

A Study of Social Representations on Groups of Minorities (Evidence from LGBT)

Puzanova Zh.V.^a, Larina T.I.^{b*}, Peoples` Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University), Moscow, Russian Federation, Email: puzanovazhv@rudn.ru, larina-ti@rudn.ru

In the modern world sensitive theme is increasingly concerned with the attitude to certain social groups, usually minorities. In this case, classical surveys are no longer sufficient and require the addition of "soft" techniques. The article presents the results of a methodical experiment in using combination of projective methods, the method of unfinished sentences and the collage method for studying attitudes towards a sensitive topic for Russian residents - representatives of the LGBT community. The procedure and technique for implementing the experiment were described in detail. Respondents with polar points of view on the LGBT phenomenon helped us to save validity of the data. As a result, this technique can be adapted for the study of social representations about any other minority group.

Key words: *Projective methods, sensitive topic, LGBT community, collage, social representations, sociological methods*

Introduction

The social sciences have long established traditions and procedures for measuring representatives regarding sensitive topics; nevertheless, these techniques are constantly being improved due to the social development and changes in the dynamics of public opinion on complex issues. The lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community is a minority group, traditionally an "acute" topic for Russian society, which has often become a "stumbling block" in communication with the West.

Studying the attitude of the population to this topic requires a special approach and the addition of classical questions of sociological surveys with projective techniques. This article presents a variant of one of these techniques.



Research Objectives

The purpose of the article is to show a way of studying attitudes about a sensitive topic, in this case, with representatives of the LGBT community, without using direct questions.

Significance of the Study

The results of the study will be of interest to sociologists working in the field of methodology, as well as specialists in the humanities who are concerned with the problem of social exclusion and other sensitive topics.

Literature Review

The problem of attitude towards the LGBT community in Russia and Europe

The attitude towards homosexuality varies significantly depending on the values that each culture has. The most tolerant regions are countries where personal freedom and so-called liberal values are highly appreciated. The CIS countries, Russia, and the countries of the Middle East, who mostly profess Islam, remain within the framework of a conservative attitude. This fact is well illustrated by the notion of the Overton Window (the window of discourse), which specifies the framework of a range of opinions acceptable in public utterances in terms of public morals. In Europe and Latin America, the discourse on homosexuality is perceived as normal. In the CIS countries, Russia, the Middle East and a number of other countries, the topic of homosexuality is no more unconceivable, yet the idea of a same-sex relationship is still perceived as radical (Puzanova, Narbut, Larina, 2018, Punluekdej, & Srisorn, 2017, Yi, Hsieh and Chia-Nung, 2018, Lin, & Yang, 2017).

The problem of attitude towards the LGBT community in America

American views toward those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) have changed substantially in recent years and a majority of U.S. adults now say homosexuality should be accepted by society. Americans are becoming more accepting in their views of LGBT people and homosexuality in general and the number of people identifying as LGBT has grown in recent years. For example, 63% of Americans stated in 2016 that homosexuality should be accepted by society, compared with 51% in 2006 (Pew Research Center, 2017, V. Charoensuk and D. Jaipetch, 2017, Meidrina, T., Mawaddah, S. N., Siahaan, F. M. M., & Widyasari, 2017, Siti Fatimah, A. Z., Norhafizah, M. S., Noryanti, M., Rozieana, K., & Hassan, R. G. 2015).



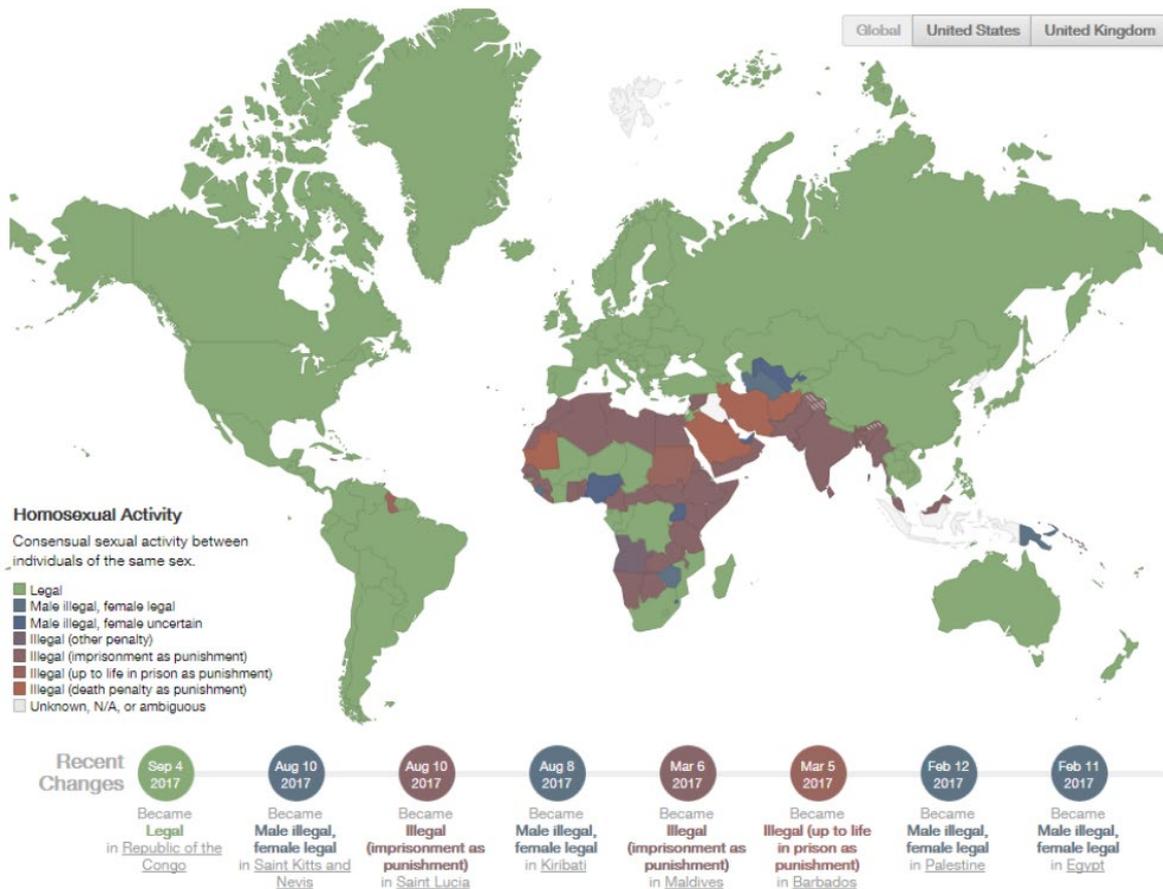
The problem of attitude towards the LGBT community in the East

The situation for LGBT people in Japan may seem satisfactory. Japan does not criminalize same-sex sexual acts between consenting adults and known violent attacks against individuals as well as those who work to protect LGBT rights are rare. One of the largest Pride Parades in Asia is hosted in the capital city, Tokyo. Transgender people can change their gender in the Family Registry if certain conditions are met. Although same-sex marriage is not recognized at the national level, five local municipalities recognize same-sex partnerships as “equivalent to marriage” (Amnesty International, 2017, Rezaei, S. (2017), Amatyakul, Sarun, and Polyorat, Kawpong. 2017). While in India, homosexuality is still criminalized, its Supreme Court, bombarded with petitions, has reluctantly announced reconsideration. China has decriminalized gay activity but Beijing doesn’t protect LGBT communities from discrimination. In some parts of China, homosexuality is regarded as a deviancy and thus a mental illness to be treated (Reuters, 2016, Uzoma, Anyanwu. Ignatius. 2017, Dewi, N. I. K., Astawa, I. P., Siwantara, I. W. and Mataram, I G. A. B. (2017)).

LGBT globally

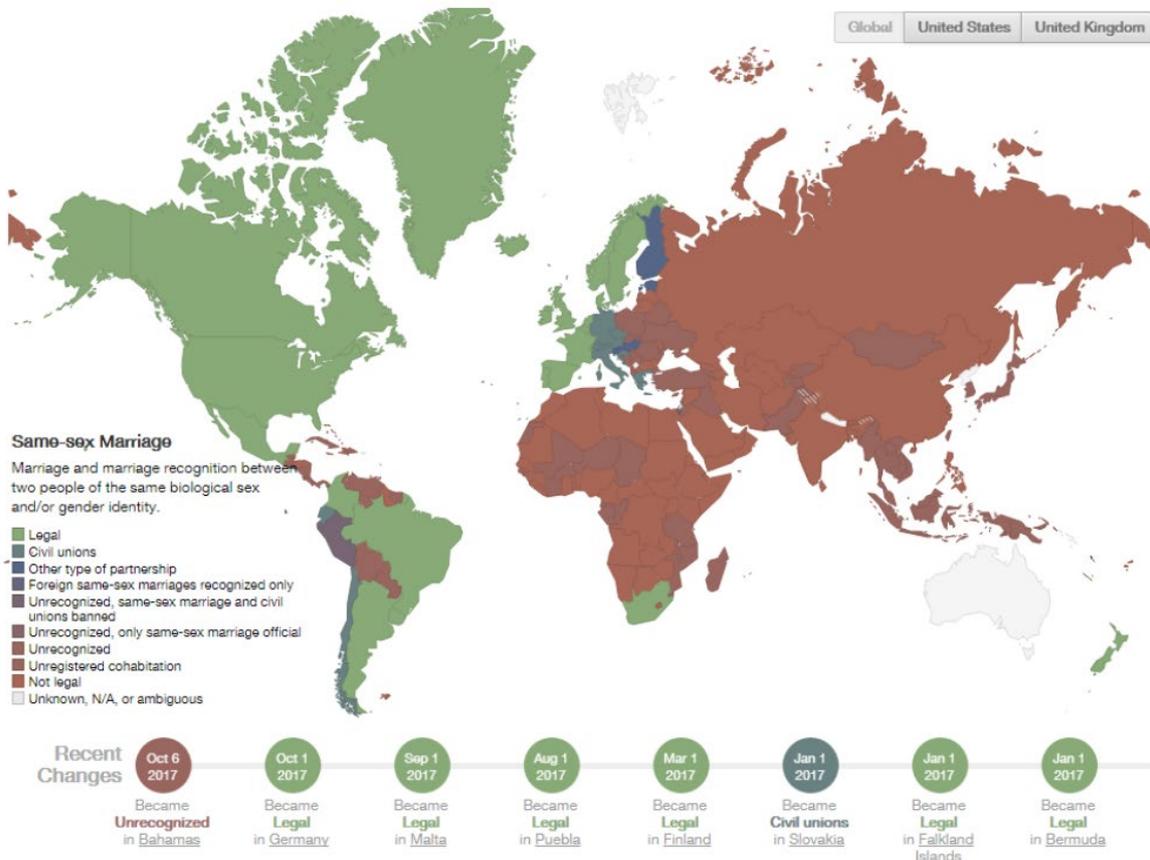
It is best to see the difference in relationship to LGBT graphically using Equaldex (2018). The latest Equaldex research shows that consensual sexual activity between individuals of the same sex is legal across much of the northern hemisphere but across swathes of Asia, Africa and the Middle East it remains illegal. In some countries such as Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Afghanistan it is punishable by death and in other countries, it’s illegal only for men. For example, in Turkmenistan, Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe homosexuality is illegal for men but legal for women. In no country is the opposite the case see Figure 1.

Figure 1. Where is Homosexuality still Illegal



Despite many countries legally recognizing same sex couples some of them still outlaw same-sex marriage. Colombia legalized same sex marriage in the last year, but it became illegal in Botswana. Figure 2 is a map which shows the clear East/West divide where same-sex marriage partners can and can't marry.

Figure 2. Where can Same Sex Couples get Married?



Research Methodology

Sample Justification

Peoples' Friendship University of Russia is one of the largest and most prestigious universities in Russia, it quite fully represents Russian students. Молодежь – наиболее реактивная часть, поэтому для методического эксперимента – это идеальная среда, которая к тому же помогает получить доступ к респондентам с крайними точками зрения. Youth are the most reactive part of the population and therefore for a methodical experiment it is an ideal environment to access respondents with extreme points of view.

Sample

Two groups of 5 participants were selected: 1) Russian students and 2) students representing the Caucasian regions of Russia. The validity of the sample is due to the fact that representatives of Caucasian peoples in Russia have radical conservative views and Russian students are committed to more liberal views and thus it becomes possible to compare two extreme points of view.

Method

Methodical experimentation is represented by a combination of the method of "collage" and the method of unfinished sentences.

Procedure

Stage 1. Introduction to the topic.

The method - visualization and projective methods.

Stimulus: "Take a look at the pictures and think what unites all these people." (see Figures 3-7 below)

Figure 3.



Figure 4.

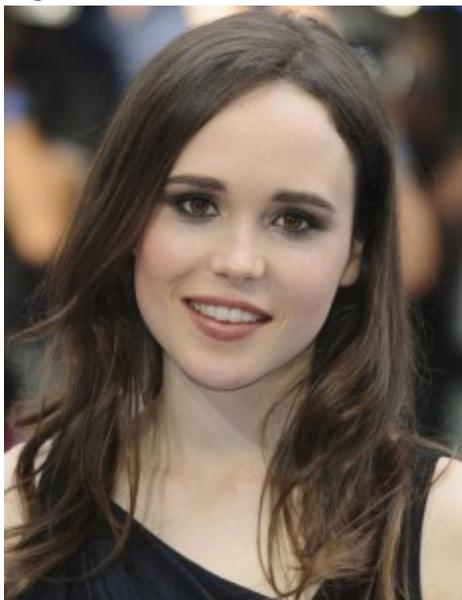


Figure 5.



Figure 6.



Figure 7.



Timing: 5–10 minutes

Stage 2 Unfinished sentences.

Respondents are invited to complete the following sentences:

“A typical LGBT representative is always ...”

“A typical LGBT representative is never ...”

“Usually LGBT people ...”

“A typical LGBT representative communicates with ...”

“A typical LGBT representative avoids ...”

“A typical LGBT representative prefers ...”

Timing: 10-15 minutes

Stage 3 Collage

Respondents were asked to create a collage that reflects their ideas about a typical LGBT representative from different points of view: appearance, environment, work and hobby.

Materials: participants in the experiment could use newspaper and magazine clippings and various photos to express their opinions about the look and behaviour of typical LGBT representatives in Russia. The magazine "L'OFFICIEL" was used to describe the appearance, environment and hobby of a typical LGBT representative. This magazine's readership is 220,000 people; mostly young "women aimed at the psychology of eternal values" who are interested in fashion. The magazine "ELLE decoration" was used to reflect the hobby and work, its' readership is 10,000,000 people.

Stimulus material for working with collages was selected according to the following criteria:

- Balance between creative and non-creative professions
- Different types of hobbies (stereotypical and non-stereotypical)

Stimulus: “you have a clean sheet of drawing paper and materials that you can freely use. For half an hour, you should collectively create your own collage, which will reflect your shared vision of how a typical representative of the LGBT community in Russia looks and behaves. For convenience, a drawing paper sheet is divided into four spheres that you need to fill:

- Appearance
- Environment
- Hobbies
- Job

“According to your wishes, the filling of the spheres may be different in volume or absent altogether. You are free to add any postscripts and freehand drawings. After completing the collage, we will ask you to explain a little, what happens.”

Results

Analysis of information obtained used the method of unfinished sentences.

Respondents were asked to complete the sentences in order to clarify the image of a typical LGBT person. During the study, the following results were obtained (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Unfinished sentences results with coding

Coding	Frequency	Percent
1 –behavior	13	36%
2 –environment	16	44%
3 –self-perception	3	8%
4 –activity	3	8%
5 –evoked emotions	1	3%
	36	100%

The answers of the respondents were as follows: 36% characterized the behaviour of a typical representative of LGBT communities, 44% answered environment, an equal number of answers were distributed among the “self-acceptance” and “activity” categories (8% respectively) and only 3% described the LGBT representative emotions and the feelings caused. According to the Caucasian student respondents, a typical LGBT person usually becomes a “victim”, in other words there is a violation of certain views and rights, he/she also tries not to impose his position on his orientation or preferences but advertises membership in the LGBT community with the help of their appearance. As for the environment, the respondents in this group believe that the LGBT person communicates with “their own kind” as well as with people who either understand them or unconcerned about their orientation. However, a typical representative of this social group is inclined to avoid contact with representatives of the Caucasian region, because of their hard core values as religious figures, in all religions.

According to the respondents, the representative of LGBT communities perceive themselves to be a completely normal fully-fledged person, but believe that people do not take them seriously. The representative of this social category is trying to express themselves with the help of creative or any other activities as well as involvement in the struggle for their rights. Very few respondents talked about such feelings as disgust and pity for LGBT representatives. Russian students expressed that the representative of LGBT communities is a vulnerable, extraordinary, immoral person. Such a person behaves strangely, does not enter into any fights and does not advertise his membership in this social group and in appearance tries to look like the opposite sex. Their social circle from the point of view of Russian students, consists of other representatives of LGBT communities as well as people who sympathize with and understand them. However most often, the LGBT representative tries to avoid contact with people who negatively relate to the social group and the rainbow as a symbolic sign.

Based on the above-described representatives a number of similarities and differences can be identified. All respondents believe that the social circle is limited to people who are either representatives of LGBT communities or who understand and show compassion and there is no interaction with representatives of the Caucasian regions and correlated negative attitudes towards them. Also, both groups consider that representatives of this social category of people are trying to stand out with the help of their appearance. According to the Caucasian respondents, the representatives of this social group tend to advertise their affiliation but the Russian students have the opposite opinion. Students representing the Caucasian regions of Russia noted that religious figures are negatively related to such people.

The results of the method of "collage".

Respondents were asked to create a collage that would describe a typical representative of the LGBT community using 4 blocks: appearance, hobby, work and environment.

Appearance. Analysing this section of a collage made by students from representatives of the Caucasian regions of Russia, we can see that in their view members of the LGBT community prefer to stand out, for example, they wear bright fashionable clothes, don't hide emotions, or try to "blend into the crowd" if they hide the fact that they belong to this exclusive group, that is, the maximum does not differ from the "normal". They are elegant and, at the same time, defiantly "youthful" careless, but they are also well-groomed. It is noteworthy that the respondents do not focus their attention on a certain age group, they consider people of different sex and age.

The respondents selected pictures where a fashion show was presented with bright and expressive accessories: black and red leather shoes with rivets as well as shaggy slippers. I t

was found that in the respondents' view, an LGBT representative is a person who is ready and willing to stand out and be different and identified as “non-standard”, wear bright, flashy accessories. They challenge society with their appearance. It may be noted that there are common features: both Russians and Caucasians define the majority of the LGBT community as bright, attracting the attention of people around them and demonstrating a desire to stand out. It is necessary to emphasize that representatives of the Caucasian nationalities also believe that some members of the LGBT groups try not to be singled out but rather “blend into the crowd”.

Environment. Respondents used a single picture which depicts a group of people, most of whom are girls. When choosing a photo, they characterized a typical male LGBT representative and said that he would most often communicate with like-minded people as well as with women. Interestingly, respondents viewed the “environment” not only from the point of view of people but also from the point of view of things. So it can be noted that extravagance (leopard couch, bright appearance of a girl with glasses), involvement in show business and art circles and interaction with representatives of this social group are inherent in LGBT people.

In general, both groups claim that the LGBT representative communicates in the following ways. The first group, focusing only on the man, said that he would include other women in his circle of communication. The second group expanded the circle of contacts, they added links to show business and the arts and in addition to the social environment, respondents noted the material component of this concept: brightness and extravagance - one of the “satellites” of a typical representative of the LGBT community.

Hobby. Representatives of Caucasian nationality used pictures related to creativity: a photo with the artist, an open book with stationery, ballroom dancing, a theatre and mimes. The respondents explained the use of the last picture by the fact that LGBT people are forced to hide their essence under the mask, under the make-up, like mimes. The Russian students used the following photos and pictures: ballet, photo with the artist, folk dances, theatre, ballroom dancing, photographer and angler. Respondents indicated that LGBT representatives are primarily engaged in a creative hobby. Interestingly, the collage involved a picture with fishing, which “does not fit” in the creative activity but draws attention to it. This suggests that in the view of respondents, members of this social group are not limited to stereotypical images associated with art. Thus, both groups agree that the hobby of representatives of the LGBT community will be associated with creativity. Russian students expanding this hobby area with a perceived typical “heterosexual” occupation - fishing.

Job. According to the respondents, a typical representative of the LGBT community works in the arts field and is a dancer, sculptor, photographer, musician or designer and that, in general, those who are connected with creativity, use fantasy. As in the case of hobbies, respondents

note that LGBT representatives usually engage in creative professions and are dancers, club workers, hairdressers/stylists/makeup artists and artists. Also, the respondents attached a picture with the manager, which may indicate that there are representatives of the LGBT communities among the “simple” ordinary professions.

Thus, respondents are similar in their opinion that a typical representative of the LGBT community works in the field of creativity, where imagination and fantasy are required. At the same time, both groups of respondents agree on the choice of the dance profession. And again, Russian students “allow” LGBT people to “join” into society where they are “allocated” a place as a manager in the labour market. It can be seen that the image of a typical representative of the LGBT community in both groups of respondents has common features in terms of interest in the field of creative activity and work: the desire to stand out and to be “on style”. However, as expected, members of the LGBT community are less susceptible to social exclusion among Russian students. This is evident in their work, hobby and environment, where these respondents allowed “a typical representative of the group under study” to choose “to become a manager”, “to go fishing as a hobby” or to communicate with “ordinary” people and not only among “their own”.

Conclusion

Describing the collective image of the LGBT representative, the most popular perceptions should first be mentioned. In most cases, respondents attributed to such an environment (44%) and behaviour (36%). The data obtained through the method of unfinished sentences indicates that, despite the slight discrepancies, the respondents agree in their views on the environment. According to them, the social circle of people with non-traditional sexual orientation is limited to the same people as themselves and those who are not part of this group, but relate with understanding and show compassion. Caucasian region representatives and those who have a negative attitude towards LGBT people have become exceptions from the social circle. However, if behaviour is the focus, it is interesting that the Caucasian respondents considered a representative of this social group to be inclined to advertise their affiliation, while Russian students had the opposite opinion.

The stability of opinions is evidenced by data obtained using the collage. In favour of the first category of ideas - the environment – it is of note that the respondents are similar in opinion, since both groups claim that the LGBT representative speaks with the same “informality” as he himself. There is also a similar distribution for the second category - behaviour. This is manifested in the distribution in such a sphere as “appearance”. Respondents unanimously agreed that LGBT participants are bright and extraordinary individuals. However, the assessment of the manifestation of a person with a non-traditional sexual orientation in society was different. Students of Caucasian nationalities, regarding the analogy, believe that



representatives of sexual minorities try not to stand out, merging with the crowd, while Russian students noted a reverse tendency, consistent with the desire to “stand out”.

Also, other interesting facts from the distributions by spheres presented in the collage testify to further interesting discrepancy in opinions. For example, if we are talking about a hobby of a typical LGBT representative, then students of Caucasian nationality, like Russian students, used pictures related to their creative hobbies (photos from the artist, an open book with writing utensils, ballroom dancing, theatre and mimes). However, the secrecy of a person with a non-traditional sexual orientation in society was highlighted first as illustrated by the explanations of one of the respondents: “the use of the last picture is connected with the fact that LGBT people are forced to hide their essence under the mask, under the make-up, like mimes”.

There is another interesting aspect in the respondents’ views in the case of hobby in that all respondents noted that sexual minorities are usually engaged in creative professions. However, the degree of exclusion from the social life of the latter varies, depending on the group of respondents. In conclusion it can be said that the manifestation of social exclusion turned out to be less characteristic in Russian students. The results of the analysis identify key characteristics of ideas about a typical representative of the LGBT community which were identified and compared across two groups (Russian and Caucasian ethnic groups) and such results were achieved by combining various techniques.

Recommendations for Future Research

Such a measurement of social perceptions can be used to study relationships for any minority group during pilot studies (to work out the “wording”, to obtain primary data) or as an independent study.

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