Head, India Studio & Global Design Strategy, Tata Motors.
- According to various studies, intense heat waves as experienced in northern parts of India, may trigger rage in individuals.

#### Local @MANASTHALI

- On the occasion of International Women's day 2024, Manasthali came up with an exclusive series on women's psychosexual wellness.
- Manasthali is planning to come up with podcast series to build awareness around various mental health related concepts.

IF YOU COULD ASK FREUD ANY ONE QUESTION, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

BEST ENTRY RECEIVED:

HEY DR FREUD, IF I WERE A MAN TRAPPED IN A WOMEN'S BODY, WHICH COMPLEX WOULD I SUFFER FROM - OEDIPUS OR ELECTRA COMPLEX? 😊

If you also wish to participate  
Mail us your inputs at  
manasthall2016@gmail.com  
with the subject  
"Mindscape Quiz"

\*Selected entries will be published in the next edition\*



*Editor's desk*



**SEMANTICS OF SEXUALITY AND GENDER!**

We have been always trying to find words to describe what we see around us. We need to have a name for a certain colour, a certain flower, a certain emotion, otherwise how do we convey our thoughts. We don't have the capacity to express ourselves without language but over the last two decades of working in the field of psychology I have realized that even though it's the cause of humanity's monumental evolution, language is not the best medium for authentic communication. There is always a cultural bias inherent in the linguistics of a social group. Explaining sexuality and gender have thus become as complex as explaining love and lust. While we tend towards categorizing things in order to simplify and understand, the natural world happily flows on the spectrum of colours, feelings, emotions...and so on and so forth. Like they say, birds don't seek passport or visa to migrate from one land to another, Forests don't delineate their boundaries, natural predispositions are not rigid and cast in stone, as long as water can flow, it continues to be a stream till it meets the ocean!

Poetics aside, definitions are necessary for understanding and raising awareness, and that will definitely be tackled in other articles suffice it to say that sex is a biological trait, gender is a psychological awareness of identifying with a certain socially defined gender norm, they mostly match as in cis gender, and sometimes they don't as in trans gender. Those trained in chemistry have learnt these, terms cis and trans in studying isomers, it's an interesting analogy because Cis-trans isomers exhibit a type of stereoisomerism where the atoms have different spatial arrangements in three-dimensional space. Thus, in psycho social constructs we all exhibit different arrangements of thoughts, feelings, perceptions, that's been different despite being same. If my mind and body agree with a concept, it's cis, if they disagree, it's trans.

But being in agreement isn't same as being normal.

Then what's the concept of normalcy? The term 'Normal' comes from 'norm'- which is a statistical

term used for a pattern, a sort of average for a group - social, mathematical or otherwise! Thus, the moment we talk of normalcy, we are immediately deviating towards alienating those which fall on the sides of the bell shaped curve ( the standard deviation curve). Is that good or bad, natural or unnatural, right or wrong, no one knows, no one can deduce!

But things outside the dome of the bell shaped curve exist, those very things allow for transformation, adaptation, evolution, progress and creativity.

The diversity is the reason life goes on, that it doesn't die out because of a change one doesn't have the means to adapt to. Diversity is the nature's mechanism for ensuring survival. Funnily enough, we are afraid of it. That people have to come up with more words to sensitise, to communicate, to address and draw support for issues that are not even issues.

I read in an article that it was the will of one woman that caused the construction of word homosexual vs heterosexual, medicalising it and finding a cure for it. It all led to brutal discrimination and assault of personal choices of people across the world because of a culture of dominion followed by European colonisers for ages finally culminating in activism for acceptance and inclusion and rise of PRIDE movement. The American Psychiatric Association, in 1973, and the World Health Organisation, in 1992, officially accepted its normal variant status. Despite the unfortunate circumstances of today's world, we have access to so much information that we can either create awareness or bias, it's finally up to each one of us and thankfully not upto the queen or the king or anyone who ever believed in drawing boundaries for rivers or migrating birds!

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**Dr Jyoti Kapoor**

Sr. Consultant Psychiatrist and Psychotherapist

## Understanding the Social Psychology of Sexuality and Gender : Clinical Insights from Indian and Global Perspectives

The social psychology of sexuality and gender is a dynamic field that examines how societal influences shape individuals' gender identities and sexual orientations. Clinical psychology, with its focus on mental health and therapeutic interventions, offers crucial insights into how these social dynamics impact psychological well-being. This article explores these interactions with a specific focus on the Indian context and compares them to global perspectives.

### The Indian Perspective

India's rich cultural heritage and diverse societal norms create a complex backdrop for understanding sexuality and gender. Traditional gender roles are deeply ingrained, and non-heteronormative sexual orientations and gender identities have often been marginalized. Despite historical recognition of gender fluidity and non-binary identities in ancient texts and traditions, modern Indian society has struggled with acceptance and inclusivity.

Recent legal changes, such as the decriminalization of homosexuality in 2018 by the Supreme Court of India, mark significant progress. However, societal attitudes often lag behind legal advancements. Many individuals still face stigma, discrimination, and violence, impacting their mental health and well-being.

### Clinical Insights

1. **Stigma and Mental Health:** Indian clinical psychologists note that clients from LGBTQ+ communities often present with issues related to internalized stigma, family rejection, and societal discrimination. These factors contribute to higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. Societal norms surrounding sexuality and gender can have profound effects on mental health. Heteronormativity and cisnormativity often marginalize those who identify as

LGBTQ+, leading to minority stress. Minority stress theory posits that the chronic stress faced by stigmatized minority groups can result in adverse health outcomes, both physical and mental. It is important to be aware of these dynamics and provide a supportive environment to oneself and others to explore their identities without judgment. This includes being knowledgeable about the unique stressors faced by LGBTQ+ individuals and employing affirmative therapeutic practices.

2. **Role of Family:** From a young age, individuals are socialized into gender roles and expectations through family, peers, media, and cultural norms. These roles often dictate acceptable behaviors, emotions, and career choices, creating a framework within which individuals understand and express their sexuality and gender. In India, family plays a pivotal role in individuals' lives. Clinicians often encounter clients whose families have difficulty accepting their non-conforming gender identities or sexual orientations. Family therapy and psychoeducation are crucial in helping families understand and support their loved ones.
3. **Intersectionality:** Indian clinical practice must consider the intersection of gender, caste, religion, and socioeconomic status. For instance, a lower-caste transgender woman might face unique challenges that require a nuanced therapeutic approach. Intersectionality is a crucial concept in understanding how various social identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status) intersect to shape experiences of sexuality and gender. An intersectional approach recognizes that experiences of discrimination and privilege are not monolithic but are influenced by



multiple, overlapping social factors.

In clinical settings, acknowledging intersectionality is vital for effective treatment. For instance, a transgender woman may face compounded discrimination based gender identity. Addressing their mental health needs requires an understanding of how these intersecting identities impact their life is crucial.

4. **Affirmative Therapy:** Indian psychologists emphasize the importance of affirmative therapy, which validates and supports the client's gender and sexual identity. This approach is essential for helping clients build self-acceptance and resilience in the face of societal adversity.

### Global Perspective

In many Western countries, there has been significant progress toward accepting diverse sexual and gender identities. Legal protections, societal acceptance, and visible LGBTQ+ advocacy have created a more supportive environment for individuals. However, challenges remain, including ongoing discrimination and mental health disparities.

### Clinical Insights

1. **Minority Stress:** Global research highlights the concept of minority stress, where chronic stressors related to stigma and discrimination negatively impact mental health. This is a key area of focus for clinical psychologists working with LGBTQ+ clients.
2. **Cultural Competence:** Clinicians in multicultural societies must develop cultural competence to effectively address the diverse backgrounds of their clients. This includes understanding cultural attitudes toward sexuality and gender and integrating this knowledge into therapeutic practice.
3. **Support Systems:** In countries with stronger

legal protections and social acceptance, therapists often focus on helping clients navigate relationships, workplace issues, and self-acceptance rather than only dealing with external stigma.

4. **Trauma-Informed Care:** Many LGBTQ+ individuals have histories of trauma related to their gender and sexual identities. Global clinical practice emphasizes trauma-informed care, which prioritizes safety, trust, and empowerment in therapy.

### Conclusion

The social psychology of sexuality and gender, viewed through clinical psychology, reveals both universal and context-specific challenges and strategies. In India, cultural norms and family dynamics play a critical role, requiring tailored therapeutic approaches that address these unique factors. Globally, while there are more robust legal protections, the need for affirmative, culturally competent, and trauma-informed care remains paramount. By understanding these nuances, clinical psychologists can better support individuals in their journey toward self-acceptance and mental well-being, fostering a more inclusive and affirming world for all.

By

**Aishwarya Raj**

(Clinical Psychologist)

### Self-help tip:

Embracing and affirming your sexuality and gender identity involves practicing self-compassion and using positive affirmations to reinforce self-worth. Openly communicating with trusted individuals and educating them about diverse identities fosters understanding and support. Building a supportive network of allies and joining inclusive communities create safe spaces for mutual encouragement. By advocating for yourself and others, you contribute to a more inclusive environment while strengthening your own resilience and sense of belonging.

## Insights from the Vedic Lore

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### Gender Diversity and Inclusivity

In the world of the Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, the scientific paradigms are shifting, we are looking back towards our Vedic scriptures, gleaning new insights from hoary theories of consciousness.

The quantum realm is suddenly being used to justify all that's been acknowledged as the philosophy of Maya and moksha, that mind is the player and we get played around for the amusement of the observer, till we achieve enlightenment, that I am the observer and I am being observed!

How does that describe gender diversity?

It doesn't, all it does is gives us a sense of acceptance, everything is possible and natural and equal for the creator. Every character of the play is important, without the smallest of role depiction no story can be told, one needs the props, the music and even the empty space. And who ever comes under the focus light becomes the hero.

Vishnu can take the Mohini avatar (transgender), Shiva can fall in love with Mohini and give birth to Ayyappa (Homosexual alliance). Shikhandi can enjoy being a woman or a man at will (Cross dressing). Bhagiratha can be venerated as the son of two mothers (Homosexual alliance).

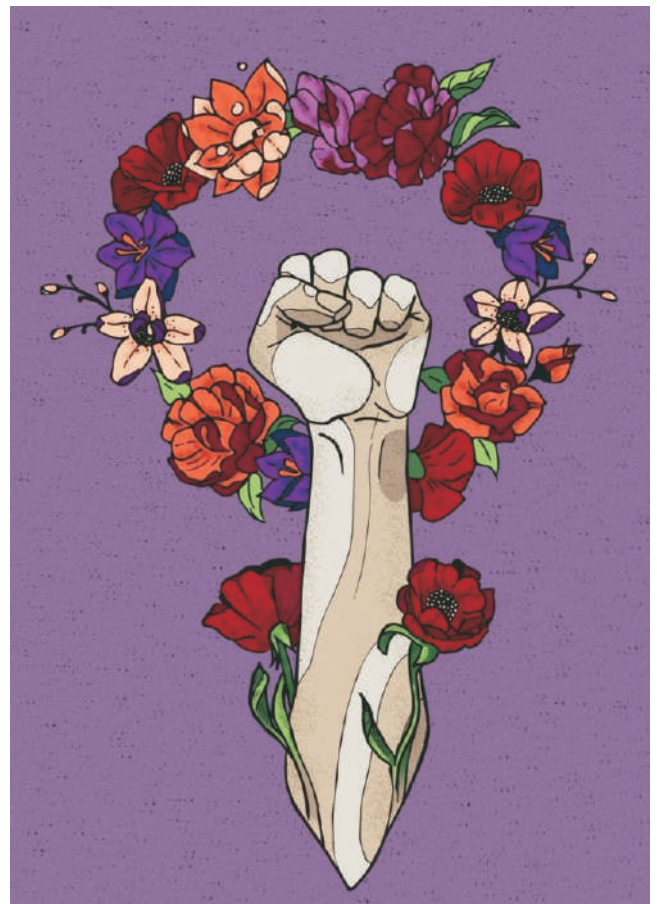
These are mere stories for most people, but it is often said that literature is the mirror of the society. We come from a culture where sexual diversity is depicted in temple sculptures of Khajuraho and Ajanta. We have puranic accounts of our deities displaying androgynous tendencies and are venerated and not rebuffed for the same. In the Rasika tradition of Ram bhakti, male worshippers dress up like Sita's sakhis and indulge in madhuropasak bhakti or sweet devotion. This goes to show that the stories the children grew up with in ancient time taught them acceptance, tolerance and reverence for personal choices and freedom of gender expression. We have been the oldest, richest and advanced society till the invasions happened, our heritage destroyed, our literature was mistranslated and western cultural

biases were imposed on our collective psyche. We are still dealing with the effects of those impressions, be it Max Muller's campaign to establish supremacy of English culture over indigenous wisdom or Macaulay's penal codes, The Supreme Court is still struggling with the ideas sown by the Christian beliefs of right and wrong in terms of personal choices about food, sex and evacuation (whoever said using paper wipes is more civilized than using water for ablution- pun intended).

One might read frustration between the lines, even indignation, and that frankly serves no other purpose than establishing the fact that we are coming full circle. The arguments can take merit from Manusmriti, or Vatsayan's Kamasutra, at the end of the day, personal choices are personal matters and unless there is an intention to hurt someone or something, it's the most logical approach, to "live and let live".

**Dr Jyoti Kapoor**

Sr. Consultant Psychiatrist and Psychotherapist



## SEXUAL DIVERSITY THROUGH VARIOUS LENS : DEFINITIONS & NOMENCLATURE

*Sexual diversity refers to the range of sexual orientations, identities, and expressions that exist beyond heterosexual norms. It encompasses how people experience, express, and relate to their sexuality and includes a broad spectrum of identities. Here's an overview of its various definitions:*

- **Biological Definition**

Focus: Natural variation in sexual attractions and behaviours.

Description: Recognizes heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, and other orientations as innate aspects of human biology and evolution, highlighting the natural diversity in sexual orientation and behavior across species.

- **Psychological Definition**

Focus: Individual experiences and attractions.

Description: Emphasizes the personal and emotional aspects of sexuality, including sexual attraction, identity, and orientation. It includes identities like asexuality (lack of sexual attraction) and pansexuality (attraction to people regardless of gender).

- **Sociocultural Definition**

Focus: Social and cultural influences on sexuality.

Description: Examines how societal norms, cultural practices, and historical contexts shape the understanding and acceptance of various sexual identities. It acknowledges how cultural and legal frameworks influence sexual expression and identity recognition.

- **Intersectional Definition**

Focus: Intersection of sexuality with other identity aspects.

Description: Explores how sexual identity intersects with factors such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status. This approach highlights the complexity and layered nature of sexual identities, recognizing that experiences of sexuality can differ based on one's social context.

- **Legal and Rights-Based Definition**

Focus: Legal recognition and rights.

Description: Centres on the legal aspects of sexual identity, including rights to marriage, non-

discrimination, and equality. It underscores the importance of legal recognition for various sexual identities and orientations in ensuring human rights and social justice.

- **Queer Theory Definition**

Focus : Challenge to normative definitions.

Description: Rejects fixed categories of sexual orientation and identity, advocating for fluidity and resistance to normative frameworks. It emphasizes the fluid and evolving nature of sexual identity and critiques societal norms that marginalize non-heteronormative experiences.

These definitions collectively highlight the complexity and diversity of human sexuality, underscoring the importance of recognizing and respecting various sexual identities and orientations.

### **Nomenclature:**

The nomenclature of sexual diversity encompasses a range of terms describing different sexual orientations and identities. Here are some key terms:

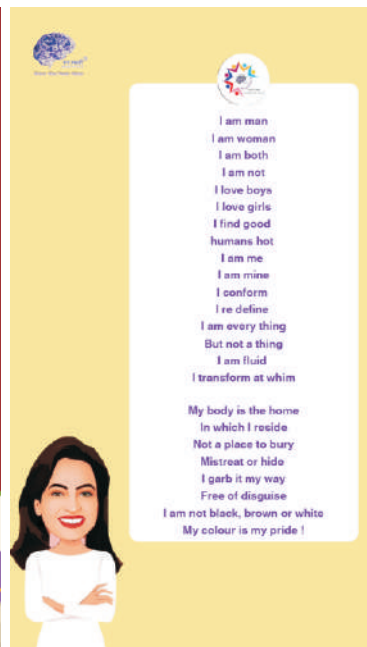
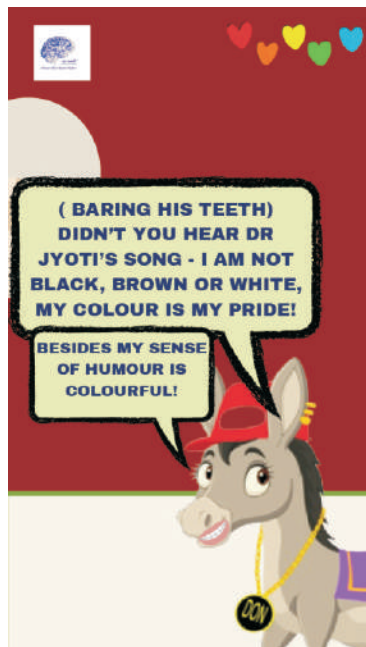
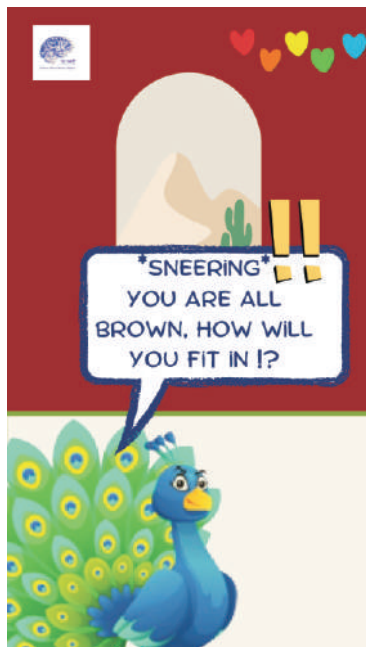
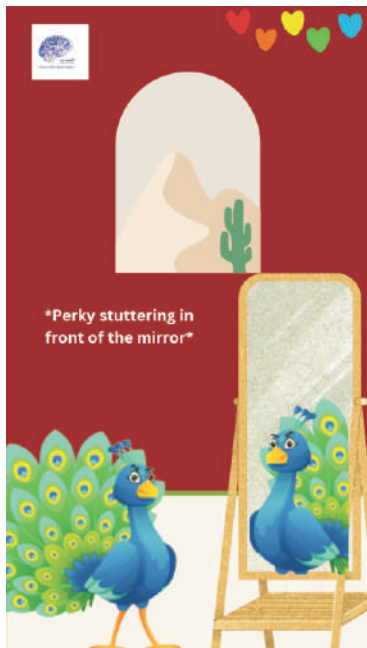
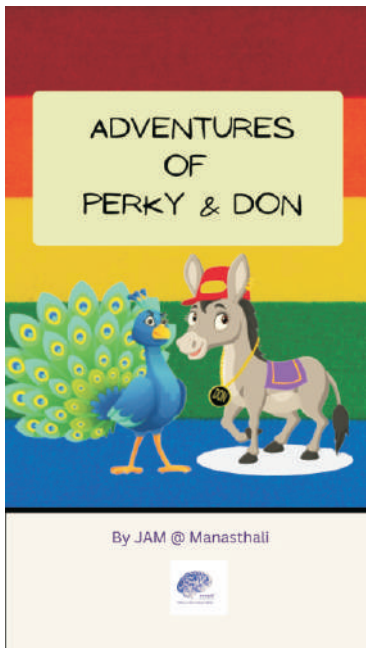
- Heterosexual: Attraction to people of the opposite gender.
- Homosexual: Attraction to people of the same gender.
- Bisexual: Attraction to more than one gender.
- Pansexual: Attraction to people regardless of their gender.
- Asexual: Lack of sexual attraction to others.
- Demi sexual: Attraction only after forming a strong emotional bond.
- Queer: A broad term that encompasses various sexual orientations and gender identities. Often used as an umbrella term.
- Questioning: Individuals who are exploring their sexual orientation.
- Androsexual : Attraction to masculinity or men, regardless of their gender identity.
- Gynosexual: Attraction to femininity or women, regardless of their gender identity.

Each term helps in understanding the diverse experiences and identities related to human

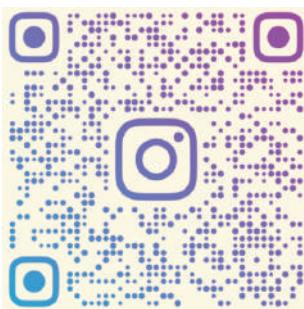
By

**Mehak Thukral**

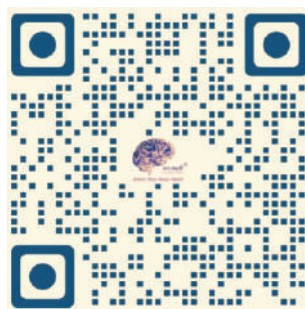




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## Living Outside Gender Norms

Who are you ?

Someone asks us to introduce ourselves to the world by our name, possibly what we do in our work life, if it's a relative we introduce ourselves with our parents association this person's son or daughter.

Who are you?

Someone asks and we say, this person's wife or husband. The question of gender will never exist in their minds if they look at a female or a male they have already perceived the gender by the external appearance of an individual. Imagine looking in the mirror and asking this question to yourself, "Who am I? Biologically you stand in front of the mirror as a female, but the voice inside you answers "I am a man"

Living in a world of assumed genders owing to the biological make of the body while the existential make says the opposite or doesn't want to identify as either & says I'm none or I can take on whatever role I like, I don't want to be confined, is challenging. In an ideal world where differences are discouraged instead of being tolerated, existing with your identity whatever it might be seems easy. But such Utopia doesn't really exist, despite the dialogue around diversity and inclusion someone who is different feels still uneasy in their skin more often than not. From the basic expression to the convenience of daily life, each small step walking in your own skin can seem equal to walking a mile. The fight starts from within an individual, the process of wrong and right being so dominant that it consumes most of an individual's energy. While we fight within us, there is also a fight outside looking to be accepted without judgement without fear and without discrimination. Like any new idea is first rejected before being accepted or any new invention or any new creation, when we see the resistance we should think of resistance as the first step before something is

finally accepted. There are a number of ways we cope with it, some don't find it worth their while to fight the outside when an internal battle is going on. Some people are done with internal battles and they don't fight with themselves anymore but fight with the outside for their rights. Some don't do either and succumb to gender conformity and live dual lives. But the struggle is real for anyone who finds themselves on the gender diversity spectrum, a simple line comes to mind which is a simple solution really to a complex issue 'Live & let live'. If we live with this simple philosophy we can probably also differentiate between biology and mental chemistry and the fact that they can sometimes contradict instead of aligning and still a person can exist in our world.

by  
**Kriti**

