There exists an extensive body of research on homosexuality, yet only a few studies address local meanings of homosexuality and still fewer attempt to understand the processes that construct these meanings and the values and beliefs of the people that share these meanings. Such studies would be particularly relevant in India as a developing and highly pluralistic country where the legal status of homosexuality has been in a state of flux. The unique history and religious diversity in India have shaped the way in which different communities come to understand homosexuality. Influences of both colonisation and tradition are salient and constantly interacting, yet in many ways conflicting with each other.

To explore these influences and intersections in relation to conceptions of homosexuality, the social representation theory was used as a methodological framework. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in Bangalore with six families from the urban middle class representing the major religions of Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Out of these six families, two families from each of the three religions participated. For each family, one member belonged to the youngest generation (18+ years of age), one to the middle generation and one to the grandparents’ generation. As Bangalore is the second fastest growing metropolis in India, it provided a good background to explore potential influences of modernisation.

The intergenerational and inter-religious approach helped to provide insights on how these categories, in addition to their national identity as Indians, entwine and frame these participants’ representations of homosexuality. Across religions and generations, three representations of homosexuality were identified: nature, nurture and culture. In the first, homosexuality was categorized in terms of what is ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’, in the second in terms of ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ and in the third, in terms of ‘deviant’ and ‘non-deviant’. Despite these convergent primary categorizations, participants’ ages, religions and gendered perceptions of what constitutes homosexuality intersected in diverse yet specific and patterned ways. My analysis sheds light on the functions served by these representations, local practices and customs, as well as social change in India with respect to meanings, understandings and practices of homosexuality.

**Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords**

social representations, homosexuality, India, generations, religions, intersectionality, identity, qualitative research
Social Representations of homosexuality in an Indian Context

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Some men like Jack
and some like Jill;
I'm glad I like
Them both; but still

I wonder if
This freewheeling
really is an
enlightened thing—

or is its greater
scope a sign
of deviance from
some party line?

In the strict ranks
of Gay and Straight
what is my status?
Stray? or Great?

Vikram Seth (2008)
1. INTRODUCTION

During a conversation with my mother back in 2010, in Bangalore, our home city in India, she shared a story with me concerning her cousin who was suspected of being a homosexual. “Suspect” is a word I would normally associate with those under investigation for criminal activity and sadly, homosexuality is considered a criminal offense in India. My mother narrated how her cousin had been seated at a dinner table with the extended family when an elderly uncle suddenly barked at him, “Son, why aren’t you married?” The cousin under scrutiny had mumbled something about not having found the right one. The uncle, clearly unsatisfied with this response remained persistent, delivering his next question rather pointedly, “You aren’t one of those, are you?”

Though I had not witnessed this exchange myself, the vividness with which my mum remembered it and talked about it made it a subject of instant fascination to me. By “those”, the elderly uncle had meant homosexuals, an implicit meaning that had immediately been grasped by my mother and others at the dinner table. Thus, he had been asking my mother’s cousin about his sexuality. However, his inability to articulate a word for homosexuals caused me to ponder on whether this was owing to a deficit in his vocabulary and perhaps in the collective vocabulary of those from his generation of a word for homosexuals. The alternative is that he did have a term for homosexuals but abstained from using it because the word and its connotations were so tabooed. I was yet to be acquainted with the social representation (SR) theory at that point in time. Now that I am, I believe the questions that had struck me when listening to the aforementioned tale 7 years ago are ones that would best fit with the SR line of inquiry. Therefore, it is with some confidence that I attribute this as the birth of my interest in the social representations of homosexuality.

Gayle Rubin (1984) remarked how sexuality can seem a vacuous subject, distracting from critical realities of world poverty, war, disease, racism, famine and the threat of nuclear annihilation. Yet as he argues, it is in these troubled times that people become excessively preoccupied with the issue. Over thirty years have passed since the time that Rubin wrote this but it still holds a ring of truth in the context of India. There would certainly seem to be more pressing issues in a country where nearly 300 million people live in abject poverty with inadequate access to water, sanitation, health, education or food (United Nations, 2014). However, far from being cast into the back drawer, sexuality has been a closet staple in India.
for governments and the public alike, even if their very aim for engaging with it is ultimately its repression. In their literary history of same sex love in India, Vanita & Kidwai (2008) describe how an editor of an Indian women’s rights journal told them that the issues they wrote of were not important compared to the “life and death issues” faced by most Indians. However, as they contend, sexuality does become a matter of life and death for many gay Indians who sometimes attempt suicide to escape life in a society where they are not accepted.

The cultural taboos surrounding sex shroud the public in a veil of mystery that is appropriate to remove only in the confines of intercourse sanctioned by matrimony for the purpose of procreation. Nevertheless, given the immense size, diversity of religions, linguistic groups, castes and disparities in wealth and status among its citizens, it can hardly be surprising that public opinion on sexuality in India is far from convergent. The legal status of homosexuality seems to be a particular bone of contention. In 2009, the criminal status it had been assigned during colonial times was overturned in a landmark ruling on the grounds that it violated the Indian constitution’s provision of equality, protection of life and liberty and prohibition of discrimination (Datta, 2014). However, this victory for gay rights proved to be short lived.

The idea of equating a homosexual relationship with a heterosexual one was perceived as threatening the social order and the family structure. In response to this perceived threat from the legal status afforded to homosexuals and the pressure exerted by religious groups and regional political parties, the Supreme Court of India reinstated the gay sex ban in 2013 (Grover, 2009). In August 2017, the subject was re-opened by the Supreme Court, with a nine-judge bench declaring that the 2013 order was a grave error, yet the court stopped short of setting aside their earlier judgement. According to the statement provided by them, changing the legal status of homosexuality would require the consideration of a larger bench, with no mention on when this proceeding could be expected to occur. (Mahapatral, 2017).

India was one of thirteen countries to vote against the passage of a United Nations Human Rights Commission's resolution denouncing the death penalty for homosexuality in countries where it is prevalent on September 29, 2017 (Handa, 2017). This suggests that it takes no issue with people being executed for being homosexual. Thus, freedom of choice on who to love would appear to remain but a distant dream in India despite the Supreme Court’s recent declaration.
This brings up questions regarding what common values, ideas and customs are drawn on in the formation of a social order that prizes heterosexuality and criminalizes homosexuality. Such systems of collective values, ideologies and practices providing a shared language for social exchange and classification of the social world were termed Social Representations by Serge Moscovici (1972). The social representation theory provides tools for understanding how people think and the contents of their thought by taking into account the social context and the role of communication and interaction. Hence, it offers a perspective far wider than the traditional individualist approaches of social psychology, making it a good framework for the current study. One of its main premises is that social representations are structured and transformed through communicative exchanges. Such exchanges occur in many ways, from the interaction between groups to the dissemination of scientific knowledge to the masses through different modes of communication (Moscovici & Duveen, 2001).

In this study, I explore the social representations of homosexuality in an intergenerational, inter-religious sample recruited from Bangalore, India. Social representations are thought to be a feature of modern societies (Moscovici, 1984). Wagner et al. (1999) argue that they are formed when a phenomenon is socially meaningful and generates some tension, thereby initiating public discourse over it. Homosexuality is evidently a subject of tension in India if the fluctuation in legal status and contradictory discourses are any indicator. Thus, a rapidly developing country like India provides the perfect backdrop for a social representation based study of homosexuality. Bangalore, a large and constantly expanding urban metropolis in South India is an ideal location to understand the influences of modernisation and urbanization on representations. These are likely to be highlighted in the intergenerational design of this study. Moreover, the coexistence of multiple religious groups, each having their own beliefs and contradictions regarding homosexuality could mean that representations of homosexuality could differ between religious groups. Hence the aim is to explore the content and structure of the representations of homosexuality across different generations of families belonging to each of three major religions in India- Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. In addition, I hope to understand the extent to which these representations reflect prominent academic theories on homosexuality.

The first step to achieving these goals is an awareness of the local history and culture in the research context. In addition, an acquaintance with the dominant forms of knowledge that exist on the subject is necessary. Accordingly, in Chapter 2 that follows the introduction, I try to develop this awareness by zooming in on India to paint an intricate portrait of
homosexuality in this context across different historical periods and religions and looking at the influential ways in which homosexuality has been conceptualized and theorized in

Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 will briefly review relevant studies of homosexuality in India and other parts of the globe. In chapter 5, I elaborate on the SR theory to trace its background and situate it in the wider field of social psychology. The theory’s tools will also be discussed as well as its relation to social identity and the main critiques directed at it. Having thus grounded the current study in relevant empirical and theoretical literature, chapter 6 provides a summary of the finer points and identifies ways to build on past research on homosexuality and utilize the appraisals of the SR theory in the current study before presenting my specific research questions.

Chapter 7 discusses in detail my methodological choices from the collection to analysis of material. My main findings are revealed in Chapters 8, 9 and 10. In Chapter 11, I conclude with a discussion of the main findings, the limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.
It is by taking into account the country, the period, custom, the injunctions of the sacred texts, as well as one’s own tastes, that one decides whether or not to practice these kinds of sexual relations.

Vātsyāyana, Kama Sutra

2. A GENEALOGY OF HOMOSEXUALITY IN INDIA

In 1996, Deepa Mehta released “Fire”, the first Indian film to depict a lesbian relationship on screen (Dasgupta, 2011). Sita, one of the film’s leading characters remarks to her lover Radha, “There is no word in our language to describe what we are or what we feel for each other.” The audience is left to speculate on which Indian language is being referred to in this loaded statement. Mehta’s sole aim here is to emphasize the inapplicability of English and its categories to the task of describing sexuality in the Indian context. Simultaneously, she also demonstrates the invisibility of homosexuality in Indian society, to the extent that it remains nameless. Such a sentiment echoes the views of several theorists on sexuality such as Michael Foucault who has contended that the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality emerged only in the late 19th century as Western constructs (Weeks, 1986). Yet, a sift through the Indian archive reveals evidence that contradicts such claims and validates the work of historians on same sex relationships such as Brooten (1996) and Boswell (1980). In ancient and medieval India, there existed varied discourses around same sex love, a wealth of metaphorical traditions to represent it and the use of distinct terms in different Indian languages to describe homoerotic love and those who practiced it (Vanita, 2002).

Thus, in order to understand how homosexuality is represented in India, it would seem necessary to heed Moscovici (1984) and start with the representation “from which it is born”. The idea that homosexuality is a perspicuous modern Western notion has been appropriated by right wing Hindu nationalists in India. Homosexuality is claimed to be a foreign import that has never been part of Indian culture. Though this argument that has been challenged by gay activists throughout the country, it is possible that it has nevertheless permeated public opinion on the subject.

While Foucault may have lacked a sensitivity to the Indian archive, he did provide the tools needed to deconstruct the taken for granted nature of such ideas through what he called a genealogy- an investigation into those elements which “we tend to feel (are) without history.”
genealogy is a historical technique of examining the totality of discourses on a phenomenon in order to question commonly held assumptions about the origin of social beliefs regarding the phenomenon in question (Foucault, 1977). The aim is not a search for the origins of a phenomenon but an attempt to throw light on pluralities and contradictions in the past and in doing so, reveal the way power shapes what comes to be seen as truth. The goal of this chapter is to look at the variety of discourses on homosexuality throughout different Indian historical periods and religions to see what they reveal about the current construction of homosexuality.

Before delving into the genealogy of homosexuality in India, I wish to explicate on my use of both the terms “homosexuality” and “India”. When the term homosexual was coined in 1869 by a Hungarian psychologist and entered English usage through British sexologist Havelock Ellis, it had a decidedly negative clinical connotation as a pathology (ABVA, 1991). As a result, it has not been embraced by the gay community. My position is that there is no such thing as a single homosexuality as homosexuals are not a coherent, easily definable group. In this thesis, I use homosexuality as a sensibility encompassing the entire area of same-sex eroticism. To clarify a few other terms, I am guided by ABVA’s (1991) glossary, using the word gay to refer to those people who are conscious of their erotic inclinations towards the same sex and lesbian to refer specifically to gay women. As I understand queer to go beyond homosexuality to include all non-normative gender identities, I refrain from using the word queer except in relation to queer theorists.

Particularly as homosexuality has meant different things to different people at different points in time, it is also important to acknowledge that the scholars whose work I draw on in this section had to use a variety of expressions and definitions of homosexuality in the course of their research on the topic of homosexuality in India. These included expressions of same sex love without an explicit mention of sexual behaviour; sexual acts between those of the same sex; men who occasionally have sex with men while otherwise living a heterosexual life and those whose sexual preference form the core of their identity (Tiwari, 2010). Trans-gendered individuals1 are recognized as a third gender in India, locally known as hijras who usually abandon their families to join hijra communities where they can satisfy their sexual desires

1 “Hijra” is used as a blanket term to lump both transmen and transwomen into the same category of transgendered individuals despite the reality that transmen are a much more invisible and marginalized group who are often not accepted by hijra clans as discussed by Kundu (2017).
Hijras are included by Sinha (1967) in the category of homosexuals as he claims that there are a number of homosexual men\(^2\) who find it advantageous to join hijra clans due to the relative security provided by them and the opportunity to use the hijra role to engage in sexual relations with men. However, I am inclined to agree with Nanda (1986) who points out that the term hijra translates to “eunuch” and is distinguished in local vernacular from homosexuals as found in a study by Asthana & Oostvogels (2001). For this reason, the subject of hijras is out of the scope of this thesis, unless otherwise discussed by my participants in the course of my interviews with them.

With regards to the term “India”, the borders demarcating the area considered to be India came into existence as recently as 1947 and have been the subject of much disagreement. Some scholars prefer the more inclusive term of South Asia to include Sri Lanka, Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh but this has been criticized for its arbitrariness, particularly concerning the degree of cultural commonalities between these regions (Dasgupta, 2011). Even within India, considerable variation exists across the country but there is enough commonality in literary and intellectual traditions to warrant studying it as a unit as argued by Vanita & Kidwai (2008). Yet, as Dasgupta (2011) reminds, parts of the regions mentioned in ancient and medieval texts are now in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

There has also been some debate about the manner in which Indian historical periods are divided. While Mill (1858) classified Indian history into Hindu, Muslim and British civilisations, this drew censure from scholars like Thapar (1977) for disregarding the social-economic continuity across ruling dynasties and foreign invasions. Vanita & Kidwai (2008) choose to divide the periods covered into ancient, medieval and modern as such a division is broad enough to include the highly contestable dating of numerous texts in local vernacular prior to the 18th century. I take a similar approach in this genealogy but feel the need to deviate from the category of “modern” which in my opinion is too broad to adequately describe distinct developments during colonial times and post-Independence. Accordingly, the periods I review below include ancient, medieval, colonial and post-Independence.

---

\(^2\) Sinha (1967) specifically uses the phrase “effeminate homosexual men” instead of transwomen as in his opinion, these individuals do not see themselves as transgendered but gay males who can use the hijra role to have sex with other men. The formulation “effeminate homosexual men” could well be criticized, nevertheless I refrain from changing the word homosexual to transwomen in this particular instance as I feel it would impose an identity that is not necessarily embraced by the people I am writing about.
2.1 Ancient Period

The ancient period in India ran from 1500 BC to the 8th century AD, during which time, the world’s oldest religion, Hinduism was born (Vanita & Kidwai, 2008). Hindu texts and traditions, both oral and written, have Gods and versions of stories to represent almost all activities, inclinations and ways of life. This age is often looked upon by activists and scholars as something of a golden age of sexuality. Certainly, prior to the Vedic religion (1750-500 BCE) of the Aryans who came to India from Mongolia, there is literary and archaeological evidence that sexuality was not directed at offspring but pleasure. There are references in the Rig Veda, a book of the Hindus dating to 1500 BC that appear to celebrate same sex pairs as opposed to conjugal couples and illustrations of same sex activity are found in the Kama Sutra written between the 1st and 6th century. (Thadani, 1996). The most comprehensive account of homosexuality during the ancient period, as well as the medieval period is provided by Vanita & Kidwai (2008). Hence, I use this as my primary source of information about these periods. They identified different tropes that emerged in ancient Indian texts within which representations of same sex attachments can be located. I summarise their discussion in the following two paragraphs.

Many Hindu mythologies were found to contain numerous references to the trope of miraculous birth. This included the possibility of intimacy between two women, resulting in conception. One such depiction is provided in a text called Krittvasa Ramayana where the child born of this union has no bones, suggesting that such births were considered monstrous. Yet in parts of India such as Bengal, the same event was glorified as miraculous in re-writings of the same text at a later period, thus making it amenable to an alternative interpretation.

In addition to same sex pairing and miraculous birth, another trope identified by Vanita & Kidwai (2008) is the questioning of gender by ancient Indian Buddhist and Hindu philosophers. Their arguments that gender is an illusion that only appears to be real is similar to writings of contemporary scholars such as Butler (1990) who makes a compelling case for the social construction of gender. An ancient Buddhist text narrates a myth of a Goddess who was asked by a monk why she does not change her sex even though she has the power to do so. Her retort was that despite searching for twelve years, she had been unable to find any innate female characteristics, quoting Buddha who was rumoured to have spoken on how nobody is really a man or woman. Such ideas have been also been incorporated into a late section of the Hindus’
Mahabharata under the influence of Buddhism. When gender categories of men and women cease to be important, there is no reason for why an individual should be attracted only to members of the opposing gender category and thus ancient Indian philosophy gives the resources to dismantle categories of gender and sexuality.

Thus, portrayals of homosexuality in ancient texts focused mainly on actions, tendencies and preferences or in other words, on practices and what a person did and enjoyed and less on to whom he/she was (Tiwari, 2010). At first glance, this would give some credence to European sexologists like Foucault (1976) who, as already stated, advocated that homosexuality is more than the act of sodomy but the ascription of an identity to personhood based on one’s sexual object choice. Yet, this discounting of the variety of relations and attachments that existed in India well in advance of the words they are known by today is unwarranted. While same sex love was still not the standard of the majority, ancient Indian legal, medical and erotic treatises did go as far as trying to provide terminologies for alternative gender and sexual categories. Such categorization can be seen as ways to ascribe identities to these acts. The Kama Sutra terms a man who lusts for other men as “the third nature” and reiterates that this desire can exist regardless of whether the man in question is feminine looking or masculine looking (Parekh, 2003). Another text discusses how men who desire other men are women with regards to desire but men with regards to gender, highlighting how desire can be dynamic and temporary (Vanita & Kidwai, 2008).

Antithetically, such acts were not without stigma even in this age of supposed enlightenment. The Kama Sutra recognized same sex activity as a natural universal constant but still did not consider it to be the ideal path to tread in the execution of one’s dharma or life duties (Tiwari, 2010). The position of the highest caste of Brahmans at the top of the caste ladder was sustained by a belief in their purity. That Brahmans were forbidden from engaging in such acts completely suggests that these acts were viewed as impure even then. (Burton, 1883). The development of patriarchal systems during the spread of caste based Vedic Brahmanism gave prominence to procreative sex and suppression of female sexuality (Vanita & Kidwai 2008).

Same sex desires and acts were also silenced with the growing dominance of the hetero-patriarchal social order. Patriarchal ideology was consolidated from 5th century BC to 2-3rd century AD and sexuality further codified through legal, medical and mythical texts. The Manusmriti is one such text that prescribes punishments for women and men who engaged in same sex acts with virgins and the punishments were harsher for women than for men. (Singh,
Dasgupta, Patankar & Sinha, 2012). Although this has been interpreted as evidence of homophobia, the transgression seems to lie not in the act of same sex relations but loss of virginity and the harshness of sanctions on women reflects the patriarchal ideology (Vanita & Kidwai, 2008). The contradiction in ancient Indian texts between myths that uphold non-vaginal sex and the offspring resulting from such unions as sacrosanct and laws that condemn it as impure is well explained by Tiwari (2010) who traces this conflict to a key tenet of Hinduism: what is usually considered taboo or polluted may be excessively sacred in special or ritual contexts.

2.2 Medieval Period

During the early medieval period (8th-13th century), only a scattering of references to same sex love can be found. The dominant one which continued to remain visible in medieval Hindu texts was the trope of miraculous birth. As discussed in the previous section, it refers to references of same sex love that miraculously brought forth a child. (Vanita & Kidwai, 2008). This reiterates on one hand the importance of offspring in Indian culture. At the same time, by depicting conception among those of the same sex, it suggests that same sex relations could be sanctioned, provided that they resulted in offspring (Vanita, 2005).

It was during this time that spirituality and sexuality were combined in Hindu art to produce carvings in temples of couples in a variety of sexual positions (Smalls, 2008). The most visible manifestation of this can be witnessed in the carvings of homoerotic art at the Khajuraho temples constructed by the Chandela kings between 950 and 1050 (Kalra, Gupta & Bhugra, 2010). The carvings featured copulating partners of the same sex as well as the opposite sex and also celebrated sexual relations between female pairs, trios and even orgies (Tiwari, 2010). The purpose of these carvings has been debated according to Smalls (2008), with some believing that they function as lessons in morality for devotees by showing an evolution of sexuality. Acts of a more untamed nature such as beastiality and homosexuality are considered base forms of sexuality which evolve to socially sanctioned heterosexuality. Others are of the opinion that they serve to represent ritualistic sex acts that unite and maintain the balance between the physical and spiritual universes. (Smalls, 2008).

Homoeroticism became markedly male centric in the late medieval period (13th-18th century) which witnessed a blossoming of literature on homoeroticism, solely concerning men. This development originated with the invasion of Muslim conquerors from Northern Afghanistan towards the end of the tenth century. (Vanita & Kidwai, 2008). The expansion
of Muslim rule in India, the spread of Islam and the Perso-Turko-Arabic cultural traditions brought by the Muslim migrants impacted Indian society tremendously. This introduced a new set of contradictions regarding homosexuality. A large part of the cultural heritage of the Muslim migrants included a body of literature and poetry that celebrated the beauty of the male form and love between men. This is in contrast to certain contemporary interpretations in Islam that understand same sex acts such as the sharing of a bed by two men or two women, sodomy and lewdness of gaze directed at the intimate parts of a person of the same sex as punishable offences.\(^3\) (Vanita & Kidwai, 2008). However, punishments for homosexuality were rare in India during the medieval period despite being common in Christian Europe. This suggests that same sex attachments were not looked at very unfavourably during this period in a Muslim ruled India. (Sarkar, 2013).

Indeed, homoerotically inclined men had great visibility in medieval Muslim history and such liaisons were accepted as a part of cosmopolitan Islamic culture that accompanied 13th century urbanization processes in India. Flourishing towns and bazaars provided opportunities for homoerotically inclined men to meet and establish relations that transcended barriers of caste and class. (Joseph, 2005). The birth of Sufi mysticism which used homoerotic analogies to express the relationship between divine and human influenced the Persian poetic tradition (ghazals) and later, Urdu poetry (Rekta) in India (Petievich, 2007). State funded efforts to increase literacy and the growth of paper making industries gave the book trade license to thrive in the markets, making medieval ballads in ode to same sex love between bazaar boys of all castes, religions and occupations exceedingly popular. The term bazaar boys was usually indicative of the age differences between the male lover, usually a grown man and the beloved, a young boy (Vanita & Kidwai, 2008).

The ghazals also attempt to distinguish between the sexual roles of the lover and beloved. Vanita & Kidwai (2008) elaborate on how falling in love with a male was not seen to detract from masculinity but rather, romanticized as a natural tendency in a man of “sensuous disposition.” However, the roles occupied by the two men in the course of their relations is what determined their masculinity. The lover was thought to have a dominant role while the beloved a passive one, acting as a replacement for a woman in a heterosexual relationship. As

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\(^3\) I would like to emphasize that there is resistance to such contemporary interpretations of Islam condemning homosexuality which has been studied extensively. One such study is discussed in Chapter 4, under the role of religion (4.6).
such, this love came with a cautionary warning, advising against its perpetual pursuit and open displays of such desire.

A graver red flag is signalled in a compilation of the Prophet’s hadith or traditions by Al Nuwayri which prescribes a punishment of death by stoning for both active and passive participants in homosexual acts (Vanita & Kidwai, 2008). Yet the harshness of this sanction was definitely not mirrored by attitudes in medieval Indian society which neither exalted nor vilified homosexuality. Instead, as Tiwari (2010) explains, same sex love was accommodated within the framework of heterosexual patriarchy, giving males the freedom to do as they pleased provided they fulfilled their role as a householder. Thus, as elite men usually had multiple wives and concubines, guarded by eunuchs, it became important to define the role of the wife and the lover, regardless of the sex of the latter.

2.3 Colonial Period

The Portuguese were among the first Europeans to commence sea trade with India as early as 1498, bringing Christianity with them into the subcontinent (Kaye, 1859). However, Dasgupta argues (2011) that it was the establishment of the British Empire in India in 1757 with the Battle of Plassey and the displacement of the Mughals that engineered social, cultural and legal changes in India. As early as 1290, the British had given homosexuality criminal status in England with punishments for the sodomite ranging from being burned alive on the stake to death by hanging (Purkayastha, 2014). According to Gnuze (2015), current Christian critics of homosexuality usually cite seven biblical passages to support their claims. These include Noah and Ham (Genesis 9:20–27), Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:1–11), Levitical laws condemning same-sex relationships (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13), two words in two Second Testament vice lists (1 Corinthians 6:9–10; 1 Timothy 1:10), and Paul's letter to the Romans (Romans 1:26–27). However, as Tiwari (2010) argues, it was not Biblical verses that were the root of colonial British homophobia but the need to assert their masculinity by emphasizing the effeminacy of their colonized subjects. In addition, a subscription to the Judeo-Christian ideology of the time and puritanical values that condoned sex only for procreation made the sexual freedom that had previously existed in India a grave source of anxiety for the British administration (Tiwari, 2010).

Repression and domination were the chief means by which imperialist Britain exerted influence on Indian sexuality. Thus, the expression of same sex love through channels considered legitimate became limited. (Tiwari, 2010). The British constructed homosexuality
as a unique Indian vice, stemming from Indian customs, despite there being plenty of discussions about its occurrence in schools, colleges and seminaries for boys in England. The terms of ‘unnatural’ and ‘order of nature’ that reflected the religious and cultural ideals of the West were incorporated into laws drafted and adopted in India during this period. (Dasgupta, 2011). As the word homosexuality was yet to be invented at this point, the legislation targeted sodomy rather than homosexuality. Thus, section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, drafted in 1860 by Lord Macaulay reads:

*Of Unnatural Offences: Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or imprisonment of either description or a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine. Explanation: Penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse to the offence described in this section.* (Rao, 2015, p. 149).

The passage of this law meant that homosexuality was brought under official state condemnation and framed as a criminal act (Dasgupta, 2011). The threat evoked by homosexuality was perceived to be so concerning that certain moral concessions were granted in order to prevent people from engaging in homosexual activities. For example, Ballhatchet (1980) discusses how prostitutes were permitted to be present in army cantonments despite being an affront to Victorian morality as the possibility of homosexual encounters occurring in the military was considered even more unpalatable. Paul (2006) discusses how the British colonizers tended to emphasize that Muslims had strong inclinations towards the perversion of sodomy and at the same time characterized them as possessing a hyper virile masculinity to the extent of “brutish savagery.”

Thus, as suggested by Arondekar (2009), the onset of British colonization brought about a systematic destruction of images of homosexual expression and sexual expression. Homoerotic poetry and literature was purged of their essence in translations and re-editions of ancient and medieval texts that emphasized platonic friendships without alluding to the traces of implicit homoerotic love in the undertones of such relations. Yet, at the same time, books like the Kama Sutra were unearthed by Orientalists who took great delight in interpreting and translating such works, revealing the many hypocrisies of this period. (Arondekar, 2009).
2.4 Post-Independence

In 1947, India obtained independence from the British after which the development of a national identity became a major project for free India. (Purkayastha, 2014). Two dominant forms of nationalism were identified by Dasgupta (2011) in the post-independence years. Firstly, the secular nationalism associated with India’s first prime minister Jawarhalal Nehru’s term in office till the seventies. Secondly, the fundamentalist nationalism under the Bhartiya Janata Party, spurred on by the unpopularity of Nehru’s successor, Indira Gandhi and the Congress political party to which she belonged. The rhetoric of both these forms of nationalism relied on what Benedict Anderson termed an “imagined community”, under which the national integration of India was made possible by visualising and creating a common history and a common citizenship (Dasgupta, 2011).

As the history of sexuality in India ruptured this idea of homogeneity, the hetero-patriarchal ideology of nationalism sought to erase alternative sexualities from its narrative (Purkayastha, 2014). Secular nationalists like Nehru attempted to do so with simplistic statements describing homosexuality as an abnormality introduced into India with the British. This demonstrates how colonial virtues had been incarnated in India’s freedom fighting generation. The task at hand was far more perplexing to fundamental Hindu nationalists who were uncomfortable and ashamed of their country’s erotic temple sculptures and the reputation India had gained as the land of the Kama Sutra (Dasgupta, 2011). In order to defend their symbolic honour that was at stake, Hindu nationalists attempted to remake an image of India that was predominantly Hindu in spirit. Hindu myths were invoked that glorified masculine characters and the Aryan resistance against Muslim invasion reminisced about. In addition, discourses that the British had circulated of Muslims having a tendency to engage in sodomy as discussed in the previous section were also emphasized by Hindu nationalists to construct homosexuality as a Muslim vice. (Purkayastha, 2014). To fight for a space of inclusion in these claims to national subject-hood, Muslims were propelled to shield their virtues by carrying out rigorous campaigns to purify Urdu poetry of its homoerotic elements (Dasgupta, 2011).

As Vanita (2005) explains, this defensiveness against Western attempts to characterise India’s past as an exotic fantasy of untamed sensuality resulted in a conscious effort to re-write that past as one of normative purity. When the movie Fire that was mentioned in the opening paragraph of this chapter was screened in theatres, Hindu right wing groups attacked
cinemas and people who went to watch it (Kapur, 2000). The film represented the lesbian relationship that emerges between two women married to brothers and living together in a joint household with their mother in law. The depiction of women satisfying their needs outside marriage was seen as a threat to the family and the inversion of cultural and religious myths and themes in the film was seen as an attack on Indian and Hindu values. (Kapur, 2000).

When an AIDS epidemic broke out in an Indian prison in the mid-nineties, condom distribution was resisted on the grounds that it legalized homosexuality and would be against Gandhian values (Kole, 2007). Thus, the colonial legal code was assimilated into the idea of an Indian tradition. The relegation of narratives of sexuality to the private sphere, guarded by the watchdog of tradition during the colonial period persisted post-independence. This caused a heavy emphasis to be placed on regulating sexuality and forbidding cross-sex friendships which were seen as a corroding Western influence. Domestic as well as public spaces became increasingly gender segregated (Purkayastha, 2014). However, this only served to provide opportunities for same sex interaction.

Thus, somewhat facetiously, much of the colonial anxiety over non-normative sexualities and the binaries between tradition and modernity and public and private spheres came to be internalized in newly emerging ideas of what it meant to be Indian (Purkayastha, 2014). Colonial processes of modernity were not liberating but restrictive as they erased expressions of queer sexuality and normalized a heterosexual identity as the only acceptable means of sexual expression. Anti-colonial nationalism merely reproduced colonial attempts to cleanse India of what were seen as unnatural and sinful vices of non-normative sexuality in order to restore the nation to its former glory. The thriving of a polyvalence of sexuality in its pre-colonial glory days was conveniently forgotten. Efforts were made to whitewash the country from its colonial days by giving new names to all major Indian cities that had been named by the British. Yet, Section 377 criminalizing sodomy that was passed during colonial times has remained in place in its exact form, condemning intercourse against the order of nature (Rao, 2015).

The conflation of sodomy with homosexuality means that the law is directed at male homosexuality, which points to the invisible status of lesbians in Indian society. The greatest strength of the legislation lies in its vagueness, as what constitutes intercourse against the order of nature is up for debate. Its defendants argue that the section protects the public not
just from sodomy but from child abuse and coercive sexual activity without mutual consent (Purkayastha, 2014). Lumping homosexuality with paedophilia and rape in the legal code fails to differentiate between homosexuality that usually occurs between two consenting adults of the same sex and these other violating and abusive forms of non-consensual sex.

To elaborate further on the changing legal status of homosexuality that I mentioned in my introduction, in 2001, the Naz foundation submitted a petition challenging the constitutional validity of Section 377 on the grounds that it was incompatible with the right to privacy, dignity and health guaranteed by India’s constitution. However, this was rejected by the High court in 2004, after which an appeal to the Supreme Court was made in 2005. (Vanita, 2005). The Supreme Court agreed to review the validity of the law in 2006 and in a landmark judgement in 2009, struck down the section, declaring it to violate the aforementioned articles of the Indian constitution. Various religious groups from the three major religions of India- Hinduism, Islam and Christianity protested so strongly against this victory for homosexual rights that the Supreme Court reinstated the law in 2013. This was justified by the court as fulfilling their obligation to represent public opinion. (Purkayastha, 2014). The rhetoric in response to the petitions, appeals and counter petitions reveals how heterosexuality is seen an integral part of national culture. Violations of privacy by Section 377 have been defended using the argument that the private domain can be brought under surveillance if individuals private choices threaten public morality. There were attempts to prove that public morality was under threat through the submission of excerpts from the Manusmriti of the Hindus, the Quran of the Muslims and the Bible of the Christians to the High Court by one Mr Sharma in 2012 to prove India’s repugnance of homosexuality. (Purkayastha, 2014).

As Narrain (2004) argues, though the law is rarely used to prosecute same sex acts, it does provide legitimacy to the police to blackmail and exploit individuals whom they consider to be violating Section 377. In addition, it has been detrimental to efforts to tackle AIDS and safe sex practice as organizations engaged in this work have faced frequent police raids (Vanita, 2005). Furthermore, Narain (2004) holds it responsible for preventing the development of a strong gay movement owing to the lack of social acceptance, fear and shame experienced by gays in India.

In 2015, India’s first advertisement to feature a lesbian couple made waves across the country. The ad for well-known online retailer Myntra, depicts two women in a beautifully
decorated household who are awaiting a visit by one of the women’s parents to break the news of their relationship. While there is yet to be a published academic article on this subject, interviews with lesbian subjects from different professional backgrounds in Quartz, an online business news publication highlighted how lesbians are less than thrilled by the way they are represented in the ad (Walia, 2015). Their main issue stems from how the advertisement uses heteronormative ideas of partnership as a premise for portraying a lesbian couple. Representing a couple rather than a gay individual and the use of a domestic setting that does not challenge patriarchy made the ad just another entitled, upper class setting which does little to capture the reality of life for majority of lesbians in India.

This ad, mainly disseminated through social media, is available on Youtube but has not been not shown on national television channels. This implies that it may not have been as visible to the middle and older generation as it is to the youth, as these generations are not exposed to social media in the same way the younger generation is. To understand how middle and older generations react to such advertisements, the ad is used as a stimulus item in this research. More about this can be found in Chapter 7 under “Interview questions and Stimuli”.

There is no denying that there has been progress in that area of social movements for alternative sexualities in India. India’s first lesbian organization, Sakhi was founded in the nineties and gay publications such as Bombay Dhost have also developed (Dave, 2012). Additionally, Pride Parades were held in five Indian cities in 2008- Delhi, Bangalore, Kolkata, Indore and Pondicherry, an annual event that has now spread to other cities in the years that have followed (Misra, 2009).The use of Hindi words in the naming of Bombay Dhost (where Dhost means friend) and Sakhi (which translates to a woman’s best friend) is significant as it shows how the homosexual community in India have tried to redefine themselves as national subjects by using local vernacular. However, this also maintains the essentialist idea that there is a true and fixed Indian culture. In this next chapter, I examine debates on the essentialism of homosexuality which emerged as a predominant school of thought in the Western world in the 19th century. In addition, its rival paradigm, social constructionism is also explored in relation to homosexuality and I also comment on the extent to which Indian theorists have supported, maintained or deviated from these paradigms.
When we say to straight people, or, more rarely, to Western gay people, “We are like you” we must remember to add, “only different”

(Nierras, 1994 as cited in Manalansan, 2003, p. 190)

3. DEBATED KNOWLEDGE PART I: Academic theories on homosexuality

As Hawley (2001) points out, Western models of homosexuality have often been the only globally recognized lens for viewing homosexuality around the world and these interpretative schemes have been imposed on non-Western societies in ways that do not fit the lived realities of sexual minorities in these countries, ignoring the growing body of literature by theorists and activists in such countries on the subject of homosexuality. To avoid falling into any ethnocentric tunnels, theories on homosexuality are used in this thesis not as mere explanatory devices but as a way of taking advantage of the opportunity offered by the social representation theory in seeing to what extent scientific knowledge comes to be represented as common sense ideas, as expressed in the speech of my participants. This process of knowledge transformation is a key proposition of Moscovici’s SR theory and will be further explained in Chapter 4. The aim of the current chapter is to discuss the dominant models of understanding and explaining homosexuality, as I hope in my results, to explore whether any of the central ideas of these theories are visible in my participants representations of homosexuality.

From the vast body of literature theorizing on homosexuality, two major paradigms that have dominated most lines of thought are essentialism and social constructionism. Under the framework of the former, biological and psycho-analytical models of homosexuality have developed. The latter has in its ranks theorists from Mary McIntosh to Judith Butler. This chapter is by no means an exhaustive account of all theories on homosexuality but seeks to identify some of the influential theories put forth under these two strands of inquiry. To ensure a well-rounded account that is sensitive to the research context, I will end with a discussion on how prominent these aforementioned paradigms have been in India and other vantage points from which homosexuality in India has been contemplated.

3.1 Essentialist approaches to homosexuality

Research that assumes an essentialist perspective views sexual orientation as a defining and enduring internal trait of individuals, transcending culture and history (Hammack, 2005). Thus, under this paradigm, theories attempt to answer two questions, firstly, “who is a
homosexual?” and “what makes a person homosexual?” (Richardson, 1984). The essentialist explanations advanced by biological and psychiatric models to these queries led to the establishment of a homosexual category and along with the diagnosis, there inevitably came the need for a cure. Rather than challenging this paradigm, early homosexual rights movements framed their arguments in the same essentialist language of these arguments and strived not for the recognition of sexual difference but for sameness with regards to “natural” gender identities, asserting that gay men and lesbians were basically just like heterosexual men and women, despite their object choices (Tyler, 1991). In the subsections that follow, the central ideas of both the biological and psychiatric models will be outlined.

3.1.1 The Biological Model

The earliest attempt to describe the homosexual category came from the biological model of sexuality, which can be traced to the dichotomization of the categories of man and woman as two distinct beings in relation to sex, anatomy, sexuality and abilities in the 18th century. Hernn (1995) explains that prior to this, a one sex model had been the norm where only the category of male was socially defined and a woman was viewed as an atrophied form of man whose sex organs were a mutation of the penis and other male sex organs. The introduction of the two-sex model created the categories of biological sex by emphasizing a strong distinction between male and female sex organs. Influenced by the materialistic determinism of late 19th century Enlightenment that prompted a biological reductionism and a comparison of humans to animals, biological arguments that sought to explain the nature of homosexuality were put forth. Karl Heinrich Ulrich was perhaps the first to hypothesize on the biological basis of “Uranismus” as he termed homosexuality, conceiving of homosexual men as biological males with female characteristics and homosexual women as biological females with male characteristics (Hernn, 1995). To support his argument, Ulrich cited examples of homosexuality in plants and higher animals, which served as inspiration for later studies on homosexuality in the animal kingdom such as the work of Karsch, a German zoologist in 1900. Research in this tradition made it necessary to limit the definition of homosexuality to specific forms of sexual behaviour, namely mutual stimulation of sex organs for females and anal penetration for males. The measuring stick involved making base comparisons with higher mammals, particularly primates to strengthen their claims. (Hernn, 1995).
This assumption, that homosexuality is innate and therefore natural, gave birth to subsequent theories of inversion. This considered homosexuality to be an inversion of the sexual drive towards an individual of the same sex. Thus, male homosexuals were seen as essentially female and female homosexuals as essentially male. (Richardson, 1984). As Hern (1995) demonstrates, scholars influenced by Darwinian ideas of evolution thought that inversion was genetic. While some saw it a throwback to primitive hermaphroditic animal forms or natural birth defects, others held the brain and body structure as key to explaining the difference between homosexuals and heterosexuals. Physiological differences between these two categories were described. A third camp saw it as stemming from hormonal defects. Some of these theories had horrifying consequences as they were usurped by surgeons who castrated male homosexuals and implanted them with testicles from heterosexuals in attempts to cure them of their “condition.” Such ideas were also appropriated by the Nazis in their eugenics revolution, leading to the persecution and eradication of homosexuals who were considered unproductive and harmful to the nation. (Herms, 1995). Thus, biological scientific discourse had far-reaching ideological consequences.

3.1.2 The Psychiatric Model

As sexual deviations were a crucial focal point of psychiatry, it was not long before Ulrich’s biological understanding of homosexuality was embraced by psychiatric approaches which popularized the notion of homosexuality as a perversion, rather than an inversion (Richardson, 1984). This led to a distinction being made between homosexuality as a state of being (i.e a permanent inversion of the sexual drive) and homosexuality as a form of behaviour (i.e acts that were considered perverted). Homosexuals came to be seen as a species, characterized by feelings, latency and a psychosocial condition. This served to generate more questions rather than answers as to whether homosexuality was a result of corruption or degeneration, heredity or the environment, a natural variation or a deformation. (Weeks, 1986). Psychiatrists devoted themselves to the task of responding to these questions by zealous endeavors to classify, characterize and measure sexuality from Kinsey’s seven-point rating scale for the spectrum of homosexual and heterosexual behaviour to Kraft Ebbing’s detailed descriptions of pathologies of sexual phenomena (Weeks, 1986). The psychiatric model of understanding homosexuality has been highly influential. Till as recently as 1973, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders still categorized homosexuality as a mental illness (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005).
Although Freud (1905) tried not to fall victim to the camp that viewed homosexuality as something that needed to be cured by attempting to incorporate it within the accepted range of sexuality, this was contradicted by his goal directed version of sexuality. Framed under his psychoanalytic theory, Freud (1905) discusses how humans have an innate, unconscious sexual capacity to be attracted to both sexes. However, successful negotiation of the Oedipal crisis and the awareness of the presence or absence of a penis necessitate the acquisition of psychological masculinity and femininity which then direct the individual to heterosexuality. Thus, attraction to the opposite sex was considered the normal outcome of libidinal development according to Freud (1905). Difficulties in the acquisition of psychological masculinity for boys and femininity for girls was seen as an arrest in sexual development, hence for Freud, homosexuality represented a crisis to normal development.

3.2 Social Constructionist approaches to homosexuality

In contrast to the essentialist paradigm, social constructionism views sexual orientations as products of particular cultural and historical understandings (Hammack, 2005). The foundations for building a social constructivist theory of homosexuality was laid by Mary McIntosh. The reason why till today, there is no consensus about what causes homosexuality according to McIntosh (1968) is because we’ve been asking the wrong question. The only way to get the right answers is to shift from seeing homosexuality as a condition that has causes to explaining why it is understood as a condition that has causes in the first place. This involves deconstructing the homosexual role as she calls it to reveal the cultural conceptions that accompany such a role as well as the institutional arrangements that depend on and reinforce such conceptions including all forms of heterosexual activity ranging from courtship to marriage as well as the process of labelling a homosexual- clinical diagnosis, criminal conviction and societal reactions in the form of gossip and ridicule.

Though McIntosh is credited with spearheading social constructionist approaches to homosexuality, her work was largely overshadowed by Foucault (1976). His ground-breaking work, History of Sexuality traced important cultural and historical changes in the construction of homosexuality. Same sex acts were not considered reflective of personhood in ancient Greece and Rome as pleasures of the body were treated as merely another preoccupation of everyday living. This is in comparison to modern day conceptions of sexuality which hold it as the key to our identity. Foucault points out how depictions of sex for pleasure as morally wrong in accordance with the teachings of the church were
transformed into discourses. Thus, sex solely for pleasure without a reproductive end came to be viewed as something that was sick and unhealthy as well as corrupt and perverse when power moved from religious authorities to medical and legal authorities. In this age where knowledge was power, Foucault argued that power had to be wielded by controlling the knowledge and limiting it to the scientific community. As such, professionals were entrusted with the task of classifying sexual acts that fell outside the boundaries of what was considered normal which saw the invention of the term homosexuality in the 1860’s. It was used to denote the ailment of a particular species of being that engaged in sodomy, a practice that had been condemned prior to the 18th century but that had not been associated with a specific identity. The variety of discourses according to Foucault only serve to highlight the heterogeneous nature of sexuality. In other words, what it is to be sexual exists in a variety of discourses, voiced through a multitude of languages, rooted in a dense network of social activities and our identities as men and women, homosexual and heterosexual are the result of definition and self-definition in a complex order of social relations.

As Weeks (1986) states, heterosexualitv is so taken for granted as the norm that it is rarely questioned. Challenging the idea of heteronormativity or the institutionalized dominance of heterosexuality is thus the crux of queer theorists. This involves going beyond gay/lesbian identities to examine underlying discourse that produce and maintain binaries of homo-hetero and masculine-feminine (Sykes, 2011). Much of the thrust of queer theory is dedicated to dispelling the notion that homosexuality is a homogenous category where all those falling under it have the same experience. Scholars like Sedgwick (1988) have extensively argued on the importance of acknowledging the differences within the gay community, with examples on differences in male and female experiences of homosexuality and the historic invisibility of lesbians compared to gays.

Perhaps the most radical constructivist approach to sexuality can be found in the writings of Butler (1990) who makes a compelling case for the performativity of gender in Gender Trouble. Butler argues that anatomical differences have been reified to construct essentialist categories of sex and gender leading to the institutionalisation of compulsory heterosexuality to align with these constructed categories. Yet if one takes the example of the act of drag, it is possible to see how this is not merely the donning of clothes of another gender but also performing and re-enacting gender in the process. This performance of gender according to Butler is not confined to drag but to all displays that perform preconceived ideas of gender, the actions of which come to constitute and reinforce the very category they are trying to
copy. The idea that to be a man means not to be gay and to be a woman means not to be lesbian impinges on, leading to the construction of effeminate gay men and butch lesbian women so that the heteronormative facade of masculinity and femininity can stay intact despite the threat from homosexuality.

That there was a counter reaction to this construction of homosexuality in the form of “machoization” of the gay world in the seventies to reconcile the conflict men felt between their sexuality and their manhood could perhaps be seen as real-world examples of Butler’s hypothesis. The taken for granted status of heterosexuality has led homosexuality to be seen as simply a poor imitation of the original. Butler challenges these ideas with her proposal that there is no original gender, masculinity, femininity and heterosexuality. Rather, such categories are created in their very performance of the behaviours they supposedly represent and homosexuality cannot be considered an imitation of the original heterosexuality when the performance of heterosexuality is an act in itself.

Butler (1991) acknowledges the political importance of homosexual identities in resisting heteronormativity. However, she thinks that such identities can be a source of oppression themselves by containing the fluidity of sexuality in the same way a heterosexual label does. Coming out and expressing a gay identity is seen by activists as the ultimate liberation while for Butler, this process brings with it a sense of alienation. The growing tolerance to homosexuality in many countries of the West is usually limited to homosexuals with the privileged status of being white and Westernized “same-sex” citizen. Thus, heteronormative ideas of marriage, monogamy, procreation and productivity have been assimilated into homosexual movements, resulting in a state of homonormativity. (Sykes, 2011). Deeply entrenched in neoliberal capitalistic structures that seek to maintain monogamy, gender binaries and procreation, homonormativity has led to the fragmentation of people with alternative sexualities into hierarchies. Only the claims of those that come closest to heteronormative standards are legitimized as most worthy of receiving rights. (Duggan, 2003).

3.3 Theorising homosexuality in India

As Sykes (2011) states, sexuality and gender cannot be divorced from racialization, histories of colonialism or nation formation. In their 1991 report entitled, “Less than gay”, ABVA, an AIDS activism organization in India points out how, in comparison to their Western counterparts, Indian medical practitioners, behavioural scientists, psychologists and
psychiatrists remained remarkably silent on the topic of homosexuality. When they did speak, their arguments were mainly advanced not from a biological or psycho-analytical model that would befit their professional status but instead to simply reiterate the alienness of homosexuality to Indian culture (ABVA, 1991). This points to the deep-rooted legacy of colonialism and the quest for national identity that followed post-Independence. The language of difference entailed in alternative sexualities did not fit the narrative of homogeneity required in the construction of nationhood and was thus excluded. Nevertheless, traces of the biological and psycho-analytical model are visible in the limited research papers Parekh (2003) was able to find on homosexuality in the Indian Journal of Psychiatry, where psychiatrists attribute causes of homosexuality to early childhood trauma in the absence of evidence of hormonal deficiency and report successful reconfiguration of their homosexual clients sexuality to heterosexuality using interventions such as behavioural modification techniques (Pradhan, Ayyar & Bagadia, 1982; Mehta & Nimgaonkar, 1983; Jiloha, 1984).

A biological understanding of sexuality can also be seen in the treatment meted out to Lila and Urmila, two police-women from a rural Indian village whose marriage in a Hindu temple with their parents as witnesses in 1987 created a huge public scandal. The couple was detained in solitary confinement and subjected to a medical examination that aimed to examine whether the women had any observable lesbian tendencies (ABVA, 1991). Even during the brief years when homosexuality was decriminalized from 2009-2013, Singh (2016) discusses how there was a disjuncture from the legal recognition provided to homosexuals and the social, cultural and religious modalities that continued to pathologize homosexuality.

The equation of homosexuality to sodomy has also given rise to a number of myths articulated within the frame of the biological model. For instance, Opendra Narayan, an Indian doctor at John Hopkins Medical School in the US made the following comment about homosexuality,

“the active sexual partner injects infected semen into the anus of the passive partner... These people have sex twenty to thirty times a night ... A man comes along and goes from anus to anus and in a single night will act as a mosquito transferring infected cells on his penis. When this is practiced for a year, with a man having three thousand
sexual intercourses, one can readily understand this massive epidemic that is currently upon us." (ABVA, 1991, p. 33).

Such rhetoric reflects two essentialist myths about homosexuality, firstly that homosexuals are sexually vociferous and promiscuous and secondly, that they are contaminated and responsible for spreading diseases. The Directorate General of Health Services also linked homosexuality with promiscuity in their magazine Swastha Hind, cautioning against providing AIDS pamphlets to youth in India. Such information was thought to increase their awareness of homosexuality and arouse their curiosity, which the Health Services wanted to discourage (ABVA, 1991). Yet for the most part, Indian homosexuals were able to escape being scapegoats for AIDS owing to their invisibility in the absence of a homosexual identity and the denial of their existence in India. ABVA (1991) condemns public health interventions targeting homosexuals as a high-risk group. However, the organization also feels that the criminal status of same sex activity and societal unwillingness to acknowledge existence of homosexuals in India complicates their AIDS prevention efforts as homosexuals affected with the disease are reluctant to seek treatment and are stigmatized when they do.

Boyce & Khanna (2011) talk about how same sex affect in India has been interpreted as homo-social instead of homosexual as it is not affiliated to readily empirical homosexual identities or intentions. They argue that this stems from the discursive legacy of Euro-American subjectivity where heterosexual men and women are ideologically produced through the continual denouncing of homoeroticism. As a result, homosexuality and homoeroticism are seen as enclosed within and restricted to a discrete homosexual subject. Some queer theorists in India such as Abha (1998 as cited in Bachetta, 2002) have actively rejected lesbian and gay identities on similar grounds as Butler (1991). They feel that such terms are not politically useful in their struggles and would only serve to impose divisive debates about Westernization, isolate sexuality from the wider erotic and affective component that it has occupied in India and threaten the gender segregated spaces that simultaneously permits and conceals the expression of same sex love in India. However, this may indicate that such scholars and activists are not willing to challenge the status quo out of fear of losing spaces that allow for the closeted expression of criminalized same sex acts. As Narrain (2004) argues, this has led to a form of activism that resists Section 377 by petitioning for the decriminalization of same sex acts in private while maintaining the criminal status of public same sex acts. This reflects wider ideas of a heteronormative order where it is not merely same sex acts that are seen as obscene but public displays of affect in general.
Activists who do try and fight for the recognition of identity categories of gay, lesbian and homosexual draw on the previously described accounts of same sex activity from ancient India as a way of proving that homosexuality has always been part of Indian history. However, both activists and conservatives seem to adhere to the same essentialist idea of Indian culture and equating Indian with being Hindu when attempting to support the idea of the Indian homosexual. This does nothing to challenge that there is such a thing as a true Indian culture which can be defined in relation to the inclusion and exclusion of certain customs and people. In subscribing to such a position, Kapur (2000) contends that it is easy to overlook that who is part of Indian culture and who is excluded is decided by the dominant group in society and that culture is not a monolith.

Kapur’s argument is illustrated particularly well by the invisibility of lesbians in India. Dominant notions of same sex visibility specific to the West reflect Western misogyny that has been universalized. This is based on the masculinist valorisation of the visible penis and de-valorisation of women’s invisible internal sex organs. (Bachetta, 2002). In patriarchal countries like India, the sexually autonomous lesbian is beyond the imagination of the patriarch where sexual agency is considered an exclusive male privilege and women are not imagined to possess any. The silenced status of lesbians is not specific to India, however explanations for its occurrence are unique in that they link the invisibility of Indian lesbians to national identity. As Bacchetta (2002) points out, men and women are constructed as national subjects in different ways in India with women’s’ legitimacy as a national subject stemming from their role as biological, cultural and national producers who embody collectivity and participate in collective honour. By refusing to play a role in the heteronormative, biological and cultural reproduction of the nation, the lesbian is thought to threaten the dominant national culture, dishonour heterosexual male subjects and remain outside the boundaries of civilization as anti-national, improperly progressed subjects.

Vanita (2002) explains that this threat seems to be rooted in a fear that lesbian desire undermines masculinity and female sociality and such gender based anxieties are closely connected to anxieties about religion, community and national identity. Religion and culture in India have borrowed so much from each other to produce a social order that prizes heteronormativity. Therefore, the preservation of traditional family values and gender relations comes to comprise a strong component of one’s national identity as an Indian. As such, lesbians are seen as an alien Western import, to be rejected. Reporting on lesbian marriages depict the bond as asexual friendships or as deviants who had to be ostracized. The
consequent suicides of lesbian partners that would ensue as a result of the ostracism, were portrayed by the media as acts by women who were dangerous and lacking intellectual capacities (Vanita, 2002).

The numerous attempts at same sex marriage in India, mainly by women would suggest an assimilation of heteronormative ideals by homosexuals, yet unlike the homonormativity in the West which is usually limited to privileged White homosexuals, such marriages in India defy religious and caste boundaries. As Vanita (2002) points out, though sexual acts between those of the same sex are forbidden by law, marriage is not. Therefore, the legitimacy of same sex marriages rests on their acceptance by the families of the prospective couples, the religious practitioner officiating at such ceremonies and the wider community. The instances of successful same sex marriages recorded in India have been enabled when the couple receives social support from their families. However, such unions are doomed to fail when families disapprove, as in most cases, the couple concerned is dependent on their families materially and owing to the criminal status of homosexuality, their families can also enlist the aid of the police in stopping such unions. (Vanita, 2002).

Three important points emerge from this discussion of theoretical ideas concerning homosexuality in India. Firstly, ideas from both essentialist and social constructionist models of sexuality in the West have trickled into discourse about homosexuality in India with discourses from the biological model especially persistent. Secondly, the appropriation of the criminalized status of homosexuality into the Hindu far right project to establish a morally pure Hindu nation makes it necessary for any challenges to Section 377 to incorporate a confrontation to the logic of the dogmas of the Hindu right. Thirdly, the ambiguous nature of same sex sexualities in India means that those who constituent such subjects and how they are affected by both prejudice and liberalizing action is far from predictable. This reflects, as Boyce and Khanna (2011) describe, a Foucauldian idea that sexual policing regimes do not really repress sexuality but indicate a hyper-awareness of it.
I have always known that I learn my most lasting lessons about difference by closely attending to the ways in which the differences inside me lie down together.

Lorde (1988, pp. 117-118)

4. DEBATED KNOWLEDGE PART II: Everyday conceptions of homosexuality

Wilson Mitzer, an American playwright, was rumoured to have once quipped that, “When you steal from one author, it's plagiarism; if you steal from many, it's research” (Johnston, 1953). Although the question of stealing does not arise when credit is given to the authors whose ideas are drawn on, the aforementioned epigram highlights an important aspect of any research process: bringing something new to the table requires a familiarity with the existing contributions. Exploring how people understand homosexuality is a subject that has been studied in a multitude of different ways in a number of different countries. Owing to the magnitude of this field, it was necessary to be selective with the studies included in this review. In particular, studies that reveal insights on the contents of people’s views towards homosexuality and how identity categories such as gender, religion and age shape manifest in their perceptions of homosexuality are considered. This includes both studies that explicitly use a social representation approach and those using other theoretical and conceptual approaches. Thus, the chapter is organized into relevant themes arising from previous empirical research on homosexuality, both in India and abroad.

4.1 Views on homosexuality

A survey conducted in major cities across India in 2009, shortly after decriminalisation found that 73% of the respondents felt that homosexuality should be considered illegal, 77% considered attraction towards the same sex unnatural, 83% felt that being gay was against Indian culture and 94% stated that they did not have a friend who was gay (CNN IBN, 2009). These reactions are indicative of the way homosexuality has been represented in India down the ages. It is not surprising, therefore, that the victory for gay rights in India was short-lived and the ban on homosexuality reinstated. Somewhat unexpected however is the finding in that homosexuality was most condemned by younger and older women alike in a qualitative study by Bhugra, Mehra, Silva & Bhintade (2007) in North India with participants belonging to different age groups. This is in contrast to studies in the West that have found women and younger generations in particular to be more accepting of homosexuality (PEW Research Centre, 2013). It appeared that the older generation in Bhugra et al.’s (2007) study was not as perturbed by homosexuality as the younger generation of female participants since they
viewed homosexuality as something common among teenage boys who had no other avenues for sexual release and thought that they would outgrow such tendencies with marriage.

Chatterjee (2013) analysed the manner in which medical textbooks in India portrayed homosexuality and found that homosexuality was depicted as an offense and an inferior form of sexuality with sodomy emphasized as a sexual offense and homosexuals said to be psychologically imbalanced, egoistic and prone to AIDS. Such representations seem to echo discourses made popular by biological and psychiatric theories on homosexuality that were discussed in Chapter 3. The idea of homosexuality as deviance and mental illness has also been found by other studies. For instance, in Furnham & Taylor’s (1990) study in Britain on people’s “lay” theories on homosexuality, participants attributed homosexuality to problems with early relationships and fear of women. Hence, psychotherapy was prescribed as a cure by participants to what was seen as a mental ailment. In addition, homosexuality was also thought to arise from genetic difference and the suggested remedy in such instances was hormonal treatment.

Similar findings have been identified in more recent literature as well. For instance, Sheldon, Pfeffer, Jayaratne, Feldbaum, & Petty (2007) were able to classify the beliefs of their participants on the etiology of homosexuality into three categories. The first consisted of genetic/biological beliefs where homosexuality was perceived to be arising from factors within the individual such as genes and hormones. The second included environmental beliefs where the individual’s environment relating to relationships and family were considered to cause homosexuality. The third comprised of homosexuality as personal choice where individuals are seen as free agents with regards to their sexuality, capable of choosing who to love. The distinction between causes of homosexuality into innate or biological and acquired or environmental has also been found by Jeolás & Paulilo (2008) in their Brazil based study of teachers’ representations of homosexuality.

In particular, essentialist beliefs about the nature of homosexuality were found to be structured along three dimensions as found by Haslam & Levy (2006). The biological basis of homosexuality is emphasized in the first dimension, the cross-cultural and historical universality of homosexuality is stressed in the second and the characteristic and defining features of a homosexual is highlighted in the third dimension. Studies with gay men (Buetti, Martinello, Moreau, Lapointe & Ladoucer, 2016) have found attempts to reject such defining features and construct themselves according to perceived ideas of normality. Such ideas of
normality seem to be rooted in ideas about normative gender roles, a theme that figures prominently in the literature and deserves a section of its own.

4.2 Importance of gender expectations

A belief in traditional gender roles often underlines homophobia, as found by Sadgrove, Vanderbeck, Andersson, Valentine & Ward (2012) in the context of Uganda. Such beliefs construct ideas about the family as an institution, marriage and procreative behaviour. A conflation of sex, gender, gender roles, gender identity and sexual orientation was found by Sheldon et al. (2007). Here, ideas of masculinity and femininity shaped beliefs about the causes of homosexuality. This resulted in homosexuality being confused with intersexuality or the presence of genes of the opposite sex in a homosexual individual. In addition, males exhibiting feminine characteristics and females exhibiting male characteristics were often used as examples of gender non-conformity in the same study. Furnham & Taylor (1990) also identify the tendency of respondents in their study to consider homosexual men as effeminate by emphasizing assumed qualities of homosexual males that are considered feminine such as an artistic, eccentric temperament and ability to cook well.

That gay men feature in examples offered by respondents in both these studies far more prominently than lesbians does not appear to be a matter of coincidence but reveals a gendered dimension to the manner in which people perceive homosexuals as it is a theme found in other studies as well (Herek, 2002; Kite & Deaux, 1987). Academics also seem to reflect similar biases with research on homosexual experiences of men rather than women (Mimiaga et al., 2015; Elouard & Essen, 2013; Sánchez, Greenberg, Liu & Vilain, 2009). Pressure of gays to conform to masculine roles has been a common focus of study. For instance, Fields et al. (2015) discuss the isolation and pressure experienced by Black men who have sex with men to conform to anti-homosexual expectations of masculinity. On a similar note, Buetti et al.’s (2016) research on the social representations of male homosexuality in Canada found that gay respondents who conformed to more “normal” and typical gender roles rejected flamboyant gays. This was marked by attempts to distance themselves from this group as they perceived them to be giving homosexuals a negative reputation. Gender expectations were also found to be important in Indian studies (Boyce & Khanna, 2011; Asthana & Oostovogels, 2001). However, unlike in other contexts where same sex relations were repressed by normative gender roles and relations, such roles enabled homosexuality to thrive in India. Gender segregated public spaces such as public
transportation made sexual acts between men possible while at the same time their enactment in such spaces enabled them to be silenced from a heteronormative viewpoint. (Boyce & Khanna, 2011).

In Asthana & Oostovogels’ (2001) study, participants used terms for same sex relations that were reflective of gender identity rather than sexual behaviour. Masculinity was associated with marriage and producing children and if a man fulfilled this expectation, he could get away with sexual relations with men without this being linked to an effeminate identity or being considered homosexual. There was only a link to homosexuality when men were perceived to have an effeminate identity and did not get married and have children. Three terms for different gender identities existed in the local vernacular vocabulary. Firstly, “panthis”, consisting of a masculine identity and a sexual orientation towards women where sex with men was just for pleasure and did not compromise one’s heterosexual identity and also avoided the stigma of extra marital sex because such acts were not considered sex. Secondly, “double deckers”, who are not overtly feminine but the object of sex is linked to identity, thus equating them to the idea of modern gay men. “Dangas” on the other hand are overtly feminine. By giving those who engaged in same sex acts the space to do so while keeping their identity as heterosexual men intact, normative gender roles did not appear to conflict with homosexuality.

4.3 Lack of a homosexual identity

In their study in Tamil Nadu, Boyce & Khanna (2011) found that homosexual acts were not equated with a homosexual identity and such an identity was virtually non-existent. This is because the homo and hetero subject could and often is the same person because of social limits on exclusive same sex relationship and sexuality in India. Safe sex practices were made difficult by a tendency not to see sexual acts between two men as sex per se because it did not lead to procreation. Current legislation was thought to work in favour of such men engaging in homosexual acts who do not desire a conferring of legality to their actions which they felt would take away the fluidity they enjoyed, entrapping them into a defining and unwanted homosexual identity. The negative image attached to homosexuality which they did not want to be associated with suggests a link between social identity and social representations mentioned in the previous chapter.

Certainly, tolerance is not guaranteed in countries that do give recognition to homosexuality as suggested by the private acceptance of homosexuality in Slovenia that functions to
maintain homosexuals as a distinct “other” and allows public discrimination against them (Roman & Alenka, 2013). The lack of a homosexual identity was also found by Asthana & Oostovogels (2001) as mentioned in the previous section. HIV was not associated with homosexuality in this study but with heterosexuality and female prostitutes because of failure to see homosexual acts as sex.

4.4 Homosexuality and AIDS

For the most part, homosexuality in India remained disassociated with AIDS owing to the lack of a homosexual identity mentioned above. However, the underground status of homosexuality makes it harder for those affected with AIDS to access health care as found by a number of Indian studies (Thomas et al., 2012; Safren et al., 2014; Ganju, Patel, Prabhakar & Adhikary, 2016). In countries where the link with AIDS and homosexuality has been strongly ingrained, the effects of stigmatization are particularly pronounced as found by a study on gay men living with AIDS in Hungary (Takács, Kelly, Tóth, Mocsonaki, & Amirkhanian, 2013). A study of the social representations of homosexuality in Jamaica describe how the equation of homosexuality with AIDS/HIV and fears of contamination can lead to health care professionals refusing to treat homosexuals with AIDS.

Joffe (1995) also found the association between AIDS and homosexuality in her study of gay men in South Africa and Britain. In both countries, the public represented AIDS as something confined to homosexuals which functioned to keep illusion of safety. There were issues of power involved in maintaining such a representation. The gay community counter reacted against the hegemonic representation by initiating campaigns that stressed on individual responsibility and practicing safe sex by tying it to eroticism in order to try and dissociate the link between homosexuality and AIDS.

4.5 Homophobia and national identity

The absence of unity among the queer community in India is welcomed by far-right nationalists in India who see the development of such an identity as threatening and conflicting to an Indian national identity. Kapur (2004) analyses the controversies caused by the release of the movie Fire in India to show how the definition of Indian culture has become a site to contest fears of sex as a threat to Indian values, the Indian way of life and the existence of the Indian nation where being Indian is equated with being Hindu. Studies in other contexts have also explored the link between national identity and homophobia (Schafer, 1996; Boellstorff, 2004; Conrad, 2001) Such a link becomes particularly prominent
in countries that have a history of colonialism as found in studies on Senegal (M’Baye, 2013) and Uganda (Sadgrove et al., 2012). To use an example from the former, depictions of homosexuality in Senegal through different historical periods were analysed to reveal a deep-rooted binary that places the West in direct opposition to Africa and derogates sexual variance and subcultures in Senegal as pathological European import. The framing of the issue around an African identity as opposed to a specifically Sengalese appears to be a way of countering neo-colonialism and Western interventions into African affairs.

National identity also serves as a powerful weapon in the arsenal of homophobia during times when the borders of a nation are perceived to be under threat as observed in the Irish context by Conrad (2001). It is during such times that the stability of the nation was thrown into crisis and one way of resolving this crisis was to construct a national image modelled on the virtues of aggressive masculinity. The association of homosexuality with effeminacy meant that homosexuals could not be accommodated within the national identity of Ireland and were viewed as a foreign pollution. This bears some resemblance to developments in Indonesia. Boellstorff (2004) notes that the violence directed at gay Indonesians at public protests where gays attempt to stake a claim in the national identity can be seen as attempts by the perpetrators to establish what they see as a “properly masculine response” to the transgression of gays against masculinity. He recommends that such incidents be viewed in the context of wider nation building trends to fashion the nation through a new, masculine cast. As a result, male-male desire cannot be viewed simply as non-conformity to normative masculinity but as a threat to the Indonesian nation.

4.6 Role of religion

Though India remains divided on religious issues, with the tension between Hindus and Muslims particularly, different religious groups are united in their persistence to retain the criminal status of homosexuality (Madhukalya, 2013). Yet, apart from historical essays, the lack of an empirical study on the role of religion in shaping public views on homosexuality in India is perplexing, given the diversity of religions in the country. Studies in contexts outside India have paid due importance to the topic with regards to Christianity and to a lesser extent, Islam. However, there is a dearth of research on Hinduism and homosexuality with the exception of analyses of Hindu religious texts in relation to homosexuality and theoretical writings on Hindu nationalism which has been discussed in Chapter 2.
In particular, attitudes and prejudices of Christianity have been well researched. Homosexuality was considered to be an abomination, a sin, immoral, unnatural and against biblical teaching by Christian interviewees in a study in Zimbabwe by Mtemeri and Maziti (2015). A Brazilian study by Pereira, Torres, Falcão & Pereira (2013) found that participants who espoused representations on the nature of homosexuality based on religious and moralist Christian beliefs were found to favour policies that discriminated against homosexuals, particularly concerning adoption and child care.

The interaction of religion with historical factors and culture in fluid ways has also been a topic of interest. Charles (2011) found that condemnation of homosexuality in Jamaica that only began during the British rule turned into extreme homophobia. This was due to the institutionalization of British censure towards homosexuality by the Jamaican government and churches. Jamaican police officials justified attacks against homosexuals as biblical judgement which shows the role of religion and the Church in their representations of homosexuality. In Barbosa’s (2009) Latin American study, the homophobia of participants was traced to the strong historical stance of Christianity against homosexuality in addition to the cultural values of machismo. However, participants in this study also highlighted how new ways of Christianity were challenging their principles and causing them to question the religious foundations of their identity. This emphasizes the importance of viewing religion as dynamic rather than monolithic.

Finding new ways of reinterpreting old scriptures was one way for gay Muslim men to cope with their religious identity. Minwalla, Rosser, Feldman & Varga (2005) emphasize how the gay Muslim men that they interviewed attempted to redefine their relationship to Allah as gay Muslims and reinterpret the Quran and traditional condemnation of homosexuality in Islam. The term “progressive” is employed to describe participants of this study as they were engaged an active and conscious process of exploring their identities and recruited from attendees of an LGBTQ conference for Muslims in the US and Canada, However, this criteria for employing the term “progressive Muslim” is somewhat questionable, given that many Muslims of alternative sexualities are engaged in such a process of exploration of identities but are not able to reconcile being homosexual with being Muslim and to say these queer Muslims are not progressive would be to simplify the matter a great deal.

For instance, in her study with Muslim lesbians, Siraj (2012) highlights how the intersection of their identity as Muslim and lesbian causes considerable strain to her participants as their
feelings and desires are considered unnatural according to their religion which celebrates heteronormative gender roles and sexuality. Such tension prevents them from expressing and exploring their sexuality. The same author (Siraj, 2009) also looked at religious representations of homosexuality among British Muslim heterosexuals. Her participants attempted to “other” homosexuals who they see as violating traditional gender roles prescribed by the Quran and Islamic culture. This provides a more complete picture for why Muslims who are homosexual feel rejected by their religious community and cannot simply reinterpret scriptures to find acceptance. A similar conflict is noted by Subhi & Geelan (2012) who explore the tension faced by participants who identified themselves as both Christians and homosexuals, causing alienation, guilt, anxiety, depression and suicide ideation.

In conclusion, if the manner in which religious identity and sexuality intersect is complex, the picture only gets more convoluted, when national identity, generations and ideas about gender roles are added to the mix. Untangling the convolutions to explore how they appear in my participants’ representations of homosexuality presents unique opportunities and challenges.
5. SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS THEORY

In the opening chapter of La Psychanalyse entitled “Social Representations: a lost concept”, Moscovici (who is considered the founder of the theory of social representations) introduces his notion in the following manner:

“Social representations are almost tangible entities. They circulate, intersect and crystallise continuously, through a word, a gesture or a meeting in our daily world. They impregnate most of our established social relations, the objects we produce or consume, and the communications we exchange. We know that they correspond, on one hand, to the symbolic substance which enters into their elaboration, and on the other to the practice which produces this substance, much as science or myth corresponds to a scientific or mythical practice” (Moscovici, 1961 as cited in Duveen, 2001, p. 3).

From this, it appears that social representations, arising from communication and social practices, play an important role in social life. They provide us a symbolic code of orientation that shapes the manner in which we construct our reality to the extent that the representation categories we use to make sense of the world come to symbolise a type of reality for us. As Moscovici (1984) says, the history, customs and collective content loaded into them weighs down on us with the resistance of a material object and perhaps their invisibility renders them all the more powerful.

Despite their importance in social life, representations did not receive the attention they deserved for a long time as Sociology, the discipline of their origin did not consider them to be more than explanatory devices that could not be further reduced to their constituent parts (Duveen, 2001). Thus, Moscovici (1984, p. 18) entrusted to Social Psychology the onerous task of understanding “the alchemy that transmutes the base metal of our ideas into the gold of our reality.” Like many others have done in the past to understand how concepts change into objects, I hope to take him up on his challenge in this research to deconstruct representations of homosexuality in India by utilizing the tools of the SRT. The first section of this chapter will tread into the background of the theory of social representations. The second will explore how representations are thought to be formed while the third will look at
the structure of representations. In the fourth section, I will discuss the relationship of SR’s to identity and groups, given the importance of this link in this current research. Following that, I will look at ways in which the theory has been problematized and how these critiques have been resolved.

5.1 A background of the Social Representations Theory

In 1948, Serge Moscovici arrived in Paris, seeking refuge from the racism, discrimination and rise of communist dictatorship that he had experienced in Romania (Marková, 2017). According to him, the key to unlocking all these problems lay in Social Psychology, yet at this point, Social Psychology was a discipline in crisis. A legacy of mentalistic concepts and an individualist orientation bequeathed by reigning forms of behaviourism and reinforced by the cognitive revolution of the 1950’s has caused Social Psychology to stagnate. (Duveen, 2001). As a result, the social in its name was rendered almost invisible. The divide between psychological and sociological forms of social psychology led to attempts to integrate the two being seen as unreasonable science. The chasm was widened by Durkheim who partitioned ‘individual’ from ‘collective’ representations in his 1912 theory of collective representations, assigning the former to the territory of social psychology and the latter to sociology. (Farr, 1996).

It is therefore somewhat ironic that Durkheim’s collective representations are usually cited as the ancestor to Moscovici’s notion of social representations. The social representation theory marked a radical development in European Social Psychology which challenged the duality between sociological and psychological forms of social psychology and combined the levels of society, culture and individual. (Duveen, 2001). Indeed, for Moscovici (1988), replacing Durkheim’s idea of collective representations with social representations was not an arbitrary terminological distinction but a change of perspective. This was needed in order to break with the idea that representations are static and stable general categories remaining the same across generations and also to account for critical human nature and modern communication methods which give representations distinctive dynamic and fluid qualities.

Taking inspiration from Jean Piaget’s work on the common sense of children, one of Moscovici’s central ideas was that scientific thinking and common sense are two different modes of thinking belonging to two different universes. Scientific thinking made up a part of what he called the reified universe and common sense was seen to be a property of the consensual universe. (Moscovici & Marková, 1998). According to Moscovici (1984), the
reified universe tries to explain the world without the influence of the people in it and is
characterised by a hierarchical system of roles and classes where people acquire their
credentials as experts in different fields such as doctors and lawyers. In contrast,
communication and negotiation are key to knowledge production in the consensual universe
where individuals are free and equal. As a result, thinking in the former is based on what is
considered to be solid facts while thinking in the latter is grounded in collective memory, folk
culture and consensus.

While this distinction between the two universes has been attacked (more on this in section
3.5), Moscovici did not regard common sense as inferior to scientific thinking as he believed
they were equally rational modes (Moscovici and Marková, 1998). He emphasized how in
modern societies, different forms of knowledge such as science, common sense, ideology and
religion cohabit simultaneously to perform different functions and meet different needs for
individuals, groups and institutions. This plurality of thinking where different modes co-exist
even when they are in conflict with each other is termed cognitive polyphasia (Moscovici,
2008). That social representations are considered a characteristic form of knowledge in our
era is what makes them in Moscovici’s opinion a phenomenon as opposed to merely a
concept and this age an era of social representations (Moscovici, 1984). Compared to pre-
modern feudal societies in Europe where centralized institutions of the Church and State,
Bishop and King were at the top of the ladder of power and the controlling authorities of
knowledge and beliefs, modernity is characterized by more diverse centres of power,
changing the manner in which knowledge is regulated (Duveen, 2001). The adaptation of
collective life to decentred conditions of legitimation has given the phenomena of social
representations its current form.

The SR theory has come a long way from Moscovici’s seminal study on psychoanalysis in
the sixties as Jodelet (2008) explains in her examination of the development of the approach
over time. Its application to everyday phenomena like health and gender in the seventies
expanded it beyond its use as a way to understand the transformation of novel scientific
knowledge. Different traditions of experimental research gave birth to major schools of
thought in social representations such as the Aix en Provence School which developed the
central core theory and the School of Geneva which brought together both cognitive aspects
and social context in the analysis of representations. The theory emerged as a dominant
alternative in the eighties along with discursive psychology and witnessed a huge increase in
its popularity in the nineties with the collapse of the Soviet Empire and the need to replace
the pedantry of the linguistic turn and positivism with interpretative devices. Over the years, a diverse range of phenomena from everyday subjects like food (Mäkiniemi, Pirttilä-Backman and Pieri, 2011) to topical issues like climate change (Fischer et al., 2012) have been explored through its lens across continents from Asia to Europe and Latin America. The success of the theory in developing countries can be attributed to its flexibility in adapting research tools to the demands of local contexts and the voices of local people which can be seen in Wagner, Duveen & Verma’s (1999) study on madness in India.

5.2 Formation and Structure of Social Representations

While the aforementioned developments have enriched the SR theory, they have taken place largely in isolation, causing fragmentation (Jodelet, 2008). As Palmonari (2008) eloquently writes, SRT brings together several ideas but lacks a map of common coordinates. To avoid getting lost, it is important to understand what exactly social representations are. Moscovici (1973, p. xvii) defines them as

“a system of values, ideas and practices with a twofold function: first to establish an order which will enable individuals to orient themselves in their material and social world and master it; and secondly to enable communication to take place among members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history.”

Thus, SR’s enable communication and interaction, define group identity and membership, aid in the socialization of individuals by aligning them with the cultural traditions, norms and values of the group and most importantly, conventionalize objects and ideas, thus making the unfamiliar familiar (Moscovici, 1984). The latter is what motivates the formation of a representation, transforming the strange and threatening into that which is conventional and non-intimidating through the processes of anchoring and objectification. In addition to being a process of representing, representations are also products which have a structure comprising of a central core and peripheral elements as well as oppositional categories called themata. These tools of the SR theory will be explored in the subsections that follow.

5.2.1 Anchoring

Like mooring a stray boat to a buoy in the safe spaces of a harbour, anchoring takes into our system of categories an unfamiliar object which arouses our curiosity. The object is then
compared to the archetype of an existing category that we judge to be a suitable base on which to tie this new category. (Moscovici, 1984). In making this comparison, the object or phenomenon obtains the features of the category to which it is compared and is accommodated to fit within the paradigm of the category (Moscovici, 1984). Anchoring can be static, where the new object acquires characteristics of the existing category and becomes merely another element in it, as well as dynamic where the original category undergoes a transformation (Sakki, 2010). An example of static anchoring is visible in Jodelet’s (1991) study on mental illness where villagers compared mental patients placed in their midst to idiots, tramps and spastics, all of which were archetypes of the category “loonies” applied without any modification to the mental patients.

An inevitable part of the anchoring process is classification and naming according to Moscovici (1984) as objects which are unclassified and unnamed are experienced as intimidating, causing us to distance ourselves from them. The means by which we bridge this distance is by placing the object in a category and giving it a label that is familiar to us. As Moscovici elaborates, classification stipulates certain behaviours and principles that govern what is and is not acceptable in relation to all the individuals or objects included in the class. This act of classifying can never be neutral in Moscovici’s opinion as a value is attached to the object in the process, giving the object a position in a graded hierarchy where it is accepted when the value is positive and rejected when the value is negative.

Thus, the new object or phenomenon is related to a representation we already have and judged in terms of its similarities or differences from that representation, enabling us to evaluate the object. Two ways in which this occurs has been identified by Moscovici (1984): particularization and generalization. In the former, the differences between the object under inspection and the prototype are highlighted and as a result, the object is considered to deviate from the prototype, causing us to maintain distance to it. In the latter however, the similarities between the object and the prototype are emphasized, reducing distance. Thus, the main motivation for anchoring in Moscovici’s original theory was to make the unfamiliar familiar. However, Kalampalikis & Haas (2008) have introduced the idea of a second type of anchoring that works to keep the unfamiliar strange and distant in order to maintain distance and group boundaries. This would appear to build on Moscovici’s notion of particularization. To refer back to Jodelet’s (1991) study, the distancing of the villagers from the mentally ill patients living among them and the enactment of exclusionary practices to maintain clear boundaries of separation is a good illustration of this type of stigmatic anchoring where
mental illness is represented as threatening and the mentally ill as distinct others (Morant, 1995).

Accompanying the process of classification is the act of naming, however Moscovici (1984) is keen to reiterate that they are distinct processes though they occur simultaneously. Naming enables a person or object to be described by giving them certain characteristics or tendencies that differentiate from other persons or objects, thus making them objects of convention for those who utilize and share these common conventions. The example given by Moscovici is taken from his 1961 study on social representations of psychoanalysis where his participants used psychoanalytical words such as neurosis to legitimize tiredness and maladjustment. Although these states had been seen as the boundary between madness and sanity, they were not taken seriously in people’s everyday understandings of psychoanalysis, suggesting that the act of naming made them less threatening.

5.2.2 Objectification

In the process of objectification, the iconic qualities of an abstract idea are discovered and a concept comes to be paired with an image. This occurs in three phases according to Jodelet (2008): information selection, schematization and naturalization. Moscovici (1984) discusses how there is an immense stock of words circulating in society referring to specific objects. Yet not all the words that make up this stock can be linked to images either because there are not enough images readily available or the images they bring to mind are tabooed. The sources for objectification must be accessible to a group and are restricted by differences in social conditions, whether historical, cultural or socio-economic (Wagner et al., 1999). Thus, villagers in Jodelet’s study on mental illness in France objectified madness using tropes such as “decay” and “souring like milk” as these metaphors were close to the routines of their daily life (Jodelet, 1991).

Thus, societies appear to select those concepts to which it grants figurative powers, in accordance with its beliefs and pre-existing collection of images (Moscovici, 1984). Those concepts which amend themselves to selection are then linked with concrete nonverbal equivalents such as images, metaphors or symbols in the phase of schematization. Such images are then integrated into a pattern of figurative nucleus or a complex of images that visibly reproduces a complex of ideas. (Moscovici, 1984). Objectification can have different outcomes, resulting in some occasions in a concrete image and in others, a metaphorical image (Wagner, Elejabarrieta & Lahnsteiner, 1995). The rainbow coloured flag as a
figurative nucleus of LGBT pride is one example of a concrete image. An example of the latter is the metaphorical visualisation of revealing one’s homosexuality as “coming out of the closet.” This phrase has its origins in the creative combining of two distinct and unrelated ideas. “Coming out” was borrowed from the world of debutante balls that gave women a chance to come out and be officially introduced to society and “the closet” belonged to the metaphor of “skeletons in the closet” that involved secrecy and hiding (Chauncey, 1994).

Objectification can also take the form of personification where the idea or concept comes to be associated with a person or group of people. For instance, Ellen Denegeres was personified as an individual heroic figure for the LGBT movement in the USA due to her highly publicized coming out. (Malinowitz, 2015).

In the final phase of naturalization, the gap between the representation and the object that it represents is bridged, as a result of which the image is no longer an element of thought but becomes an element of reality (Moscovici, 1984). In this stage, the image is detached from its original context and acquires an independent existence. Thus, the image representing the object can no longer be separated from the object but rather comes to symbolize the object. Naturalization has been conventionally understood as belonging to the objectification process. However, Hakoköngäs & Sakki (2016) argue that it constitutes a process of its own in the formation of a social representation as a representation which has been naturalized becomes an instrument that can be used as an anchoring point for other objects and concepts.

Being embedded in history, culture and collective memory, naturalized representations come to have a prescriptive quality, assuming the status of taken for granted knowledge. Yet, humans still have the capacity to question such knowledge and when this capacity is acted upon, representations are negotiated and transformed (Howarth, 2006; Hakoköngäs & Sakki). This is what Moscovici (1984) means when he claims that we are a “thinking society”, to counter arguments that humans are solely under the sway of a dominant ideology or have minds like black boxes which simply receive and process information that conditions behaviour. The processes of both anchoring and objectification show how people, far from being passive receptors, actively produce and communicate their representations, with events, science and ideology simply providing food for thought (Moscovici, 1984).

Yet scholars disagree about which of the two processes are more active and the order in which they occur, with some suggesting objectification occurs first and others placing anchoring first (Philogène, 1999). Markova (2003) is of the opinion that objectification is the
more active process occurring when a phenomenon is problematized, compared to anchoring that supposedly occurs when the object or phenomenon is taken for granted. Billig (1988) goes as far as saying that objectification is the only relevant process as far as social representations are concerned. Anchoring in his opinion merely consists of an automatic and universal process of naming and classifying while objectification is a process particular to SR that converts the abstract to reality. However, this appears to be contradicted by Moscovici (1984) who believes that anchoring is so fundamental to perception that thinking cannot take place without it. He argues the purpose of classifying is not just to label distinct entities but to enable an interpretation of characteristics, an understanding of the motivation behind people’s behaviour and the formation of opinions, none of which are passive processes. In reality, the need to make such distinctions does not always arise as the processes are often interdependent and cannot be distinguished from the other which is particularly likely when anchoring categories provide the base for objectifications (Wagner, Elejabarrieta, & Lahnsteiner, 1995).

5.2.3 Core and peripheral elements

Most studies investigating core and peripheral elements adopt a more quantitative approach. This is because searching for the core requires as Abric (2001) identifies, an examination of the links between different elements of the representation and a study of the frequency of the appearance of terms. I would therefore like to emphasize that the core and peripheral elements of social representations will not explored in this thesis which assumes a qualitative approach.

However, I will nevertheless outline this addition to the social representations theory in brief. Structural approaches such as that of Abric (1993) developed under the Aix en Provence school. Structuralists are influenced by the idea of a figurative nucleus in objectification and assume that a representation is organized around an inner core that is stable over time. The core is thought to provide a location for the meaning of the representation. Changes in the core of the representation lead to changes in the entire representation. As Abric (2001) points out, two representations can be identical in content but drastically different in meaning if the organization of the representations and their cores are different. Thus, the peripheral elements of the representation surround the core and are more sensitive to changes in context in comparison to the core. (Abric, 2001). The core theory has come under critique for being
overly cognitive, a criticism also directed more generally at the SRT which will be discussed further in Section 4.4.

5.2.4 Themata

The idea of themata in social representations developed in the nineties under the dialogical perspective of Marková (2003) which holds that antinomies are crucial to human thinking, language and communication. Such oppositional categories are interdependent in the sense that one can be defined without reference to the other. For example, justice is defined in relation to injustice, life with regards to death and clean in relation to dirty. (Moloney, Williams & Blair, 2012). Tension is created by the interdependence of the opposing antinomy which gives rise to the figurative nucleus or symbolic image of the representation (Moscovici, 2001).

Like the relationship between anchoring and objectification, the link between the core and themata is not clear cut. Moloney & Walker (2000) claim that in each oppositional pair of a representation, the category that becomes dominant depends on its context in the core. A study on the social representations of women’s roles in Cameroon by Pirttillä-Backman, Mattsson, & Kassea (2006) is one of the few to highlight conceptual linkages between all the aforementioned tools of the SR theory showing how women’s roles were objectified in a core of women as wives and mothers and anchored in tradition, giving rise to a themata of tradition versus modernity. Liu (2004) found a connection between the processes of anchoring and objectification in contextualising themata. However, he cautions against linking the themata and core as he believes that they belong to different schools of thought. The approach of themata focuses on language, history and culture and the core theory remains largely cognitive (Liu, 2004).

Thus, themata are generative as they have the potential to structure emerging social knowledge (Moloney, Williams & Blair, 2012). Furthermore, since this knowledge is consensual as a result of being socially shared and shaped by social norms, themata are also normative (Moscovici, 2001). This is a particularly noteworthy point in relation to understanding social representations of homosexuality as norms tend to define what is moral/immoral, appropriate/inappropriate, healthy/perverted with regards to sexuality. However, as Marková (2003) observes, not all oppositional categories become themata but only the ones that are problematized and brought into public discourse. In analysing social
representations, locating themata may present a methodological challenge as they often organize themes implicitly and are subject to interpretation (Moscovici & Vignaux, 1994).

5.3 Social representations, groups and identity

From the above discussion on the tools of social representations, it is clear that social representations are not simply cognitive or individual processes. They are also social processes, embedded in the culture, history, traditions and social life of groups. (Sakki, Kassea, Vauhkonen & Pirttilä-Backman, 2010). Thus, the basic unit of analysis in a social representations approach is a natural group where the group is defined by those sharing a representation (Wagner et al., 1999).

Bauer & Gaskell (1999) describe the minimal social system enabling the process of representation as comprising of two subjects who relate to the same object through a common project. Their coordinated activity in the form of social practices produces consensual meanings. In particular, SRT explores how people in a group form and transform their everyday theories in interactions (Sakki et al., 2010). For Breakwell (1993), a social representation might be significant for a group not because they necessarily produce it or because it defines the boundary of their group but because it is directed at an object that is important to the group at a specific point in time. Three types of representations have been identified by Moscovici (1988) depending on the extent to which a representation is shared within society. Hegemonic representations are consensually shared by all members of a society and are uniform and imposing. Emancipated representations are created and shared by different subgroups leading to complementary versions of the same phenomena co-existing in different parts of society. Polemic representations are produced during times of conflict when groups actively disagree about a representation, leading to mutually exclusive representations held by each group (Moscovici, 1988). Subjects are not only aware of their own representations but also have knowledge of other groups’ representations. This is known as holomorphy and is argued by Wagner to be expected with polemic representations (Wagner, 1996).

As Sakki & Pirttilä-Backman (2009) argue, intergroup relations are affected by these different types of representations as they are play a role in constructing a group’s identity, norms and values. The relationship between social representations and other related psychological constructs is the subject of much speculation. However, in this thesis, it is the interdependence between social representations and social identity that I concern myself.
This is owing to the minority status of homosexuals in India and my use of different identity categories such as religion to understand my participants’ representations of homosexuality.

Through social representations, community identities are constructed and the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are drawn (Sakki et al., 2010). This suggests that prejudice is not merely an individual cognition but has a social and historical dimension. In a study on political socialization, Dougherty, Eisenhart & Welby (1992) combined the social representation theory with Tajfel’s (1981) social identity theory and found both social identities and representations played a crucial role in acquiring knowledge. They demonstrate how individuals belonging to different social groups identify and categorize themselves in terms of a specific group. This in turn leads to the evolution of a social identity which evokes a corresponding social representation containing the beliefs, values and ‘facts’ about the group, recognized by those identifying with the group. This social representation then directs the contents of what group members learn. The same principle was also found to apply in case of national identity where individuals categorize themselves as members of a particular country. In this case, the corresponding social representation that provides this national identity with beliefs, values and meanings is evoked.

Drawing on discursive approaches to identity where the self is seen as discursively produced in the course of communication, Duveen (1993) suggests that identities should be seen as positions in relation to social representations as people make sense of themselves and their experiences by drawing on and reconstructing social representations. This approach has been further elaborated on by Andreouli (2010) who suggests that social representations provide people with a variety of positions. However, the position taken up by them is defined by their relations with those they define as the “other.” Once a specific position is accepted, the person is limited by the conceptual repertoire of this position and the structure of rights and duties entailed by it. An understanding of power relations between groups is enabled by this perspective by showing how dominant representations function to legitimize claims for action and participation.

Additionally, approaching identity from a social representations framework allows the consideration of the role of communication, production and diffusion of social knowledge by the media. This is a facet that has conventionally been neglected in intergroup studies despite perceptions of the ‘other’ often being created and maintained through the media (Sakki & Pirttilä-Backman, 2009). Moscovici (2008) distinguished between three systems of
communication that are tied to different forms of groups and different identity positions. In Propagation attempts to transform a phenomenon into a whole that is compatible with the principles that unite the group by shaping attitudes. Propaganda is far more ideological by creating a dichotomy of what is right and wrong in relation to the object and giving the group the tools to produce stereotypes. The third system, diffusion, tries to inform opinions by presenting information in a way that allows the audience to draw its own interpretations and does not restrict itself to a particular group but to the general population (Moscovici, 2008). Such systems of communication have the power to give rise to different psychological phenomena such as stereotypes, attitudes and opinions (Howarth, 2011). Objectification is a key process in the production of stereotypes by symbolising certain groups in derogatory terms that cast them as animals or inferior to humans in some way (Sakki & Pirttilä-Backman, 2009).

The assumption that those who share the same representation come to be defined as a group translates to a practical difficulty when conducting research on social representations. One selects what they think is a group prior to knowing their social representations, thus, consensus is assumed before being confirmed. Potter & Litton (1985) sum up the dilemma well when they talk of the tension between social representations of groups as a topic of study and as a resource for the construction and interpretation of research findings. In much research, age and religion have been treated as markers for stratifying groups, however to presuppose that my participants’ representations of homosexuality will differ based on their age and religion will be to fall into the very trap Potter & Litton (1985) warn about. Hence, the aim of this research is to explore whether social representations of homosexuality could be found among an urban middle-class sample of different generations and religions without assuming consensus among my participants.

5.4 Critiquing the SR theory

The unique position between the individual and the social that has made the SRT so revolutionary by opposing the Cartesian dualism which still permeates Social Psychology to this day has proved to be something of a double-edged sword for the theory (Voelklein and Howarth, 2005). Its originator persevered in his attempt to communicate his complex and dynamic ideas. However, critics have also persisted in their attempts to place these ideas within fixed conceptual models, where it is inevitably lambasted for falling outside a paradigm it was never meant to fit within (Raudsepp, 2005). For instance, two of the main
criticisms of the SR theory is that it suffers from cognitive reductionism on one hand and theoretical ambiguity on the other (Potter & Litton, 1985; Billig, 1988; Jahoda, 1988). Billig (1988) constructively suggests remedying the former by changing the focus on categorization to particularization in the anchoring process. However, as Volklein & Howarth (2005) point out, what is overlooked by such critiques is that cognition in SRT is not individual oriented but socio-cultural and dynamic, thus SRT goes further in the integration of culture and cognition than any theory on social cognition. The same authors have also taken up the latter criticism, arguing that the SRT was left deliberately open ended by Moscovici as attempts to list an exhaustive definition of social representations shows a misconception of their dynamic, transformative nature.

The broadness of the social representation approach has also caused anxieties about the extent to which social representations are synonymous with and can be replaced by concepts like attitudes, ideology and discourse. Yet these different constructs have been advanced under different paradigms. Attitudes in their current use refer to views differentiating individuals while representations are shared, structural understandings of social life (Fraser, 1994). Additionally, as Moscovici & Marková, 1998 argue, ideology is considered a form of knowledge which can shape the generation of representations but is not a representation in itself. Similarly, though communications and language are crucial to the SRT, a representation cannot be reduced to a discourse. There are other forms through which social representations that can make themselves known such as social practices and behaviour. Thus, SRs are amenable to being analysed through mediums other than verbal data (Volklein & Howarth, 2005).

Other critiques concern the distinction between the reified and consensual universe which has been attacked for considering the activities of scientists as detached from the consensual universe when in reality, they are equally subject to social and historical influences (Volklein & Howarth, 2005). According to Mckinlay & Potter (1987), this prevents a consideration of the researcher’s influence in the research and has made the study of representations one sided by looking at the transformation of knowledge from reified to consensual rather than the other way around. Räty & Snellman (1992) suggest taking a critical stance to the idea of separate universes by questioning how the power structure manifests in the creation and transformation of knowledge. This has been taken up by Howarth (2011) who claims that the difference between reified and consensual universes should be studied in terms of a reification process that positions certain representations as expert knowledge. Viewing the
two universes as interacting and co-existing is suggested by Foster (2003) who uses the idea of cognitive polyphasia to back her opinion is another way of overcoming these issues.

The dilemma of how to define a group and consensuality is harder to resolve as identifying representations through groups and assuming groups define representations runs the risk of circularity (Räty and Snellman, 1992). As already mentioned in the previous section, the lack of an empirical criteria for consensuality means that consensus is presupposed in empirical analysis, rather than allowed to emerge through analysis (Räty and Snellman, 1992). Identifying three types of representations that vary in the degree to which they are shared across groups was one way in which Moscovici (1988) tried to respond to this critique and develop the theory.

Thus, to conclude, while some of these critiques on the SRT are misunderstandings caused in part due to a lack of a translation of Moscovici’s original ideas into English, contributing to its questionable reception in the Anglo-Saxon world (Duveen, 2001), some of the objections raised have been and remain crucial for the theory’s development. To summarise Moscovici, a theory is relevant only to the extent it stimulates a practice of discovery, facing social problems and providing meaning to our lives (Moscovici, 1997 as cited in Phoenix, Howarth and Philogène, 2017). Despite its challengers, the SRT remains highly relevant by facilitating these aims and continuing to grow and advance.
India is not, as people keep calling it, an underdeveloped country, but rather, in the context of its history and cultural heritage, a highly developed one in an advanced state of decay. 

Shashi Tharoor (2005, p. 27)

6. RESEARCH AIMS

Previous literature has given us a historical understanding of homosexuality across different periods. This is complemented by empirical research which has provided us with a fuller perspective on homosexuality by considering public opinion, generation and gender of participants. In addition, studies have also looked at gender roles in homosexual relationships as well as perceptions of homosexuality in relation to gender expectations, the prominence of people’s associations of homosexuality with AIDS and the meanings they give to their national identity and religious identity to include or exclude homosexuals from these categories. However, such themes have been explored in a one-dimensional way. We need more research that deals with the values, ideas and beliefs of people of different generations and religions with regards to homosexuality. I believe this is a subject of importance for two main reasons, if we hope to gain an in depth understanding of how people in India think about homosexuality.

The first reason relates to the religious diversity of India. Although a secular country on paper, being a multi faith nation with Hinduism being the dominant religion along with several other religious minorities and denominations means that politics in India is influenced by religious interests. From my historical review of homosexuality in India, it was evident that each historical period was linked almost inextricably with the influence of a particular religion and associated cultural practices. Of the many religions that exist in India, the three major ones are Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Currently, Hindus make up majority of the country’s population at 79.8 percent while Muslims are the largest minority at 14.2 percent, followed by Christians at 2.3 percent (Census of India, 2011). In the research context—Bangalore, religion is divided on similar lines to the national composition with Hindus accounting for 79 percent of the population, Muslims for 13 percent and Christians for 6 percent (Bangalore City Census, 2011).

Hinduism’s status as the majority religion and the current Hindu right wing nationalism has resulted in attempts to make being a Hindu synonymous with being an Indian and to blot out other “polluting” religious influences. Sexuality is a central stage on which these majority-
minority relations play out. Therefore, a study of homosexuality would be lacking without considering how the religious identities of participants belonging to Hinduism, Islam and Christianity intersect with their positions on sexuality.

The second reason arises from the need to discuss sex/gender structures in relation to larger socio-political ones. This is of utmost importance to Altman (2001) who argues that we cannot discuss the construction of sexual identity independent of other shifts in social and economic spheres. As he discusses, great changes have occurred in familial and personal relations and notions of self with economic growth, urbanization, consumerism, social mobility and improving telecommunications. India has experienced rapid economic growth and urbanization in the twentieth century with Bangalore at the helm of such developments as the second fastest growing major metropolis in India (Krishnakumari, 2008). Such growth has been accompanied by the dual processes of “Westernization” and “modernisation” (Jayaswal & Saha, 2014). In the former, as a country develops and interacts with the global economy, changes occur in cultures, practices and religions. The latter is characterized by the adoption of new forms of technology, communications and industries. Bangalore provides the perfect site to understand the influences of Westernization and modernization in relation to views on homosexuality. This is likely to be highlighted by studying an inter-generational sample from the urban middle class as it is reasonable to expect that they would be exposed to such forms of technology, communication and Western media sources (such as news, television shows and movies), with such exposure differing by generation.

Thus, as Dasgupta (2011) argues, the legacy of colonialism, uneven economic development and religious diversity have contributed particularities to narratives of homosexuality in India. Understanding these particularities that are rooted in the subjectivity’s entanglement with the broader social and material field in India is necessary and have not been adequately addressed by previous studies. However, this requires using a line of inquiry that is amenable to exploring such complexities. Traditional lines of social psychological enquiry have failed to fully engage with different intersections. Yet, social psychological theories do have the potential to grapple with these issues. The social representations approach is particularly conducive to this as there is a long history of its application in non-Western contexts. In such studies, social representations researchers have been able to shed light on the culture, beliefs and values of people in these contexts that emerge from alternative knowledge systems. This turn forms a large part of how individuals and communities interpret their existence and determine their behaviour. (Kessi & Kigua, 2015). The social representation theory also
provides the opportunity of exploring the manner in which scientific theories of homosexuality manifest in common sense representations and observing the dynamic flow of information.

Thus, the aim of this research is to explore the social representation of homosexuality in India in order to answer the following research questions:

RQ1) How is homosexuality represented by the urban middle class in Bangalore?

RQ2) How does the generation of participants appear in their representations of homosexuality?

RQ3) How does the religion of participants appear in their representations of homosexuality?

RQ4) What are the functions of social representations of homosexuality in terms of identities?

RQ5) How do scientific theories of homosexuality appear in the common-sense representations of homosexuality among my participants?
7. METHODOLOGY

When taking a course on reflexive interviewing in 2016, our instructor, Michael Egerer started by saying something to the effect of, “If you are so square minded to be able to describe your method, should you be doing qualitative research?” This was a rhetorical question as he went on to discuss how intuition and subjectivity are not excuses for failing to describe how you conducted your research. In this chapter, I attempt to make transparent all my methodological choices starting from my epistemology to my final data analysis.

7.1 Epistemology

“Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world through interpretive practices that turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self…” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.3). I felt a qualitative approach was best suited to answering the research questions I laid out in the previous chapter as identifying anchors, objectifications and themata of social representations of homosexuality would require an in-depth conversation with my participants to be able to locate the representations in their talk. I subscribe to a social constructionist paradigm which has been defined by Gergen (1985, p. 265) as, “a perspective which believes that a great deal of human life exists as it does due to social and interpersonal factors.” This is differentiated from social constructivism by Guterman (2006) who argues that while both subscribe to a subjectivist view of knowledge, constructivism places emphasis on individuals’ biological and cognitive processes whereas constructionism puts knowledge in the domain of social interchange.

The social representation theory has been described by Wagner both as a constructivist approach (1998) as well as a constructionist approach (1996). Since Moscovici was influenced by both Durkheim and Piaget, the influence of both constructionism and constructivism is perhaps not so surprising and indeed both perspectives could well be applied given the focus of one’s research. However, as mine emphasizes social structures more than cognition, I find constructionism a better fit for this particular study.

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4 Durkheim is commonly associated with positivism, however his work has been argued by Weinberg (2014) to have had an influence on social constructionist research, particularly his later writings such as “The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (1954) and Primitive Classification (1963).
7.2 Data collection and participants

To collect my data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of eighteen people coming from six families representing the major religions of Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Semi-structured interviews are considered active interactions between researcher and participant through the flow of context specific dialogue (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). This method of data collection is in line with my epistemology and also capable of generating the kind of rich data I need to answer my research questions. The use of a topic guide enabled me to focus on my topic of interest without necessarily adhering to a particular order of questions and also giving participants some flexibility.

Although focus group interviews might have been a quicker tool to generate discussion with each family and highlight intergenerational differences, individual semi-structured interviews with each participant were deemed a more appropriate method owing to the sensitive nature of the topic. Homosexuality is not a subject many people in India feel comfortable discussing, particularly with their children and grandchildren so individual interviews provided the kind of privacy conducive to making my participants feel comfortable with opening up about the subject. In addition, my research design of interviewing people of different generations individually was also capable of capturing intergenerational differences by seeing if the ways in which my participants talked about homosexuality differed across generations.

Two families were chosen to represent each of these three religions, of which one member from the youngest generation, one of their parents and one of their grandparents participated in individual interviews. As homosexuality is a sensitive subject in India, I ensured that my participants from the youngest generation were over 18. Due to the very specific criteria for participants that I had, that is, that they had to be of a particular religion and have a living parent and grandparent who would also participate in the interviews, I had to make use of personal contacts in recruiting the same. This was accomplished through the use of a purposive sampling strategy in my hometown, Bangalore, a South Indian city which has transformed over the last two decades from a small city of retirees to the IT capital of India. I restricted my study to the urban middle class as firstly this is a setting I have access to, secondly, they are articulate in English, the language I too am fluent in which enabled conversation to flow between us and thirdly, the middle class are more exposed to the influences of modernization. However, the extent to which different generations are exposed
to such influences is likely to differ, therefore in relation to my research questions, I hope to find out if and how the generation of participants appears in their representations of homosexuality.

Potential participants were contacted by phone and interviews were set up in this manner. Only three of the participants interviewed were men, comprising one of the Muslim families, while all the others were women. This was not intentional, it would have been preferable to have a more balanced gender distribution but unfortunately, my own criteria for my subjects limited my participants - many of the younger generation contacts representing the religions I wanted to include did not have a grandparent alive. Further, perhaps what appeared an issue of practicality – that is, more women were reachable by phone and available to do the interview compared to their husbands or sons who were always out of the house reflects broader societal patterns of men working and being out of the home for long hours while women in their expected role of mothers and homemakers spend a large part of their time at home. The process of recruiting participants, arranging interviews and conducting them was spread out over a period of 5 weeks from the end of October 2016 to the first week of December, 2016. I received a travel grant from the Faculty of Social Sciences, enabling me to travel to India to conduct my research during this time period.

More detailed information about the participants and my relationship to them is disclosed in Appendix 1. All my participants were either distant relatives or friends of my parents so even if they were not known to me personally prior to the interview as was the case with some of my parents’ friends, they were familiar with my family. Blichfeldt & Heldbjerg (2011) discuss how it is surprising that more qualitative research does not make use of acquaintance interviews as the goal is not to capture an objective reality but socially constructed interaction. They argue that acquaintance interviews enable the development of trust and rapport, the importance of which has been emphasized by many qualitative researchers. However, they also highlight some limitations of acquaintance interviews, namely that one cannot tap into their personal networks for knowledge on very specific topics and in addition, the need to maintain face in front of a known person might prevent certain kinds of information from being disclosed. The first limitation was not a concern in this case but prior to my interviews, I did fear that the second limitation could restrict the kind of conversations I was able to have. Having completed the interviews, I admit to being surprised at the extent to which my participants opened up. Many of my participants from the middle generation also expressed shock that their parents were able to discuss a subject with me that they had
never even discussed with their own children. I offer two reasons for this: firstly, the purpose of the interviews for research lent legitimacy to an otherwise tabooed subject that I would have been unable to have a casual conversation about without such a pretext for a study. Secondly, being an insider in the sense of firstly being Indian myself and secondly knowing them personally proved an advantage in getting access to a setting that might have otherwise been denied to me, even with the credibility of a researcher.

7.3 Interview questions and stimuli

I made use of two stimuli items in the course of my interviews: pictures that showed different types of families and the advertisement featuring a lesbian couple that was mentioned in my second chapter. These are provided as appendices. I do not have a specific research question related to these stimuli but rather used them as tools to encourage people to talk about homosexuality. I constructed my topic guide based on some of the literature I had read but made sure that the questions were open-ended to avoid forcing pre-conceived categories on my participants.

To ease participants gently into the more sensitive subjects of the interview related to sexuality, sexual practices and religion, I chose to begin every interview with very general questions pertaining to their ideas of family structure and composition. Next, I introduced the pictures of different types of families, showing a two-parent husband-wife-two child family, a single mom parented family, a lesbian couple parented family and a gay couple parented family. Participants were asked to describe and comment on what they saw in the pictures and whether they thought there was an ideal type of family out of these different types. This provided a good way of bringing in questions about their thoughts on same sex parented families, giving them a hypothetical situation to think about how they would react if their child came out as gay, whether they saw homosexual parents as equal to heterosexual ones and their own knowledge on homosexuality and homosexuals. By this point, the proverbial ice had been broken, rapport established and participants were opening up, making it possible to ask questions about their views on sex and different sexual practices and their thoughts on their religion’s stance on sexuality and how they felt this influenced their own standings. Masculine and feminine roles were then discussed to understand how they thought of homosexuality in relation to these gender expectations which then provided a good chance to bring in the video of the advertisement. I requested my participants’ permission prior to showing them the video. The advertisement was not the last item in my interview schedule,
however when asked if I could show them the ad, three of them told me that they were very constrained for time and asked if I still had a lot of questions for them. As I had an additional section of questions after the ad, these three participants said that they would prefer to skip the advertisement and go straight to the last set of questions. One of my participants, the Muslim grandfather declined watching the advertisement as he felt that it was propaganda that he did not want to expose himself to.

The final section consisted of questions related to their awareness of the legal status of homosexuality, their thoughts on it being criminalized, the historical antecedents of the legislation and questions related to cultural artefacts like the Kama Sutra and the temples at Khajuraho. This was in order to understand how they remembered and thought about such artefacts that provide evidence of a tolerant and sexually liberated India as opposed to the repressive society that exists today. Follow up questions, probes and prompts were also asked to clarify responses of participants. Refer to appendix 2 for the full topic guide I used during my interviews.

Potter & Hepburn (2005) emphasize how preliminary fieldwork can help researchers gauge cultural and linguistic norms of the community and thus perfect the art of asking questions in ways that can be understood by participants. This enables to avoid flooding the interview with social science categories. Therefore, I piloted my topic guide on one of the Christian families to test my questions to see if they are able to elicit information and the approximate time taken to conduct the interview. As the pilot interviews were able to obtain the kind of data I was hoping for, I treated these interviews as data too and proceeded with interviewing the remaining five families using the same topic guide, adding some questions on my participants’ sources of information about homosexuality as recommended by my supervisor and as this was also a topic that had come up in some of my earlier interviews. The average time of each interview was 45 minutes with the longest one extending to an hour and 10 minutes and the shortest to 26 minutes.

7.4 Ethical considerations

Ethical principles should be adhered to by recognizing participants’ vulnerability and protecting their interests through informed consent, non-deception, confidentiality and the absence of psychological or physical harm (Peled & Leichtentritt, 2002). This was ensured by having an information sheet explaining what my research was about quite explicitly. I also had a consent sheet that highlighted what they were agreeing to by participating in the
research. The sheet also informed them that the interview would be taped but that its confidentiality would be strictly maintained, with the tapes being erased after the transcription phase. Both the information and consent sheet are attached as appendices.

While transcribing, I maintained the anonymity of each participant and stored the transcribed interviews in a file on my personal computer accessible only to me. Although sensitive topics like sexuality and religion were discussed, the use of semi structured interviews allowed questions to be framed and asked delicately and participants were informed at the beginning that they were free to skip questions or withdraw if necessary so I did not anticipate any psychological or physical harm arising as a consequence of my research.

After doing interviews with the middle and younger generation of two Muslim families I had initially contacted, the mother of one of the families felt that her mother would be uncomfortable with the subject while for the other, I started interviewing the grandmother who then dropped out of the study after the first two questions. I immediately stopped proceedings with these families. As the first two questions I asked that particular grandmother were related to the family in general rather than homosexuality in particular, I do not feel she would have been traumatized in any way by our brief conversation. I was able to then recruit two other Muslim families, one of which showed no reluctance to speak about the topic through all three generations but not so with the other.

In the latter, the Muslim grandfather took charge of the interview and diverted from many of the questions. Initially, it was his wife who was supposed to be a participant. I had already interviewed her son and grandson who invited me over to talk to her as well so I assumed that she had some idea about the topic of discussion. However, when I briefed her myself, she expressed discomfort with the idea of talking about homosexuality, which she felt was forbidden by her religion to even think about, let alone talk about. Therefore, her husband volunteered to participate instead, showing the double standard that existed in their household regarding this subject. His deviation from my topic guide does not seem to be owing to harm experienced by him but rather, due to my presence as a young girl discussing an issue his own wife was unwilling to talk about. Therefore, I feel secure in making the claim that among the people who did participate, no harm resulted, as all my participants seemed very comfortable answering all my questions, with the exception of the Muslim grandfather for reasons I have mentioned. Indeed, even after I told them that I had got all the material I needed so we could stop the interview, many of them wanted to continue the discussion. In
addition, to tackle the power imbalances that can arise during interviews, I let my participants pick the place of the interview and the place chosen was their own household with the exception of the Muslim father and son who chose their office as the site for our interviews. Meeting in spaces decided by them helped to shift some of the power away from me as it was in a place familiar and comfortable to them.

7.5 Analysis of material

The interviews were transcribed from the recording device onto computer files separated for each religion, named CYPG, HYPG and MYPG for Christian, Hindu and Muslim youth, parents and grandparents respectively. By verbatim I mean that my transcripts included verbal as well as nonverbal data such as coughs, laughs and pauses. Taylor (2010) argues for the use of codes rather than pseudonyms for each participant in order to give the researcher some distance from the data while analysing it. I feel like this is an attempt to strive for an objectivity that does not exist in qualitative research. However, I did find the need to use codes rather than pseudonyms when undertaking my analysis in order to have a way to differentiate between the generations and religions. Example of codes includes CD1 and CD2 for the two Christian daughters I interviewed, MM and MF for the Muslim mother and father and HGM1 and HGM2 for the two Hindu grandmothers. The average time spent on transcription was 3-4 hours per interview. After transcribing each interview fully, a total of 205 pages was compiled for analysis. As I also transcribed fillers such as laughing and pauses, describing the amount of material I have in terms of words would be an overestimation.

To deconstruct my interview data into meaningful chunks and codes, I used thematic analysis. As it is not tied to any pre-existing theoretical framework, thematic analysis provides flexibility, can be used both inductively or deductively and enables a rich and complex account of data. I was guided by Braun & Clarke’s (2006) stages of conducting thematic analysis. As I collected and transcribed my data myself, I already had some prior knowledge of my data and some analytic thoughts before coding. Nevertheless, my first step was to continue to familiarise myself with the data by reading and re-reading it several times and jotting down notes and observations I made during this process. After I familiarised myself with the data, I started to code each interview line by line. I did not use a computer programme to assist with coding but rather, coded all my interviews manually. The initial codes I used during this stage were largely semantic or descriptive. I then printed out all the
codes, cut them out and placed codes that were similar in content and meaning into distinct piles. During this process, codes were merged together and collapsed, resulting in 28 main codes and 67 sub-codes at which stage, my coding progressed from more semantic or surface level meanings to deeper latent meanings.

Braun & Clarke (2006) warn of the danger of losing the context of your data when coding. Therefore, at the suggestion of my supervisors, I made summaries of each interview as they had done in their research on trust (Pirttilä-Backman, Menard, Verma and Kassea, 2017) to preserve meaningful relations between my codes. Familiarisation with literature sensitised me to some of the developments that were taking place in the data, nevertheless this stage remained data rather than theory driven. I was able to identify themes and sub-themes. After returning to my data and reviewing my codes, themes and sub-themes, I made a few amendments to them. I present an example of how my coding evolved below:

Extract: “It is if a guy was gay, well there are different signs. He would be more on the feminine side. His mannerisms, the way he would dress. He wouldn’t be wearing a skirt or whatever but you know, he would be extra prim and proper”

Analysis
Effeminate gays (sub-code) > Stereotypes about homosexuals (code) > Belief in innate qualities about homosexuals (sub-theme) > Nature (theme)

The tools of the social representation theory, namely anchoring, objectification and themata led the next phase of analysis. I was open to considering that none of these might be present at all, however this was not the case. Using my codes as guidelines, I returned to my data and looked specifically at how my participants conceived of homosexuality. This allowed me to pick up objectifications which were visible in speech through metaphors as well as non-symbolic language. Examples of objectifications are given below.

Extract: “The point I would try to make is that it is an unhealthy construction on the face of it.”
Objectification: Illness

Extract: “It’s like with liquor, with drugs, with using chemicals so then they want to say, let me try this, let me try that and see what’s working for me and it can work detrimentally also. So the dosage needs to be managed I would say”
Objectification: Vice
Although objectifications are present in speech, anchors and themata may not be so easily visible as they are historically and culturally embedded (Pirttilä-Backman et al., 2017). Hence, they require interpretation that goes beyond the data and my position as an Indian with some knowledge of the local context, having grown up in it proved advantageous here. In addition to thoroughly studying the objectifications I had listed, sub-themes, codes and sub-codes, the extensive literature research I had undertaken also helped when making such interpretations. For instance, objectifications of homosexuality as illness and imbalance could be seen to be anchored in ideas about heterosexuality as the cure for the illness and the epitome of balance was perceived to be heterosexuality.

It was during this stage that it became apparent that the anchors I had identified differed for each theme. Thus, what I had thought were themes appeared to be representations in themselves with unique anchors and objectifications. While this had not been something I had anticipated, it is not surprising given the diversity of the cultural context I was working within, the contradictory history of homosexuality in India and legal changes in the status of homosexuality. The themata proved easier to identify than I had thought as they were often present in my participants’ language.

I then went back to my raw data and re-read it to evaluate the soundness of my interpretations which led to some changes. In the final phase, I collected all the themes, sub-themes, codes, sub-codes, anchors, objectifications and themata together and used this as an outline to write my analytical chapters, moving back and forth between coded and raw data when doing so. My first idea had been to present representations of homosexuality according to the frame of generation and religion, however all three representations I identified overlapped across generation and religion, differing only in subtle and nuanced ways for each one. Therefore, I present each representation as a chapter owing to their complex sub-themes which could get lost if the results were merged into a single chapter.
Michael Foucault (1989, p. 268)

“8. REPRESENTING HOMOSEXUALITY AS NATURE

In 2012, Mackelmore released a song called Same Love that was to become an anthem for gay pride. As the singer crooned, “And I can't change, even if I tried, even if I wanted to” the message was clear: homosexuality is innate, cannot be changed and should be accepted. That homosexuality is innate was an idea subscribed to by many of my participants, yet somewhat contradictorily, a few of them still thought that it was something that could be changed and that it should not be accepted.

This unacceptance particularly seemed to concern same-sex couples’ ability to be good parents and stemmed from conceptions of gender roles. Men and women are thought to have distinct, biological roles corresponding to their anatomy and such roles were thought to be essential to maintain the circle of life. This shaped understandings of homosexuality which were positioned in relation to heterosexuality. Homosexuals were thought to be very different from heterosexuals in terms of biological functioning. Participants who emphasized the reproductive aspect of copulation were unable to concede that homosexual relationships could fulfil the functions that relationships are thought to serve. However, those that felt that the function of sexual intercourse was intimacy and pleasure as opposed to procreation and the purpose of a relationship was love and care were able to acknowledge that homosexual relationships would be capable of fulfilling such things.

Mirrored in my participants representations of homosexuality as nature are strong echoes of the biological model of homosexuality, discussed in Chapter 3. These ideas can be grouped into three main sub-themes: belief in innate qualities of homosexuals, importance of biological gender roles and functions of sex. I will elaborate on each of these below, providing excerpts from my data.

8.1 Belief in innate qualities of homosexuals

To start this sub-theme, I draw on a quote from J Hamilton, author of Zen Mind, Zen Horse, who attributes his love of horses to a genetic quirk that divides those who love horses from those who do not (Hamilton, 2011). By a similar token, my participants presume
homosexuals to be unique by virtue of a similar genetic quirk that pre-disposes them to love those of the same sex in the way that a horse lover loves horses. In other words, homosexuals are thought to be born this way as Extract 1 and 2 demonstrate.

Extract 1

I- So how do you think someone comes to be gay?

CM1- See, being gay or being a lesbian does not really happen, it is basically in your DNA, yeah? So whatever people say about it and whatever people research about it, I don’t think that you can do jack about it because if it is in you, it is in you. It is just there.

In Extract 1, the Christian mother dismisses the role of circumstances and agency in causing homosexuality. Rather, homosexuality is considered to be inherent and unavoidable. Participants from both the younger, middle and older generations subscribed to this essentialist idea of homosexuality. While participants of the younger generation who thought homosexuality is innate felt that it should be accepted as a result, those from the middle and older generation who believed in the inherence of homosexuality were not always inclined to be more sympathetic to homosexuals. In a similar manner to a genetic mutation, visible markers of homosexuality are thought to manifest during a child’s formative years.

Extract 2

I- So what would your reaction be if your child came out as homosexual?

MG1- Well, certain factors show you have a tendency towards that. Then you might be able to accept it easier if you notice early on and don’t wear blinkers.

Thus, in the second extract, the Muslim grandmother talks about it being easier to accept homosexuality when parents watch out for pre-dispositions to homosexuality in their children during early childhood so that they can prepare themselves for the possibility of their child eventually coming out as gay. This is echoed by some other participants from the older and middle generation who mention needing to look out for the signs of homosexuality in children as they are growing up, which seems to paint an image of homosexuality as an illness, whose symptoms are observable from an early age.

Thirty-two years prior to Mackelmore’s song about homosexuality being innate, Cyndi Laudi had released True Colours after the death of her gay friend from AIDS. With lyrics, “Your true colours, true colours are beautiful like a rainbow”, this ballad evokes the idea of a
homosexual personality that should be admired. A similar view was prevalent among some of my participants, both young and old. Homosexuals are thought to possess certain innate traits that makes them drawn to certain subjects, occupations and have a certain image. This is highlighted in my exchange with the Muslim daughter that I interviewed.

Extract 3

I- And you said you have friends who are homosexual. Have they come out openly to you or is it just something that you have been able to identify?

MD- My old high school friend turned out to be gay. When we were in school, he was a sweet, really intelligent kid who took high level English and history with us and took drama. I mean, we should have known! And I always thought, “dude, you are such an interesting guy! But okay um and your handwriting is really good and your shirt is always impeccably like you know all proper.

In the above extract, MD is talking about her high-school friend who she describes as taking subjects typically considered feminine in an Indian context like English, history and drama and having qualities that women are typically thought to possess such as a beautiful handwriting and attention to personal appearance. Her comment that “we really should have known” suggests that it is not typical for boys to take these subjects or have such qualities and since her friend did, he was displaying behaviour that is more typical of women and this caused her to characterise him as gay. Implicit here is the idea that gay men are effeminate. A similar idea is revealed in my interview with her mother, presented in Extract 4.

Extract 4

I- Do you think that there are any differences between homosexuals and heterosexuals?

MM- You’d never find a homosexual who’s like an engineer or a software engineer or a mathematician, you’d find him in one of these offbeat, he’d be great at photography, great in theatre and cinema. You know, you have a lot of very talented people and sometimes you know, you can just tell from the way they dress and the way they gesture, the way they talk, they’re more expressive. A little bit of the feminine gene comes through in that so you can kind of tell that he’s a little different.

Like MD, MM also thinks that there is an innate difference between homosexuals and heterosexuals that manifests in the mannerisms of homosexuals and their personalities. She
discusses this explicitly in relation to male homosexuality, with gays considered to possess
more feminine qualities which affects their personal style and way of expressing themselves.
The creative and expressive qualities that homosexuals are thought to have makes them
pursue careers in artistic fields. Just as gays are thought to have certain feminine traits,
lesbians are thought to possess more masculine traits. The advertisement showing a lesbian
couple was used by some participants to confirm their stereotypes about homosexuals, where
they talked about how one of the women was more feminine and the other more masculine.
Others used it to challenge such a heteronormative portrayal of homosexuality. With
reference to extract 5, HGM2 talks about how she was able to identify her daughter’s
classmate as a homosexual by the strong presence of masculine qualities and riding a
motorcycle which in India is a typically masculine pursuit.

**Extract 5**

*I- You mentioned that you knew someone in Bombay who was homosexual and had a kid. How did you know that this person was homosexual? Was it something they were open about?*

_HGM2- Yeah, the girl, I mean the person, I would call her not my close friend but a friend’s daughter but she had a very masculine way about her. She used to come to college on a motorbike when my daughter was studying and she was a very nice person, jolly, but she had very marked male tendencies._

Thus extracts 3, 4 and 5 reveal how my participants thought of homosexuality as a state that
could be identified from definitive male characteristics in a female and vice versa. It is worth
mentioning that some of the stereotypes of homosexuals while acknowledged as existing
were challenged, particularly by participants from the younger generation which points to
social change, something that will be discussed in detail under the representation of culture in
Chapter 10. Nonetheless, these stereotypes about homosexuals were drawn on by a number of
my participants and this points to their ideas about gender roles and their understanding of
heterosexuality which will be discussed in the sub-theme that follows.

**8.2 Importance of biological gender roles**

When the Muslim father I interviewed was provided with pictures of different families and
asked to comment on the members of each family, he interpreted the picture of the lesbian
couple with their children as a husband and wife with two children. He further went to
mention that he saw heterosexual families as ideal because they seemed complete to him.
This has a number of implications, firstly that heterosexuality is the frame of reference that many of my participants from all generations oriented towards when viewing homosexuality. Secondly, that heterosexuality is perceived as ideal and homosexuals as lacking, a view expressed mainly by participants of the middle and older generation. This idea of heterosexuality being the measuring stick for making comparisons and judging homosexuality stems from their perceptions of biologically determined gender roles. The following extract below highlights this well.

**Extract 6**

MGF- “God has created us as man and woman. Our sex is determined in the womb of the mother by God and that’s how we’re supposed to discharge our responsibilities in the sex we’re born in...”

In extract 6, after I had explained what my research was about and obtained consent for his participation, MGF, without waiting for me to ask a question, started talking about homosexuality and the quote above is the first line he uttered. For him, biological roles of men and women are necessary to maintain God’s natural order of creation. When talking about same sex couples adopting, he went on to say that it would be immoral to give a baby to someone of the same sex as they would be raised in the most unnatural way possible. Other participants of the older generation and one of the Christian mothers of the middle generation also described homosexuality as unnatural.

**Extract 7**

I- What would make homosexuality less than perfect in your opinion?

CM2- I reiterate what I said about paternal and maternal roles. Both those influences I feel make up a complete family. So if there is two men or two women, so then, you know, it is an overdose of one kind, I mean, it’s a little unnatural. Because a man’s way of thinking, I mean a father and a mother are very different right?

Thus, similar ideas are expressed that men and women have distinct biological roles in both extracts 6 and 7 which are taken from my interviews with the Muslim grandfather and one of the Christian mothers respectively. For CM2 in extract 7, this makes it difficult for same sex parents to meet the needs of their children as she feels that the unique natural roles that men and women have mean that they complement each other in meeting different sets of needs for their children. Thus, children of same sex parents are seen to be lacking and deprived. CM2
uses the metaphor of “an overdose” to suggest that having two fathers or two mothers would create an imbalance.

The idea of balance also came up when talking to my participants about masculinity and femininity. Most of them felt that masculinity and femininity were innate qualities exemplified by strength and domination in men and softness and delicacy in women. Such ideas were more prevalent in the older and middle generation than the younger generation. A heterosexual relationship was thus perceived to have the perfect balance of masculinity and femininity. Thus, when I asked my participants whether they saw homosexuality as going against their ideas of masculinity and femininity, it was surprising that many of them saw it as violating biological roles of men and women but not masculinity and femininity. This seemed to be because they felt this balance is part of a natural order of all relationships and therefore, it displays itself even with homosexual couples.

**Extract 8**

*I* - Do you think that homosexuality goes against what you see as typically masculine and feminine?

**HGM1** - I don’t know. Say for example with a heterosexual couple, there’s a soft side and there’s a strong side. In a homosexual couple also, there seems to be a strong side. A man who could be as they call the bull and the other one is the soft side.

Thus, it is evident from extract 8 that HGM1 sees one person in a homosexual relationship taking on the feminine role and the other assuming the masculine one. However, while my participants who expressed this idea of a balance see it as something that is naturally present in all relationships, I interpret this finding as part of heteronormativity. This is because it appears that they look for this balance which they see as characteristic to a heterosexual relationship in a homosexual one. Butler (1990) discusses how homosexuality is seen as a poor copy of heterosexuality and this seems to be how my participants perceive it. Thus, having heterosexuality as the frame of reference, they perceive the balance of a heterosexual relationship to be replicated in a homosexual relationship.

Somewhat counterintuitively, quite a few of my participants from all generations were unaware of the term heterosexuality, even though they talked about it in other ways such as “man-woman pairing” and “regular families.” When I asked them the question of whether homosexuals and heterosexuals were similar, they often confused heterosexuals with
bisexuals. I often had to clarify that heterosexuality referred to the idea of the “normal man-woman relationship” that they had been talking about just a minute prior to that question. This further points to heterosexuality assuming the status of natural, taken for granted knowledge whose status is so cemented that the images it invokes of a man-woman dualism have replaced the actual term by which it is known.

Although families parented by a same sex couple were viewed as incomplete in some ways, those parented by lesbians were thought to function better than those headed by a gay couple. This again was justified on the grounds of differing biological impulses of men and women. In particular, women are thought to have a natural maternal instinct that was considered so essential for children’s well-being that they would not be lacking considerably in the absence of a man.

Extract 9

I- Do you think a same sex couple should be able to adopt children?

CG1- No, because when the children grow up, they would question them. Because a man cannot make up for the love of a child, what a mother can do.

I- So would it be okay for a lesbian couple?

CG1- Yes, if it is their own child because they will have that connection. Also for a woman, she will probably accept that if one partner is gone, she will not mind being alone. But a homosexual man may not and he will go for another.

As seen in extract 9, there is the idea of men having an innate tendency to be promiscuous, thus a gay couple would lack the stabilising influence of a woman and be unable to settle down which could affect the stability of a child’s growing environment. Women on the other hand are assumed to possess a natural loyalty that ties them to one partner. Even in the absence of a partner, CG1 feels that a woman would not have the desire to seek a new relationship, unlike a man. In addition, CG1 thinks that a mother is able to develop a special bond with her children and as a result of this, lesbians would be able to fulfil the demands of parenting. However, the bond between a mother and her infant is presumed to exist only if the child is born of either of the lesbian parents and not in the case of an adopted child. By the same token, she should not have approved of adoptions in general if she is of the opinion that mothers are only able to connect with babies they produce themselves. Yet in a later part of the interview, the same grandmother goes on to say that she thinks it is okay for a
heterosexual couple who is unable to have children to adopt. This reveals a double standard that exists when it comes to parenting and mothering.

The idea of heterosexuality as natural and ideal also meant that a few of my participants from the older generation objectified it as a cure that was capable of healing people from the illness they conceived homosexuality to be. This is despite the same participants also thinking that homosexuality is innate which should have implied that it could not be changed. For these participants, heterosexuality was imbued with almost miraculous properties to cure the incurable.

**Extract 10**

*I- If your child confided in you that he or she is gay, how would you react?*

*CG1- I wouldn’t like it at all. Because it is not a natural, healthy thing to happen. I would say, “Now you are going out with another boy and you are a boy also. Go out with a girl, see how you feel then. You’ll feel much better, I know it.”*

As Extract 10 highlights, the Christian grandmother feels that homosexuality is unnatural and unhealthy. Her solution to finding out about her child being potentially gay is to prescribe heterosexuality in the same manner one would recommend a medicinal tonic. She is convinced that there would be such a noticeable difference in how they feel after having a relationship with the opposite sex that they would be convinced to follow this healthy course. Closely related to the importance of gender roles is the subtheme of functions of sex, presented below.

**8.3 Functions of sex**

A final component of my participants’ representation of homosexuality as nature involved their understandings of the functions of sex. Many participants from the middle and older generation emphasized the procreative purpose of sex. The importance of children in families was emphasized and non- procreative sex was therefore considered to go against nature. Homosexuality was also conceived as an unhealthy way of having intercourse or an unhealthy way of living in general. Although such roles were ordained by nature, nature itself was seen by some as an expression of God’s laws.

**Extract 11**

*I- So what would your reservations about homosexuality be?*
MM1- Religion has a major factor to play- Christianity, Islam, they all believe it’s not the ideal because you know, man and woman have been paired together because of the purpose of procreation and you know, enlarging your family and your community and leading a purposeful life under the eyes of whatever, you know, God Almighty or the Holy Messenger.

In extract 11, MM1 reiterates the idea of heterosexuality being ideal because the union of a man and woman is able to bring forth a child. Having a child is considered a duty to the immediate family and the larger community, giving life meaning and purpose. She anchors this in religion, as do all the other Christian and Muslim participants from the older and middle generation. In addition to religion, homosexuals were also objectified as animals by the Muslim grandfather. He described homosexuals to be “worse than animals” by talking about how no other animal or bird engages in sodomy because it is so unnatural.

Interestingly, although one of the Hindu grandmothers also considered homosexuality as unnatural, she did not refer to religion when doing so and throughout our conversation, she repeatedly spoke of another function of sex, namely sex for pleasure. This is not surprising, given that in Hinduism, sex for pleasure has been given a high importance in addition to sex for procreation. However, by that logic, homosexuality which performs the function of sex for pleasure should have been accepted. Yet, as shown by extract 12, this was not the case.

**Extract 12**

*I- If you had a child and he or she came out as gay, how would you feel?*

HGM1- Truthfully, not very happy.

*I- What would upset you about it?*

HGM1- My God! It is something so different. And it’s not healthy. That would be the thought that would come to me.

*I- What to you is unhealthy about it?*

HGM1- Okay, the main unhealthy thing would be for me and I am sure for other people my age, is their physical relationship.

With reference to extract 12, HGM1 sees homosexuality as an unhealthy way of having sex, justifying her view as typical for her generation. This shows how understandings of homosexuality as unnatural among her generation have been naturalized to the extent that the reason for homosexuality to be considered unnatural in the first place, namely, that it does not
fulfil a procreative function has been forgotten. As a result, homosexuality is just considered unnatural, full stop.

For all my participants from the younger generation, the pleasure function of sex was emphasized. Many of them dismissed the importance of children in a family and some of them even talked about homosexuality as a natural solution to population explosion. In addition, sex was considered a basic need and a person’s sexuality was objectified as other basic needs such as food. For instance, one of my participants talked about how liking someone of the same sex was as natural as one preferring strawberry ice cream over vanilla. The metaphor of food and taste was also used by another participant to show how denying homosexuals the right to their sexuality was as bad as depriving them of something as essential as food.

**Extract 13**

_"My god, it is terrible that someone can take someone’s sexual orientation and say no that is wrong. That’s like saying you like your tea with milk and I like mine without milk and then you ban tea without milk but I am lactose intolerant. So it is really messed up on a lot of different levels."

In the extract above, CD1 is discussing the criminalization of homosexuality in India with reference to the legislation’s use of the term “intercourse against the order of nature.” For her, sexual orientation is a matter of one’s palate. In the same way that people are able to eat certain foods and unable to stomach others, homosexuals are thought to only be able to satisfy their sex drive with people of the same sex. Thus, not allowing them to do so is like giving someone with a food allergy access only to the very food which he or she is allergic to.

* * *

To sum up, in the representation of homosexuality as nature, laws regulating “natural order” were evoked, ideas of inherence and evolution drawn on and instincts naturalized. Homosexuality was thought to be innate and homosexuals to have innate qualities. Heterosexuality was a barometer used to compare homosexuality which came up short in the area of parenting. Participants from the older generation assumed that men and women have
natural qualities that make the role of a father complementary to that of a mother. Therefore, anything other than a man-woman pairing was considered less than ideal. Relatedly, when the biological function of sex for procreation was emphasized, homosexuality was usually seen as an unnatural way to have sex but for those that emphasized sex as a basic need of all human beings, there was nothing unnatural about homosexuality.

For participants of the younger generation, masculinity and femininity were not understood as biological roles and most of them had a more fluid idea of gender relations. However, they drew on the biological representation of homosexuality in that desire for sex is a basic human drive or instinct, existing in everyone regardless of whether they were homosexual or heterosexual. This shaped their understandings of homosexuality in relation to heterosexuality, not seeing any difference between them except for the object of their sexual preference. That they were all against criminalizing homosexuality was partly rooted in the idea that it denied a homosexual person the legal right to meet this inherent human need. Some of them also suggested the idea that homosexuality could be a natural solution to the problem of overpopulation and enabling more adoptions.

Table 1: Representation of homosexuality as nature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Anchor</th>
<th>Objectifications</th>
<th>Themata</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Older and middle generation</td>
<td><em>Heterosexuality</em></td>
<td><em>Imbalance, mutation, disease</em></td>
<td>Natural vs unnatural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Healthy vs unhealthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dominant category: unnatural, unhealthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger generation</td>
<td><em>Heterosexuality</em></td>
<td><em>Basic needs</em></td>
<td>Natural vs unnatural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dominant category: natural</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The above representation of homosexuality as nature served the function of protecting the laws of nature for my participants but the idea of what was natural differed across generations. As Table 1 shows, for both generations, homosexuality is anchored in *heterosexuality* or man-woman dualism. Participants of the middle and older generation saw homosexuality going against heterosexuality by violating gender roles and sex for procreation. However, participants of the younger generation saw homosexuals and heterosexuals as similar by virtue of having the same biological need for sex and companionship. Thus, a prominent objectification for the older generation was *imbalance*, *mutation* and *disease* while for the younger generation, homosexuality was objectified as *basic needs*. For both generations, the themata included categories of *natural* versus *unnatural* with unnatural being the dominant category for the older generations who viewed homosexuality as unnatural. For the younger generation, natural was dominant as they viewed homosexuality as a natural alternative to heterosexuality to meet biological needs and a way of nature evolving. A second themata found among the older generations was also *healthy* versus *unhealthy* with unhealthy being the dominant category.
They fuck you up, your mum and dad.
They may not mean to, but they do.
They fill you with the faults they had
And add some extra, just for you.

Phillip Larkin (2001)

9. REPRESENTING HOMOSEXUALITY AS NURTURE

In Three Essays on the theory of Sexuality, Freud (1905) has a section devoted to the prevention of inversion, as homosexuality was popularly referred to in those days. To quote, “One of the tasks implicit in object choice is that it should find its way to the opposite sex. This as we know, is not accomplished without a certain amount of fumbling. Often enough the first impulses after puberty go astray, though without any permanent harm lasting” (Freud, 1905, p.203). For many of my participants, from all generations, homosexuality was represented as a fumble that diverted the person away the normal developmental trajectory. Such fumbling was seen as being caused by external and often traumatic circumstances. Implicit in this representation of homosexuality was an assumption that growing up in circumstances they considered optimal would completely mitigate the risk of becoming a homosexual.

Unlike representations of nature where homosexuality is presumed to be innate, in the representation of nurture, homosexuality is thought to be precipitated by negative extrinsic experiences during childhood or teenage years of development. Such experiences could be an abusive father, a neglectful or overbearing mother and rejection by the opposite sex. Homosexuals were seen to be psychologically damaged as a result of these circumstances. To prevent “permanent harm lasting” as Freud (1905) termed it, participants talked about the need for interventions, the role of counselling in helping people come to terms with their issues and the importance of exposure to positive influences. This representation of homosexuality contained many ideas of the psychological model of homosexuality discussed in Chapter 3. Thus, the three sub-themes under nurture consist of homosexuality as a product of the environment, homosexuality as a changeable state and homosexuals as psychologically troubled which will be discussed in detail in the sections that follow.
9.1 Homosexuality: a product of the environment

Family is usually considered to be a shelter and a refuge from the harsh realities of the world. Therefore, it is not surprising that a dysfunctional family life is cited to be responsible for a whole host of neuroses and psychoses. In the same work of Freud (1905) I mentioned above, he considers quarrels between parents and an unhappy married life to sow the seeds for disturbances in a child’s sexual development or the acquisition of a neurotic illness. In a similar vein, some of my participants considered homosexuality to be the manifestation of such disturbances in sexual development, resulting from having a less than optimal family environment.

Extract 14

I- And do you think there is anything that causes homosexuality?

HGM1- I’ve heard that it’s something in their genes. That’s what I’ve heard. But that’s what I’ve heard. But my sense is there has been something in their family get up that has upset them so much, that would be. For example, an over-controlling mother perhaps or no balance in father-mother interaction, that would be second. And maybe the child was not accepted as a boy if he is, not accepted for the gentleness in his side, they expected him to be a macho and uh then he would feel that any woman he meets also would expect the same thing. Maybe out of that, if he finds another male who is gentle, sensitive, he could develop feelings.

In extract 14, one of the Hindu grandmothers talks about how she has been exposed to information that suggests that homosexuality is genetic. However, she does not consider this to be very accurate, preferring to go by her gut instinct that tells her that the real causes of homosexuality can be found in their family dynamics. It is important to mention that she is a counsellor by profession in order to provide a context for her beliefs. Thus, it is understandable why she places so much emphasis on the family as a site affecting development, as this is a central paradigm of psycho-analytical counselling. She makes reference to concepts and ideas that might not be at the disposal of one not well-read in psycho-analysis such as an over-controlling mother and imbalance in father-mother interaction. She also talks about how a boy might not be accepted at home for displaying typically feminine qualities such as gentleness and sensitivity and such unacceptance might make them seek comfort from a man who displays similar feminine qualities. This also points to the influence of psycho-analysis which emphasizes how people who are unaccepted by one
of their parents seek to find acceptance in a partner of the gender of the parent that rejected them. Nevertheless, these ideas were still very visible among those not well-versed in psychology. During my interview with the Muslim father, I showed him the video advertisement featuring a lesbian couple and asked him for his thoughts on it. His response is presented in Extract 15

**Extract 15**

*MF-* "...I'm trying to think what her parents would feel like to find out as to what has been the shortcoming in their upbringing that their child wants to be with another girl instead of live a normal life with another boy...”

In the extract above, the Muslim father puts himself into the shoes of the parents of the lesbian couple in the advertisement. He feels that it would be tough on the parents to find out their daughter was lesbian as this would cause them to ponder about what they had done wrong as parents to bring this calamity on the family. In line with the representation of homosexuality as nurture is the idea that the parents of these lesbians must have really messed up to cause their daughters to desire not a “normal life” with a boy but one with a girl. The idea of normality and abnormality strongly figure in this representation of homosexuality, as my discussions with other participants also highlighted.

Freud concluded his section on inversion by talking specifically about how loss of a parent in a child’s early years could determine the child’s choice of a sexual partner permanently. This precise scenario was recounted by one of the Christian daughters I interviewed, who did not have a psychology background. In response to the same question I had posed to HGM1 about the causes of homosexuality, she described how the trauma of a parent dying precipitated homosexuality in her college room-mate.

**Extract 16**

*CD2-* Um well it always I feel like the girl who I stayed with, my junior in college, so uh basically when she was young, when she was about 10 or 12, her dad passed away and she was a normal girl before I mean she was just a girl. But she became very boy-like after that. And I mean she wanted to be her mom’s son, she wanted to be the man of the family and like you know to take care of her mom and everything and her girlfriend was her childhood really close friend. So she was there with her during such a tough time in her life and maybe that’s one of the reasons it made her to feel that if this person understands me so much and so well,
maybe you know she is someone who I can confide in not only as a friend but as a partner as well. So I feel there is obviously something that triggers you to get to becoming like this. Maybe something really bad or maybe just something that changes you to see life this way.

Thus, in extract 16, CD2 narrates the passing away of the father of her room-mate, an event after which, she ceased to be “a normal girl.” The detail of her account is striking- despite not having familiarity with psycho-analysis, she psychologizes on how her roommate became very manly after the death of her father in an attempt to take over the role of the man of the house in his absence and be a source of support for her mother. The presence of a close friend during such a traumatic time, whom the room-mate had a long history with was thought to help fill the void and provide safety and comfort that were desperately needed. Hence, homosexuality is thought to be triggered by adversity.

Furthermore, the family was also considered to have to be a site of abuse, which had the potential to cause homosexuality. For instance, when talking to the Muslim grandmother, she mentioned how she had watched television programs that showed fathers abusing their own daughters. She thought that this was something that could permanently put them off the male sex. Indeed, a few of my participants from each generation expressed that homosexuality was not merely attraction to the same sex but also discomfort with the opposite sex. In addition to abuse, difficulties with the opposite sex was perceived as arising from rejection by a member of the opposite sex, leading someone to seek solace with a person of the same sex.

Extract 17

I- Do you think that there is anything that causes one to have a preference for the same sex?

CG2- I think there are some. Otherwise people normally don’t go.

I- So how do you see that happening?

CG2- I think most of the cases like that have happened as an accident. They don’t find from their own sex any nice person so they try to have a nice relationship and then they try like this with another boy or another girl that is of the same sex, so they try it.

In extract 17, CG2 reiterates the circumstantial nature of homosexuality, seeing it as arising from failed attempts to find love with someone from the opposite sex. She also emphasizes how it is not normal for one to be attracted to the same sex, hence the only reason why two people of the same sex would end up together is if difficult circumstances pushed them to it.
Accompanying the idea that homosexuality is the product of the environment is concern for children of same sex parents who they feel would be in need of exposure to a normal relationship. Implicit here is the idea that homosexual parents could themselves be one of those adverse circumstances that would trigger homosexuality in children and that homosexuality is learned by role modelling.

**Extract 18**

I- Would you say alternative families could be bad role models in any way?

**MD** - I don’t think they could be bad role models as long as the children are being given exposure to other things. If they’re not being home-schooled or isolated, if they are being sent to school, the child is making friends, the children’s friends have parents, those parents are going to expose those kids to certain other things.

In extract 18, although the Muslim daughter is talking about how homosexuals are not bad role models, the reasons that she gives for this seem to suggest that children of same sex parents also need to be exposed to heterosexual parents so that they see “certain other things” and as long as this exposure happens, children of same sex parents will grow up normally. MD otherwise expressed very positive conceptions of homosexuality, nevertheless this extract highlights a slight bias she has as it is unlikely that she would feel the need for children with heterosexual parents to be exposed to same sex parents to learn about certain other things.

**9.2 Homosexuality: a changeable state**

For my participants of the middle and older generation who saw homosexuality as something triggered by the environment, the need for interventions to restore normalcy were emphasized. Counselling was one such method advocated for, as it was thought that this would resolve the underlying issues they presumed that homosexuals had, thus enabling them to return to a normal state.

**Extract 19**

I- How do you feel about homosexuality being a criminal offense in India?

**HGM1** - I’ll say truthfully, making it legal is giving permission okay? And many times homosexuality occurs because for some reason that boy has not been able to develop comfortable relationships with the other gender, there are so many of those. Given the
chance, some counselling, maybe they would be able to work out these issues and then go into a heterosexual.

In extract 19, HGM1 once again emphasizes how homosexuals become that way due to experiences that cause them to shy away from the opposite gender. Counselling is thought to be able to help them deal with these problems and give them the ability to have what she sees is a normal relationship. The same grandmother recounts a dilemma she encountered as a counsellor when the family of a girl who was a lesbian requested her to take on the task of converting their daughter. Although it is evident from Extract 15 that HGM1 does see counselling as a means of changing someone’s mind about their sexuality, she felt the need to turn down that particular case as it went against the ethics of counselling which gives importance to accepting people as they are. Nevertheless, this raises concerns about instances where counsellors see homosexuality as a changeable state and feel justified in trying to convert homosexuals referred to them.

In addition to counselling, some of my older participants talked about the need for parents to intervene and stop what they saw as an abnormal course of action. For example, when asked about how he would react if one of his children came out as gay, the Muslim father talked about trying to understand what he had done wrong as a parent to cause them to make such a decision and how it was his duty to lead them back to the Islamic path.

9.3 Homosexuals as psychologically troubled

As homosexuality in the representation of nurture is thought to arise from traumatic circumstances or bad parenting practices, homosexuals are thought to be psychologically damaged people as a result of the harsh experiences they have had to endure. Homosexuals were thus considered to be abnormal in some way, have more psychological issues and relationships that are unstable and short lived. This idea was espoused only by a small minority of participants, one of whom belonged to the middle generation and the other two to the older generation.

Extract 20

I- If you had just one word to describe homosexuality, what would it be?

CM2- Extraordinary. I mean no, not abno, I mean abnormal would be slightly um okay actually to tell you the truth, I find them abnormal. Like extraordinary would not be the correct word I think. Abnormal in my view. Actually maybe it isn’t. My daughter would, when
you speak to her, like she would find them absolutely normal. But for me being in my generation. I’m also reminded of the third gender. The hijras and all. So I’m a little um, I mean I’m scared of them too.

My exchange with one of the Christian mothers in Extract 20 shows how she struggles to articulate her feelings towards homosexuals as she is aware that such a view would be considered harsh, especially by someone from her daughter’s generation. As I am her daughter’s age, perhaps she feared being judged negatively by expressing such an opinion. Nevertheless, she does finally admit that she finds homosexuals abnormal rather than extraordinary which was how she first described them. She goes on to talk about how she understands this view is peculiar to her generation and feels that for people of her daughter’s generation, homosexuals would be normal. This view of homosexuality was actually not typical of her generation with only one other participant from the middle generation (MF) referring to homosexuals as abnormal. That CM1 justifies her stance as a generational thing indicates an awareness of the views of those she considers to be outside her age group. Yet she is not swayed from her own beliefs by this alternative knowledge, holding on to her own view and imagining it to be common among those of her age. She also mentions the third gender and how she is afraid of them too, implying that she also views trans-people as abnormal and that abnormality is a state to fear. Her mother also had a similar view and unlike her daughter, she did not feel any discomfort with disclosing that she found homosexuals abnormal.

HGM1 also saw homosexuals as abnormal, and discussed how she felt that the disruption in their development by virtue of their homosexuality manifested in a host of other psychological issues including insecurity and guilt. These issues that homosexuals are thought to possess makes it hard in her opinion for them to make a lasting commitment to another person. Thus, homosexual relationships were viewed as short lived and unstable. It is important to mention here that even though some participants of the younger generation also felt that circumstances could contribute to causing homosexuality, none of them talked about homosexuals being psychologically unstable and in need of interventions. Thus, for the younger generation, how a person came to be homosexual did not matter so much. For them, a person is the sum of their experiences and if those experiences made one homosexual, it was a state that should be accepted and not changed and they did not see homosexuals as lesser people as a result.
To summarise nurture in a nutshell, there were some participants from each generation who ascribed to this representation of homosexuality suggesting that the idea of a normal development trajectory is one that has stayed fairly persistent. Homosexuality is conceived as a failure of some kind in attaining the ideal of development but such failure is not held the responsibility of homosexuals but rather attributed to external circumstances beyond their control. Participants from the younger generation who held this view were very sympathetic to homosexuals and thought that they deserved to find happiness even if it was with someone from the same sex, after the trauma they had to endure that contributed to pushing them down the path to homosexuality. However, those from the middle and older generation who thought homosexuality was caused by environmental factors saw it as a state that could be changed and some of them viewed homosexuals as psychologically troubled people.

**Table 2: Representation of homosexuality as nurture**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Anchor</th>
<th>Objectifications</th>
<th>Themata</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Older generation</strong></td>
<td>Psychological disorder</td>
<td>Abusive parents, difficulties with opposite sex, instability of gay partnerships</td>
<td>Normal vs abnormal. Dominant category: abnormal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle generation</strong></td>
<td>Psychological disorder</td>
<td>Dysfunctional family, difficulties with the opposite sex</td>
<td>Normal vs abnormal. Both categories equally dominant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Younger generation</strong></td>
<td>Psychological disorder</td>
<td>Abusive parents, difficulties with opposite sex</td>
<td>Normal vs abnormal. Dominant category: Normal.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As highlighted in table 2, the anchor of the representation of homosexuality as nurture is a psychological disorder, seen to be caused by trauma and external circumstances. This was objectified mainly by abusive parents, dysfunctional family, difficulties with the opposite sex and to a lesser extent, the instability of gay unions. The themata I was able to identify was normal versus abnormal with the dominant category being abnormal for the older generation. For the middle generation, while two participants considered homosexuality abnormal, the others did not and hence both categories of abnormal and normal were equally dominant. For the younger generation, the dominant category was normal. Such a representation seems to function to maintain the desirability of psychological stability, which is considered to exist only in the absence of trauma.
In the social jungle of human existence, there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity

Erik Erikson (1968, p. 130)

10. REPRESENTING HOMOSEXUALITY AS CULTURE

In a column for Times of India, a leading national newspaper, journalist Neema Majmudar questions what it really means to be Indian. She starts her essay with the following line, “There is, now more than ever, a need for Indians to reflect on their identity and redefine themselves instead of continuing to emulate only western thoughts and behaviours” (Majmudar, 2017). In the course of our interviews, my participants appeared to reflect on their identity as Indians in relation to homosexuality. However, the binary between the East and West that Majumdar (2017) feels imposes on Indian identity was just a small part of a very complex picture.

Although representations of nurture and culture would appear to be similar as they are both related to the environment, there is an important difference. Nurture was seen to pertain specifically to developmental challenges they conceived as triggering homosexuality. However, with culture, social mores and norms of what it means to be Indian were drawn on which homosexuality was seen to either maintain or reject. With the help of stimuli such as the advertisement featuring a lesbian couple, my participants constructed ideas of what it meant to be India and what comprises Indian society and culture. These ideas provided a location for their understandings of homosexuality as deviation.

Morality was also drawn on, such that they considered religious perspectives on homosexuality. Yet they were able to use different strategies to reconcile the stance of their religion to homosexuality with their own views to it. Hence, religion, culture and traditions were not just seen as static entities, rather participants from both the older and younger generation recognized ways in which society is changing. These shifts provided the means for modernity and tradition to intersect, adding layers to the way in which homosexuality was represented as culture. Such changes stemmed from changing sources of information about homosexuality, contributing to their awareness about different aspects such as the history of the legislation criminalizing it in India, gay rights in general and the kind of associations they had with the very word homosexuality. Accordingly, my sub-themes under culture consist of importance of family life, morality, remembering heritage, social change, awareness and East-West divide.
10.1 Importance of family life

In their book on homosexuality in India, Vanita (2005) discusses how many couples of the same sex attempt to get married and such attempts are thwarted by the extended family reporting the couple in question to the police who then rounds them up and returns them to their families. However, she also describes how some families partook in the wedding celebrations and these marriages were accepted. This has many implications, firstly that the family is a very important institution that continues to have influence in their children’s choices of life partner. If this choice diverges from that of the parents, rather than disowning the child and allowing them to live with their choice, the family is willing to take whatever action is necessary to impose their will and restore harmonious family life. That the police ignored the rights of these couples who were over the age of consent and took them back to their family is also a testament to how public institutions give importance to the will of the larger family over the individual. However, the small number of same sex couples whose marriage was celebrated by the larger family reinforces how family and community approval are capable of over-riding the law criminalizing homosexuals.

I draw on the aforementioned example to show how important family life is considered in Indian society as the idea of a traditional family was emphasized by many of my participants. With the exception of two who included homosexuals in their definition of a family, all the others specifically mentioned having a traditional idea of a family based on how they had grown up in India. Some of my older participants saw homosexuality as a threat to this institution because they could not come to terms with the thought of having a society with families composed of homosexual parents as opposed to the traditional father and mother of the opposite sex. However, compared to the representation of nature where homosexuals were seen to violate biological roles of man-woman dualism, in the representation of culture, homosexuals were seen as alien to India and difficult to include within the frame of a joint family.

Extract 21

I- So to clarify, your main reason for feeling upset if your child came out as a homosexual is because you think your child’s life would be difficult and they would not be accepted in India?

CM1- In this day and age, if you are talking about, then, yes I feel like my child would be accepted. But um then you are looking at your family, your extended family and thinking how
do they fit in with that? But if you stop right there, you don’t have to think further, you will accept your child.

Prior to the information included in extract 21, CM1 had talked about how she would feel a bit upset if her child came out as gay and mentioned how this was something unheard of and totally unacceptable during the time when she was growing up in the seventies. It therefore seemed that the only barrier to accepting her child the knowledge that he/she would not be accepted socially. Extract 18 shows her response to me clarifying this with her. She clearly thinks that the child would not have the same barriers to acceptance in current society compared to when she was growing up. However, she cannot envisage how her child could fit into their extended family if he or she had a partner of the same sex. Yet, if she did not have to think about her extended family, it seems like it would be quite easy for her to accept her child’s choice. Hence, it appears that having a homosexual child would put her in a difficult position of having to choose between pleasing her extended family or accepting her own child. Owing to these strong ideas about family in India, many of my participants objectified homosexuality as deviance or a vice that went against norms.

**Extract 22**

I- What do you think about the ad?

_HGM1_ - I would say that it would be tough on the parents. If they are talking in Tamil, means that they’re a traditional family and appa⁵ and all that are quite traditional so this is like rubbing the old man’s nose into the dirt. Go home and tell them and let them have the choice of reacting and going through their anger.

I- So it would be an unrealistic message to give Indian parents?

_HMG1_ - A tough message! A cruel message. It feels like she is rebelling, she wants to break the rules and hurt her parents, yeah that’s what I think.

In the above extract HGM1 feels that the message of acceptance and freedom to come out of the closet as preached by the advertisement was an unrealistic one that did not fit with Indian traditions. She infers that the girl comes from a traditional Indian family by her use of Tamil when talking to her parents on the telephone, implying perhaps that English is a language of more modern families. Having thus established that the girl comes from a traditional family,

⁵ Appa is the word for father in Kannada
she feels that the only reason that the girl would want to come out to her parents by inviting them to visit her and then surprising them with her lesbian partner is because she wanted to rebel and deviate. Even though my participants of the younger generation accepted homosexuality, they still recognized it as a deviation from norms.

For example, CD2 describes the thought of coming out to her parents in the following manner “Like it’s as good as telling your parents say for example if your parents are not okay with you smoking, or something, it’s as bad or even worse. It’s as drastic as that so yeah” Here, she objectifies homosexuality as a vice comparable to smoking which once again reiterates the idea of deviance. Deviance was not always seen as a bad thing. For some participants of the younger generation, conformity was considered restrictive and therefore breaking with traditions was seen as liberating. In such cases, homosexuals were described as brave and courageous.

A reason why homosexuality is seen as deviance from norms is because of the strong importance that society places on marriage as an institution. Therefore, when I described a scenario of a married man with a family having an affair with another man and asked my participants how they would label such a man, none of them brought up that the hypothetical man in question could be bisexual. Rather, their talk was focused on how social pressure to marry in India would force a homosexual man into a marriage he did not really want.

There was a difference in how same sex acts between women and men were viewed, with many of them having a very male centric idea of homosexuality. They referred to men specifically even when talking about homosexuality in general. This seemed to be related to them being more reluctant to classify women engaging in same sex acts as lesbians. Thus, they were more likely to have an idea of homosexuals as exclusively male. Women were thought to engage in same sex acts with other women only as a result of boredom or neglect in their marriage and such acts were not seen as homosexuality. Most of them did not have a reason to justify this bias despite my probes, except for HM1 who talked about the role of patriarchy.

**Extract 23**

*I- Why do you have this difference regarding the same sex acts of a married man and woman?*
HM2- Because men in India have a certain amount of freedom. I’m not talking about the society I come from but the average Indians where these things are not even discussed. In such families, men are allowed to go out on their own, they do not need to take their wives but women’s mobility is limited.

Thus, in extract 23, HM2 brings up the idea that because men have more freedom in society, they could have affairs with whoever they want. Therefore, if a married man specifically had an affair with another man, it would be because that was the object of his choice since his freedom is not restricted. However, in a patriarchal society where women’s freedom of movement is limited, she may not be allowed to go out and would not have exposure to other men if she wanted to have an affair. Therefore, the only people a woman might be able to have affairs with are women owing to the gender segregated nature of Indian society. HM2 distinguishes herself from the average Indian by virtue of being from an upper middle-class background, implying that she thinks that she has more enlightened views than the average Indian family as a result.

For the younger generation, while family life still appears to be important, they have been exposed to enough media influences that have cemented the status of families headed by homosexuals as a legitimate alternative to heterosexual families. Thus, in deciding whether homosexuality deviated from family life, participants used other criteria of being able to judge this including whether homosexual families could still maintain certain other traditions typical of Indian families. For example,

**Excerpt 24:**

*MD1- “Culturally we're all very family oriented. So though they live in New York now, the kid always has her grandparents around, aunts, cousins, this, that, always travelling, you know best schools, best food, cool nannies...”*

From the above extract, the Muslim daughter talks about her gay friends who have adopted a baby. Despite having deviated from the traditional Indian family, visiting and being visited by members of the extended family means that the collectivistic orientation of family life is still preserved and the child does not lack in any way. Thus, homosexuality is still able to maintain cultural standards. Similar ways to incorporate homosexuality within their religious beliefs were employed by some of my participants as the next section explores.
10.2 Morality

When discussing religion with my Hindu participants, they all emphasized the tolerance of the religion and its message of individual choice and freedom, therefore none of them attributed their views on homosexuality to their religion. However, without exception, all my Christian and Muslim participants saw homosexuality as going against their religion. For those who did not consider themselves devout followers of the religion, the stance of their religion on homosexuality was not perceived to affect their own views. However, for those who did consider themselves religious, three strategies were adopted to reconcile their religious views and their beliefs to homosexuality. The first one was to emphasize how religion is fixed and cannot be re-interpreted. This was used by most of my participants of these religions from the middle and older generation and therefore, the stance of their religion towards homosexuality was accepted without question and used to justify their negative views towards homosexuality throughout our interviews.

A second strategy was selective interpretation of the religion and to emphasize the context in which the religion was formulated. Thus, for the Muslim grandmother, religion was something that was subject to personal interpretation and she compared homosexuality to other things that were considered not permissible in Islam but still occurred such as marriage to a Hindu. One of the Christian mothers considered herself religious, yet accepted homosexuality, emphasizing how she saw Christianity’s stance towards homosexuality as culturally and historically specific.

Extract 25

I- Are there any sexual practices your religion would consider wrong?

CM1- Homosexuality and birth control. That is something my religion does not believe in. The Church does not believe in that. But logically in this day and age, if we had to go by that, we would be having churches with ten floors in it so I think our religion needs to be more flexible in its way of thinking.

In extract 25, CM1 highlights how religion should adapt to the needs of the modern world and evolve with society. Therefore, although her religion views homosexuality and birth control negatively and she considers herself religious, she finds a way to reconcile the two by reiterating how her religion had these ideas that were relevant at a different point in time but do not have relevance in the current society where overpopulation is real issue. Such a
strategy is also used by a few of my participants from the younger generation including her own daughter.

In addition, a final strategy employed by the other Christian daughter involved looking at the broader message of the Bible and seeing the stance of homosexuality in light of this message. Thus, when asked how her religion viewed homosexuality, CD2 responded, “Well I don’t know if my religion is for it because it is not something my religion would encourage for sure but my religion believes everyone is equal in the eyes of God so this part should come into that. I mean if you are God’s child, whether you are homosexual or heterosexual, I don’t think that should change.” For CD2, the Bible therefore has an ethical message that teaches unity of all humanity, therefore discriminating against homosexuals goes against that message and this is what she takes home from the scriptures.

An observation I feel the need to mention that came up with regards to religion is how most of my Muslim participants who talked about Islam’s negative stance to homosexuality always emphasized how other religions all view homosexuality negatively as well.

**Extract 26**

*I- Say someone in your own family came to you and said they are homosexual? How would you react?*

*MGF- I’d ask him to see a doctor, get treated and explain to him what’s in the Holy Quran, the Bible, the what do you call the Jewish book, the Vedas, all of them do not permit this.*

As extract 26 shows, the Muslim grandfather refers to every religion he knows in addition to Islam to emphasize how this is not a peculiarity of Islam or evidence of Islam’s primitiveness. This appears to be related to wider developments in society regarding the position of Muslims and will be explored further in my discussion.

10.3 **Remembering heritage**

An argument favoured by Hindu right wing nationalists is that homosexuality has never been part of Indian culture or society. Therefore, I initiated discussions about the Kama Sutra and the Khajuraho temples where homosexuality has been depicted to see if my participants shared this view of the Hindu right. For some of my older participants, the Kama Sutra and Khajuraho were viewed as relics of a primitive time that should be discarded from the culture and such participants had a tendency to overlook any evidence of an Indian society that was
tolerant to homosexuals. As a result, homosexuality was conceived as going completely against Indian culture. For others, the link between the Kama Sutra and homosexuality was ignored, so even if they thought that the Kama Sutra was an educative book, they argued that it only showed the relationship between a man and woman, despite my challenges that it did not.

My Hindu participants, for whom the Kama Sutra and Khajuraho temples can be viewed to have special significance in light of them being products of the religion, could not dismiss such artefacts so easily. Hence, with the exception of one of the Hindu grandmothers, all other Hindu participants talked nostalgically about the glory days where sexuality was celebrated in India with reference to these objects. Prudishness was seen to have been imported by the British and was something to be rejected. However, HGM1, while acknowledging the beauty of these products, seemed to feel that her view of them had been tainted by the British values that had been part of her childhood in a colonized India.

Extract 27

I- What do you think the Kama Sutra reflects about our culture and values?

HGM1- Okay, the Kama Sutra is a wonderful book in the sense, it decriminalized sex which the Englishman brought in. I would say it takes away the frigidity. But we’ve become so British in our mind that we’re not able to separate Indian broadmindedness because I think in that old Indian tradition, homosexuality was okay. Sex itself was okay in whatever form it gave you pleasure. So, I am a little confused.

Extract 27 shows that HGM1 has an appreciation for the Kama Sutra which celebrates sex for pleasure. Yet she feels that such values do not exist anymore as a result of colonisation and she sees herself as a product of these times. Thus, on one hand, she knows that sexual exploration was curbed by the British and does not seem to like the frigidity that she associates with them. On the other hand, she still feels that she cannot reject these British values that do not condone homosexuality or sexual experimentation as they are so much a part of her upbringing in a colonised India. Her acceptance of prudishness however is not mirrored by those from the younger generation who see a huge conflict between the art and architecture of ancient India and present intolerance.

Extract 28

I- What do you think the Kama Sutra reflects about our culture and values?
CD1- It shows how we are going backwards instead of forwards.

I- So you think India was more tolerant of homosexuality and other things before?

CD1- Yeah, I mean we have sculptures of gay women and orgies and threesomes all over the temples and all the places kings lived. It’s just ridiculous how, I mean, in the old days, they must have been like, “Oh I had this threesome, it was great”

In Extract 28, CD1 talks about how the values of sexual liberation and openness that she saw embodied by the Kama Sutra and Khajuraho temples are highly relevant and educative for the closed society of today. Similar views were expressed by others of her generation. Homosexuality was therefore seen by my younger participants as celebrating such values that were part of the culture since ancient times.

10.4 Social Change

Citing past tolerance, manifested in cultural heritage as evidence of liberal values that should be returned to, was not the only way for participants to express a desire for homosexuals to have rights in society. Many of them saw culture as dynamic rather than static, evolving in the same way as a living organism to adapt to existing realities. Gender expectations of men as breadwinners and women as homemakers were no longer thought to be relevant, with some of my participants mentioning fathers staying at home to parent and mothers going out to work. This fluidity in the roles of men and women allowed more space to reflect on the ability of a same sex couple to be good parents.

Extract 29

I- So a same sex couple would be able to meet all the needs of a child?

HM1- Well these days, men and women don’t have the same roles as they used to and kids turn out fine. And when you think of homosexual couples, they’ve adopted a kid, they do the same things a heterosexual couple would do. You get up, dress your child, send them to school, one parent is more present at home and the other works more. It’s not any different.

Thus, same sex parents were considered to be just as capable parents as heterosexual couples by HM1 as seen in Extract 29, partly because there has been a move away from the idea of stay at home mothers and working fathers and an understanding that gender does not need to determine the allocation of responsibilities at home. Some of my younger participants also had very fluid ideas of sexuality and labels such as homosexual and bisexual were thought to
be unnecessary. Participants also felt that there was more acceptance and awareness about homosexuality at present than ever before. The younger generation was perceived to be the most tolerant both by themselves and by the older generations, as they are exposed to more information than the others. Nevertheless, many of my participants from the middle generation and a few from the older generation saw homosexuality as a modern phenomenon that is here to stay and that they had no choice to accept it as an inevitable part of social change.

Extract 30

I- Are there any differences between homosexuals and heterosexuals?

CM1 - There is a big distinction because er well as they say in the Bible, there was always Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve. So uh we’ve been brought up that way to think that way. But the world is changing, everything is changing. So we are getting to an era where we have to realize that we have to respect the gay community as well. You can’t just say okay to eliminate them or stay away from them. You have to. Everybody is eventually a human being.

In extract 30, CM1 talks about how homosexuals are not God’s original order of creation and that she does see homosexuals and heterosexuals as different because she has been brought up with an emphasis placed on this religious perspective to viewing homosexuality. Nevertheless, she is aware of changes taking place in the world and society around her and as a result, her religious interpretation of homosexuality as unacceptable does not suit her in this new climate. The idea of unity of humankind and respect for homosexuals that she talks about seems to echo a broader discourse in society about human rights. Such ideas were very much prevalent among participants of the younger generation who talked about how the homosexual minority should have the same rights as heterosexuals in all spheres, which again resonates with wider debates about minority rights.

My findings also revealed a change in values between the generations. When participants from the older generation were asked about how they would react if their child came out as gay, many of them thought of it as a great tragedy that they would try to change at any cost, focusing on themselves and the wider family as opposed to their child. However most of my participants from the middle generation said that though it would upset them, they would eventually accept it because their child’s happiness was most important. None of my participants in the younger generation even anticipated feeling upset and also talked about their child’s happiness being of utmost importance. This seems to indicate that a shift has
occurred from values that give more importance to the collective to those that give more importance to the individual.

**Extract 31**

I- **How would you react if your child came out as gay?**

**HD1**- Well, my mum and I were talking the other day about my child growing up. She mentioned how she can’t wait to see what kind of adult she turns into and what kind of man she would end up with. I reminded her that she could end up with a woman too and I want to bring her up in a world where this is a possibility. So yeah, for me, it wouldn’t be a problem. At the end of the day, I just want her to be happy.

This quote in Extract 31 illustrates well the emphasis placed on individual happiness and free choice by those in the younger generation. In addition, even though some of my participants from the older and middle generation did not approve of homosexuality, they still felt that it should be an individual choice and that laws should not criminalize personal choices. The distinction between public and private was emphasized, such that homosexuality was considered tolerable behind closed doors but not in public.

**Extract 32**

I- **How do you feel about homosexuality being a criminal offence in India?**

**CG1**- It shouldn’t be. For one thing, give the freedom of living choice to each one. What does it matter what they do in private? As long as they can’t get married publicly in India, it is fine.

Extract 32 shows that despite not approving of homosexuality and seeing it as unnatural, CG1 still does not think it is right to criminalize it as it violates the freedom of choice that should be present in a democracy. However, she is against the idea of homosexuals getting married as that would be a public declaration which would put them on par with heterosexual couples.

An unexpected development occurred during my interview with the Muslim grandfather that led to him being challenged by his grandson on the topic of public versus private. It was not considered appropriate for me to be in a room alone with him so I interviewed him in his living room with his grandson present at the other end of the room. When MGF expressed that he was happy homosexuality was criminalized because it was protecting people from something so unnatural, MS got up and challenged his grandfather, saying that it was not fair
for the government to regulate personal life. I present a fraction of the conversation in the extract below.

**Extract 33**

*MS-* Look but the question is then, should the government be able to make a law-

*MGF-* They should!

*MS-* To lock up someone because they’re homosexual is targeting a minority group. Tomorrow it could be a religious group. Essentially they’re-

*MGF-* No no no!

*MS-* There’s no stopping-

*MGF-* It’s all just unhealthy, it has nothing to do with religion. Please don’t try to mix one with the other.

In extract 33, MS makes an appeal to the grandfather to change his position on homosexuality being criminalized by emphasizing how the government is interfering in minority rights in the private domain. As Muslims are a minority in the country, he hopes that the grandfather would understand the implications of a law targeting minorities and what happens in the privacy of the household. The grandfather however is not swayed and even though the grandson kept persisting, eventually the norm of respecting elders outweighed winning the argument.

**10.5 Awareness**

One of the reasons for social change and the shift that is visible across the generations is a change in the sources of information available to people about homosexuality. With the exception of HD1, all my participants went to all boys or all girls Christian schools which were the only type of educational institutions available to people till the nineties and early two thousands in Bangalore. While some of those from the older generation heard about homosexuality only at university, most of my participants heard about it for the first time at school. For the older generation, the average age of hearing about homosexuality was 17 whereas with the middle generation it was 15 and for the younger generation, it was 11.

For all participants, their first associations of homosexuality were usually negative with the term homo, gay or lesbian used as insults, to tease boys or girls who had a close friendship in
school. However, on encountering more information, homosexuality ceased to be just a bad word and most participants reflected some changes in their conception of homosexuality since the first time they heard about it. Reading books, watching movies and exposure to some form of media gave people more awareness about homosexuality. Knowing someone who was a homosexual was seen to have had the biggest change on their conceptions of homosexuality.

**Extract 34**

*I- So would you say your conception of homosexuality has changed since the first time you heard about it?*

**HGM1-** Definitely. When I first heard about it, I was angry and said, how could anything be so unnatural. And I had never met anybody till my colleague. And even that I remember when my director said we’ve got a new person, he’s a foreigner and I said, “Oh good, we’re going to get new ways of looking at everything.” Then she said, “Oh, by the way he is gay.” I was taken aback and she realized and said, “I went to the chief and spoke about it and he said, if he fits your bill, why don’t you keep him? Why would you allow that to be factor? And we said “Okay, let’s see how it is” and we found him really acceptable and all. After that, I changed my mind about homosexuals and found they’ve got a beautiful, creative, sensitive side.

In extract 34, HGM1 recounts how the idea of homosexuality made her angry but that changed when her boss hired a homosexual who was also a foreigner. Her reticence about having to work with a homosexual was so obvious that her boss had to explain to her how she had discussed the matter with their superior who said that the man’s sexuality should not be a reason not to hire him. However, after getting to know him, she found it easier to tolerate homosexuality and even mentions some positive stereotypes about male homosexuals. Most of my participants had had personal contact with a homosexual and when I asked them what came to their mind when thinking about homosexuality, they mentioned these personal contacts or prominent gay celebrities, thus having a familiar face to give homosexuality an image helped to make it more tangible to them.

For participants from the older and middle generation, homosexuality had been a tabooed subject growing up. One of the Christian grandmothers mentioned hearing about homosexuality for the first time when she was in her fifties and only because a neighbour’s son came out as gay so she was personally exposed to him. As discussed in my methodology,
some of my participants from the middle generation expressed surprise that their parents were willing to talk to me about this controversial subject as it was not a topic they could ever bring up with them. Those from the middle generation felt that it was easier for them to talk about such things today due to the increasing awareness although it was still not a subject that some of them felt comfortable talking to young children about.

My participants from the younger generation were particularly well-aware of the criminal status of homosexuality in India and debates about gay rights abroad while those from the middle and older generation less so. However, only my Hindu participants were aware of the history of the law criminalizing homosexuality in India. This is perhaps because they were familiar with homo-erotic Hindu art and architecture that had been celebrated prior to colonization so the change to a more prudish way of life was most visible to them, which they attribute to the British. It is worth mentioning that when asked specifically if they wanted more knowledge about homosexuality, none of my participants except one of the Hindu daughters expressed a desire to learn anything else. They felt that it was not a personally relevant subject to them and had no need for any more information about it.

With every change, comes resistance. Two of my participants, CG2 and MGF had not had any personal contact with a homosexual and though they talked about developments in gay rights in the West, neither of them perceived to have received any new information about homosexuality since the first time they had heard about it and also felt that their conception about it had not changed.

**Extract 35**

1- What do you think about same sex families?

CG1- I do not approve of it as I am an elderly person but nowadays they grow up, I see them, at the age of 14, watching these things about gays on TV where they are getting married and all that, they read newspapers so they are aware of it.

The extract above shows how CG1 justifies her disapproval towards same sex parents on the grounds of her age. She talks about how her grandchildren are exposed to media that shows homosexuals getting married so they are aware of it. However, it seems that she would also be exposed to the same media and would have seen the same TV programme, yet she finds a way to distance herself from the information with the expectation that people from her generation should not be expected to go along with change.
Extract 36

I- If you had just one word, the first thing that comes to your mind when you think of homosexuality, what would it be?

MGF- I don’t think of homosexuality at all. I like to see pretty women and I found my pretty woman and have been married to her for 60 years now. I got married to her in June 56, now we’re in 2016 so no homosexuality, no nonsense.

Thus, in extract 36, MGF attempts to distance himself from homosexuality by asserting how he never thinks about it and emphasizing his heterosexuality by referring to pretty women and a long marriage. Some other participants from the middle and older generation also seemed to try to maintain some distance from the phenomenon, either by positioning themselves as lacking knowledge even when they seemed to know quite a lot or by using distancing language, such as us and them.

10.6 East West Divide

I started this chapter with a quote from Majumdar’s (2017) article on what it means to be Indian, where she expresses the fear that embracing foreign values come at the expense of rejecting everything Indian as backward and superstitious. Her fear is not totally unfounded: even among some of those participants who felt that Indian society is changing and becoming more accepting, they still viewed India as a whole as backward compared to the forward West. Therefore, tolerance to homosexuality was perceived to be modern and Western and India was seen as regressive.

Extract 37

I- Why should it be decriminalized?

MS- Because it uh sends a message not only to Indians but to the rest of the world that we are open minded as a community and it sets the foundation for a better future for our generation which encourages and supports differences instead of trying to see them as a threat to your cultural integrity.

Both my Muslim participants from the younger generation went abroad for their bachelor degrees and talked about how living abroad had made them more accepting. However, none of my other younger participants were educated abroad and yet all of them expressed similar ideas of acceptance. Hence, it seemed like the participants who were educated abroad
attributed any form of liberal thinking to Western influence. When discussing the criminalization of homosexuality, as seen in extract 32, MS emphasized the need for decriminalization, not only for the sake of gay rights in itself but to change India’s image as a backward country. For some of my older participants this perceived binary between the East and West led to some conflict.

**Extract 38**

*I- Where do you think the law criminalizing homosexuality comes from?*

*CG1- From the backward Indian classes.*

*I- Actually the British imposed that law on us when they colonised India but it has been changed in Britain since then but it has been kept here.*

*CG1- Here they are very uneducated and they think it’s like a shame because they are not educated. But in Britain, they are very modern.*

Throughout our interview, CG1 expressed her disapproval of homosexuality, yet when asked about the law criminalizing it, she attributes it to the regressive masses. She does not appear to position herself as belonging to what she sees as a regressive category even though her views would probably be very similar to the people she sees as regressive. Yet, neither does she consider herself modern as she constantly referred to her age as justifying disapproval throughout the interview. She resolves this apparent paradox by going on to talk about how the values in India and Britain are different, so therefore India is not expected to have the same standards and to do so would be to threaten the family life upon which she sees the country being founded.

Thus, while some of the younger generation felt the need for India to modernize by emulating the West, some older participants saw the West as a pollutant to the Indian way of life. When asked to view the advertisement featuring the lesbian couple, MGF declined and said that he saw it as, “Western culture which is ruining our Indian culture.” That the law criminalizing homosexuality was a Western product was conveniently denied to preserve the idea that India has always hated homosexuals.

* * *
Central to the representation of culture with all its layers and intricacies is the construction of an Indian identity that is rooted in the importance of family life, traditions, heritage and morality. For society to function, it is thought that norms must be followed, yet the values on which these norms are built on seem to differ between generations with a move from the collective to the individual. Different strategies were adopted by my participants to either incorporate homosexuality within family life, heritage and religion or exclude it. However, culture is not seen as monolithic but fluid, paving the way for tolerance, if not whole-hearted acceptance of homosexuality.

**Table 3: Representation of homosexuality as culture**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Anchor</th>
<th>Objectification</th>
<th>Themata</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Older generation</td>
<td>Deviance from norms</td>
<td>Vice, rebellion</td>
<td>Conformity vs deviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Both categories equally dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle generation</td>
<td>Deviance from norms</td>
<td>Vice</td>
<td>Conformity vs deviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Both categories equally dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger generation</td>
<td>Deviance from norms</td>
<td>Vice, difference, freedom</td>
<td>Conformity vs deviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Both categories equally dominant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The anchor of representations of culture is *deviance from norms* and it is objectified in a number of ways including as a *vice* similar to drug taking, as *rebellion*, as *freedom* and as *difference*. Homosexuality in the representation of culture is thematised as *conformity* versus *deviation* with both categories being equally dominating as homosexuality is seen as conforming to some norms and deviating from others.
Limiting our understanding of any complex human experience is always going to be worse than allowing it to be complicated

(Grzanka as cited in Ambrosino, 2016, p.10)

11. DISCUSSION - Revisiting social representations of homosexuality

In the previous analytical chapters, I attempted to illustrate the multi-faceted nature of my participants’ representations of homosexuality. In this final chapter, I return to my research questions and answer them in light of my results. I then discuss the limitations of my study, directions for future research and end with my contributions in relation to previous studies.

11.1 Answering my research questions

*RQ1) How is homosexuality represented by the urban middle class in Bangalore?*

Homosexuality was represented in three ways: nature, nurture and culture. To revisit the social representation theory, Moscovici (1984) argues that the basic function of a representation is to make an object familiar through the processes of anchoring and objectification. The former involves comparing an object to a known category and judging it in terms of similarities and differences. In the latter, the iconic qualities of an abstract idea are emphasized. In representations of nature, participants of all generations compared homosexuality to heterosexuality. For the middle and older generation, a process of particularization occurred where the difference in biological functioning between homosexuals and heterosexuals was emphasized. As heterosexuality was considered ideal with men and women being complementary parts of a whole, homosexuality was considered unnatural, objectified as a disease, a genetic mutation and as imbalance. Hence in the objectification process, homosexuality is visualized as a genetic flaw or illness inside the person that disrupts his/her natural functioning.

However, for my participants of the younger generation, a generalization process occurred where the similarities between homosexuality and heterosexuality were emphasized. As both homosexuals and heterosexuals have basic biological needs for sex and homosexuality is thought to be innate, it was seen as something natural and to be accepted. Hence, it was objectified as basic needs such as food. As public discourse on homosexuality and indeed the very law criminalizing it terms it as unnatural, it is not surprising that the antimonies of natural versus unnatural have come to be thematized in my participants representations of homosexuality as nature. In addition, it is worth mentioning that heterosexuality appears to
have been naturalized for my participants. The idea of man-woman dualism has been taken out of its context of heterosexuality such that participants are not even familiar with the term but rather know it by the image of a man and woman together that it embodies. This supports Hakoköngäs and Sakki (2016) who argue that naturalization should be regarded as its own process as it becomes an anchoring point for other objects. In this case, heterosexuality became an anchoring point for homosexuality.

In representations of nurture, homosexuality was compared to a mild psychological disorder. The similarities between the processes causing both homosexuality and psychological illness were emphasized. Mental illness is still stigmatized in India and such a stigma is likely to be greater for the older generation and middle generation (Zieger et al., 2016). Hence, for participants of these generations, homosexuality was evaluated as something negative that required immediate intervention, either from the direct family or if need be, from a counsellor. However, for the younger generation, psychological illness is not as stigmatized. Having a mental illness which they compare homosexuality to is not seen as something positive among these participants but at the same time, as opposed to the idea of changing the person, there is an emphasis on acceptance based on sympathy. The iconic qualities or objectifications here included images of homosexuals as abused individuals, coming from dysfunctional families, having difficulties with the opposite sex and unable to have stable relationships.

Finally, in representations of culture, homosexuality was compared to deviance. A generalization process was at work here as well, with similarities between homosexuality and deviance highlighted. For the older and middle generation, norms regarding family life that give importance to the extended family and children as well as religious teachings remain important, hence deviation from these is evaluated negatively. However, for participants of the younger generation, social change has caused certain norms such as having children, getting married and meeting traditional gender expectations to be challenged and hence deviating from such norms was seen in a positive light. Thus, some of the images that homosexuality was objectified as include rebellion, a vice, freedom and difference.

The co-existence of these three representations in my participants of all generations and religions suggests the contradictions, conflicts and confusion that people are experiencing as a result of differential exposure to new information. Hence it appears that they use selective combinations of these three representations to complement their understanding of
homosexuality as a whole. Knowledge from different sources including religion, science and ideology are all conglomerated together in these representations. This suggests the possibility of cognitive polyphasia where different forms of knowledge cohabit and perform different functions. Some of the functions performed by these representations include protecting the laws of nature as well as God’s order of creation, emphasizing the desirability of psychological stability and maintaining social order.

**RQ2) How does the generation of participants appear in their representations of homosexuality?**

While all three representations of homosexuality are held by each generation, the manner in which homosexuality is evaluated and compared in the anchoring processes seems to be differ considerably across generations. In all three representations, homosexuality is evaluated positively by the younger generation as a result of which it is seen as natural, normal and a positive kind of deviance. However, for most of my older participants and some of those from the middle generation, homosexuality is evaluated negatively and hence is seen as unnatural, abnormal and a negative kind of deviance. The difference in generations appears to be related to their exposure to information. For the older and middle generation, homosexuality was and for some, still is a tabooed subject that was hardly talked about during their upbringing. When it was discussed, it was usually in a negative manner. Hence, even though there is alternative information today, some of them see their existing ideas as typical of their generation and dismiss the new information they might be exposed to.

The younger generation on the other hand is surrounded by information promoting the acceptance of homosexuality. With more of their own friends coming out as gay, homosexuality is not a tabooed topic and all of them perceive their generation to value difference and emphasize equality. Nevertheless, there are a few participants from the older generation and some from the middle generation who do see themselves as more accepting and attribute this to more exposure to information as well as being personally acquainted with a homosexual.

In addition, as discussed in answer to my first question, my participants of the middle and older generation emphasized the differences between homosexuality and heterosexuality. Some of my older participants also highlight their lack of awareness and knowledge about homosexuality and how it is a subject they do not think about. This suggests that for these participants, social representations of homosexuality might not function to make the
unfamiliar familiar and but instead to keep the unfamiliar distant, lending support to Kalampalikis and Haas (2008). Furthermore, participants of each generation had an awareness of not only their own representations of homosexuality but of elements of the representations of other generations as well. For instance, the older generation talked about how participants from the younger generation would consider homosexuality normal while those from the younger generation felt that the older generations were less informed and more intolerant about homosexuality. This would suggest the existence of what Wagner (1996) mentions as holomorphy or subjects’ knowledge about what other groups believe. As all generations shared some elements of all representations, I could not identify the presence of hegemonic or polemic representations. However, it is possible to describe my participants’ representations as emancipatory representations as Moscovici (1988) explains how these are created and shared by different subgroups, leading to complementary versions of the same phenomena co-existing in different parts of society.

**RQ3) How does the religion of participants appear in their representations of homosexuality?**

The role of religion in my participants’ representations of homosexuality was subtler than that of generation. In representations of nature, many Muslim and Christian participants of the older and middle generation referred specifically to God’s natural order of creation when talking about biological roles of men and women. This suggests that the importance that they gave to these roles was motivated by religious beliefs. In addition, all Christian and Muslim participants from all generations saw homosexuality as going against their religion but had different ways of dealing with this apparent conflict as mentioned in my results.

My participants who used strategies to reconcile their religion’s stance on homosexuality with their personal beliefs were not aware of broader movements advocating for reform and re-interpretation from within their religions. It is therefore interesting to note that the methods they used such as selective interpretation of religious texts, emphasis of historical and cultural specificity of religion and reading homosexuality in light of their religion’s overall message of acceptance are similar to those advocated by many scholars active in this area, particularly Islamic feminists such as Wadud (2006) and Barlas (2002). Among my Hindu participants, even the few of those who saw homosexuality as unnatural did not use their religion to justify their stance. Instead, importance of biological gender roles was emphasized. In addition, my Hindu participants were well versed in cultural products of ancient and medieval India such as the Kama Sutra and homoerotic temple art and most of them wished for a return to the
values they saw such products being created upon. They were also aware of the history of the
tLaw of homosexuality, associating the curbing of sexual exploration to the British. This
suggests that when homosexuality was disapproved of by Hindu participants, it was not
because of their religion which they saw as tolerant of all forms of sex. Rather, cultural norms
and ideas about gender expectations caused such disapproval.

As mentioned in my second chapter, Muslim cultural heritage from the medieval period
contained homoerotic poetry celebrating same sex love between men and such acts were not
seen to detract from masculinity (Vanita & Kidwai, 2008). However, there was no mention or
knowledge of such products among my Muslim participants. This suggests that the attempts
described by Arondekar (2009) to eradicate the homoerotic undertones in Muslim cultural
heritage in defence of colonial claims of Muslims being prone to sodomy were successful.

My Muslim participants who referred to their religion to justify their disapproval of
homosexuality had a tendency to emphasize how homosexuality is forbidden, not just by
Islam but by all religions, including Hinduism and Christianity. This can be seen to reflect
wider developments in Indian society where Islamophobia is rampant and Muslims are
looked down on (Kumar, 2016). Perhaps, an awareness of the inferior position that Muslims
occupy has caused my participants to legitimize their views by drawing on the dominant
religion of Hinduism as well as Christianity in addition to Islam. This in turn is an attempt to
show how the unacceptance of homosexuality is not peculiar to Islam or evidence of Islam’s
narrow-mindedness. The Muslim son appealing to his grandfather to re-think his stance on
the law criminalizing homosexuality by saying that laws targeting minorities are dangerous
also highlights an awareness of his minority position as a Muslim. As mentioned in my
methodology chapter, the difficulties I had in recruiting Muslim families where members of
the older generation were unwilling to speak about the subject may suggest that this is a
tabooed subject for older Muslim participants, perhaps particularly for Muslim women.

**RQ4) What are the functions of social representations of homosexuality in terms of
identities?**

In my participants’ representations of homosexuality, generation and religion both appeared
to serve an identity related function. By emphasizing differences between homosexuals and
heterosexuals and positioning themselves as lacking knowledge on some aspects of
homosexuality, participants of the middle and older generation tried to keep the unfamiliar
unknown. This served the purpose of maintaining the boundaries between their in-group of
heterosexual Indians and the out-group of homosexuals. However, my participants from the younger generation emphasized similarity and familiarity with homosexuals and thus, their representations served to validate ideas of equality and modernity. Religion was used a way to legitimize representations by my participants of the older and middle generation. For instance, Christians referred to biblical disapproval of homosexuality when justifying their views and Muslims referred to all religions in addition to Islam to validate their position. This can be seen as a way for them to place themselves on an equal footing to other religions and construct themselves as national subjects in a climate of Islamophobia.

Of the three representations of homosexuality, the representation of culture in particular had an identity function. It served to define an Indian identity in terms of family life, morality and heritage while also taking into account social change and new information. Homosexuals were either accommodated within these categories or excluded from them. In particular, the reluctance to classify women engaging in same sex acts as lesbians or homosexuals suggests that lesbians are seen as more threatening to national identity in a patriarchal society, even while changes in gender roles and expectations are taking place. In addition, ideas of what it means to be Indian were positioned in relation to the West. This means that human rights and rights for minorities come to be seen as a specifically Western project. Thus, homosexuality was to be rejected on the grounds of being alien as a Western import or accepted in order to conform to standards of modernity dictated by an enlightened and progressive West. None of my participants except for the Hindus associated the law criminalizing homosexuality with the British and most of them saw it as arising from regressive and uneducated Indians.

This shows how heavily the burden of colonialism still weighs on Indians who cannot associate Britain and the West with anything other than liberalism even though the reality of a colonial India was one of repression and division. The Hindus were aware that the law was a British product because until that period, sex for pleasure in different forms was celebrated in temples, religious texts and teachings. Hence, the change was particularly striking for those belonging to this religion and it seems like this knowledge of past liberalism was handed down through the generations of my Hindu participants. Most of the Hindus therefore had no trouble rejecting prudish British values which they saw as artificially imposed on a previously tolerant India. However, one of them while acknowledging the prudishness of the British felt that she had internalized such ideas and could not reject them. My younger participants all expressed acceptance of homosexuality. However, acceptance was built upon ideas of tolerance, rooted in Western liberal values that should be emulated by the upper
middle class. Thus, with regards to representations of culture in relation to identity, class intersects with religion and generation in the representations of homosexuality. This intersection is expressed in binaries between a regressive East and progressive West, and between a backward Indian lower class and forward thinking upper class.

**RQ5) How do scientific theories of homosexuality appear in the common-sense representations of homosexuality among my participants?**

Both the biological and psychiatric models of homosexuality discussed in Chapter 3 strongly appeared in my participants’ representations of homosexuality as nature and nurture respectively. In the representations as per the biological model, a strong difference was perceived between male and female sex organs. This served to naturalise men and women as complementary parts. Homosexuality was considered innate and physiological differences between homosexuals and heterosexuals were emphasized. Homosexuality was also perceived to be an inversion of the sex drive, with homosexual males considered to be effeminate and homosexual females considered to be masculine. Genes, hormones and the brain were all thought to play their part in causing homosexuality. Many activists in India and abroad have appropriated the ideas of the biological model to legitimize their claim to equal rights by arguing for the innateness of homosexuality (Grzanka, Zeiders and Miles, 2016). Similar arguments were used by my participants of the younger generation. However, the biological model was also used to justify attempts to cure homosexuality through hormonal treatments, which was advocated for by some of my participants from the middle and older generation.

Representations of nurture reflected ideas from the psychological model which saw homosexuals as a distinct species with feelings, latency and a psycho-social condition. (Weeks, 1986). Freudian ideas of psycho-analysis manifested in this representation of homosexuality, with the role of a dysfunctional family and troubled relationships with the opposite sex emphasized in causing homosexuality. Some of the same participants who thought of homosexuality as innate also felt that it could be triggered or brought out of the person by such traumatic circumstances, showing how a combination of biology and psychology were used.

To a lesser extent, ideas of social constructionism also manifested in a few of my participants representations, with the questioning of gender roles, challenging of stereotypes about homosexuals and emphasis on historical and cultural specificity of religion. As mentioned,
my participants who used strategies to reconcile their religious beliefs with their personal
stance on homosexuality did not express an awareness of broader movements of reform
within their religions. The similarity between so called scientific methods advocated to
achieve such reform and my participants’ common-sense ones may lend support to the idea
that the flow of information is not necessarily a one-way street from science to common
sense and that common-sense ideas could perhaps stimulate scientific concepts, as knowledge
is not produced in a vacuum.

11.2 Limitations

This research has a few limitations which are important to address. It aimed to explore local
meanings given to homosexuality among a small urban upper middle-class sample in
Bangalore. Hence, the findings are not generalizable and cannot be applied to homosexuality
in other contexts. Bangalore is also different from many Indian cities in the manner in which
it transformed from a small city to a major metropolis. This makes it difficult to extend this
study to other settings in India which is a very heterogeneous country. The uneven gender
distribution within my sample as well as the use of a non-random sampling strategy could
also invite criticism. As I mentioned in Chapter 7, this could reflect larger societal patterns of
women staying at home and having a more flexible schedule and the use of personal contacts
was necessary to gain access to the setting I chose. Furthermore, using randomised sampling
is necessary for generalizable results, which was never the aim of this qualitative study on
contextual meanings of homosexuality. I could also be faulted for choosing to study an urban
middle-class sample rather than a rural one as India’s rural population makes up seventy
percent of the country’s population. However, as homosexuality is a tabooed subject,
accessing a different sample would have been very difficult. Moreover, the complex
manner in which my participants values, beliefs, ideas and knowledge about homosexuality is
structured and intersects with their class, religion and generation does lend an argument to the
importance of approaching homosexuality from a social representation perspective.

Furthermore, there are some methodological weaknesses: my position as a young Indian girl
may have prevented me from clarifying certain answers from my participants as I was
worried it could be interpreted as disrespect from the older participants. Disturbances in the
household during the interview also caused some participants to rush through the remaining
interview. It is also necessary to discuss the extent to which my interview questions shaped
my participants’ representations of homosexuality. I discussed families, meanings and
knowledge of homosexuality and heterosexuality, sex and sexuality, religion, legislation and homoerotic art with my participants. While religion, families, man-woman dualism, knowledge of homosexuality and sex were ideas that came up even without my explicit questions on such subjects, issues related to law and cultural products were mostly answered in response to my questions. Hence, asking different questions might have changed the prominence that these categories then assumed in my sub-themes. However, a central idea of social representations is that people have the agency to question and challenge knowledge. The manner in which my stimuli were engaged with by my participants suggests that they were active participants in co-constructing shared ideas of homosexuality. Finally, my results are subject to the limitations of my interpretations and a different researcher might have interpreted the same findings differently. Nevertheless, I have tried to make my analysis and entire methodology as transparent as possible.

11.3 Future Directions

Perhaps the most significant question of a study is the one that comes when it is completed, “What now?” The findings revealed by my study make it a useful starting point for both practical and theoretical applications. Practical initiatives could involve the undertaking of interventions to reduce prejudice in older and middle generations. In addition, assessing whether exposure to information about the history of homosexuality in India changes some of the binaries constructed by all generations between the East and West and backward and forward Indians could be a good way to tackle these dividing polarisations. Furthermore, all but one of my participants had no desire to know more about homosexuality as they did not consider it a personally relevant subject. This passivity of not wanting to engage in a subject that is not of personal importance might inhibit people who are not gay from taking an active interest in advocating for gay rights in India. Hence, this brings up the question of how it could be made personally relevant. Campaigns showing young people coming out and parents dealing with this process with empathy and acceptance could be one way to connect more people with what they currently see as merely an abstract reality. More campaigns specifically featuring lesbians would also be a step towards increasing their visibility in a society where they lack it. Such campaigns should not be limited to social media platforms as has been the case with the advertisement featuring a lesbian couple used in this thesis as a stimulus. Spreading these campaigns through more traditional mediums such as television channels could enable more exposure to their message, particularly by the older and middle
generations. However, as long as homosexuality is criminalized, it is unlikely that such campaigns could materialize.

More theoretical directions could explore the under researched area of how the homosexual community in India represent homosexuality themselves. This would complement this research and may offer an innovative way of bridging the divide that has existed between social representations and social identity. The male centric nature of many of my participants’ representations of homosexuality and their reluctance to see women engaging in same sex acts as homosexuals is an avenue that could also be useful to pursue in future research. This could involve separate studies specifically on the social representation of lesbians in India. In addition, the importance of gender in my participants’ representations of homosexuality also points to the need of understanding changing ideas of masculinity, femininity and gender roles in the Indian context. Furthermore, my research setting is unique in the way it transformed from a small city to a large urban metropolis housing a huge concentration of IT industries. As a result, the changes in the generations are perhaps more noticeable here than they would be in other Indian cities. It could be worth exploring whether similar religious and generational differences can be found in other Indian cities that have not had the same growth. Furthermore, representations of homosexuality are likely to be very different among a rural inter-generational sample who have their own local customs and are not exposed to media in the same manner as my participants. Thus, representations among Indians living in rural settings could be another area worth pursuing.

11.4 Contributions and concluding remarks

My study offers unique insights into the contextualized meanings given to homosexuality by participants of different generations and religions, the functions served by their representations and the mechanisms of anchoring and objectification involved in the representation process. Majority of respondents in a national Indian survey felt that homosexuality was unnatural, should be illegal and was against culture (CNN IBN, 2009). My study went beyond assessing such evaluations to reveal the processes that lead to the construction of homosexuality as unnatural and deviation. It also shows how these are not the only ways that people perceive homosexuality in India.

Previous studies on the causes of homosexuality such as Sheldon et al. (2007) and Jeolás and Paulilo (2008) have found that people categorize homosexuality either as innate or acquired. However, for my participants, representations of homosexuality as nature and nurture
overlapped and complemented each other rather than being mutually exclusive. Compared to Boyce & Khanna’s (2011) study, my participants were quick to characterise married men engaging in same sex acts as homosexuals. This suggests that the idea of a distinct homosexual identity reserved for those engaged in same sex acts has come to exist in India. This is perhaps owing to more information being available about homosexuality among the general public than at the time of their study as well as a recognition of the pressure to marry that could force a homosexual man into a heterosexual marriage. However, my participants did not think women engaging in same sex acts were necessarily homosexuals. This supports theorists who have emphasized the invisibility of lesbians in India. For instance, Bacchetta (2002) and Vanita (2002) attribute this to a feature of a patriarchal society where women violating gender roles are perceived particularly threatening to national identity. In countries with a colonial history, homosexuality was seen to be a European import with a dichotomy between the east and west (M’Baye, 2013; Sadgrove et al., 2012). This was a theme that was also prominent in my research in addition to my participants other ideas of what it means to be Indian. Like participants in Siraj’s (2009) study who cast homosexuals as a distinct other as they were thought to violate Islamic gender roles, some of my participants of the older and middle generation also engaged in practices to other homosexuals and maintain distance from them. The role of having personal contact with homosexuals in reducing prejudice has been well-documented (Grzanka, et al., 2016). My study also supported this. In addition to offering a more holistic picture on isolated themes that have come up in previous literature, my study offers unique insight into processes of social change. India is considered a collectivistic country and previous studies such as Srivastava & Singh (2015) emphasizing the link between social stigma about homosexuality and collectivism. However, my research revealed a shift from looking at the welfare of the entire family to looking at the personal happiness of a child, allowing more room for the acceptance of homosexuality. In addition, different processes were at work in anchoring the representations of my participants from the younger and older generations. Thus, nuances in value change were captured in a way that large scale survey data is simply not amendable to. Moreover, the idea of private acceptance and public prohibition of homosexuality expressed by some of my participants reflects neo-liberal ideas where governance should be limited to the public sphere and intervention in the private domain should be minimal. Many activists in India advocate for rights using a similar argument as discussed by Narrain (2004). However, these demands do
not always lead to an improved situation for gays as found by Roman and Alenka (2013) as private acceptance in their study was accompanied by public discrimination and hate crime.

At the time of conducting my research, I was asked by a neighbour what I was studying. When I told him that I was exploring how people of different generations and religions represented homosexuality, his next question was, “So you are investigating their attitudes?” I then went on to lecture him about how a social representation was much more than an attitude. I am glad that my results support this: my participants’ representations of homosexuality were multi-layered and deconstructing these layers showed how their class, generation, religion were woven into a very intricate picture. Appreciating this picture is necessary in order to design context specific interventions to reduce prejudice against homosexuals as well as to simply understand changing ideas of homosexuality against the larger social matrix.
References


Mill, James (1858). *The History of British India*. Madden


### Appendices

Appendix 1: Details about my participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Relation to me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CGM1 Christian grandmother</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Distant grand-aunt by marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CM1 Christian mother</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Distant aunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD1 Christian daughter</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Distant cousin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGM2 Christian grandmother</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Grand aunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CM2 Christian mother</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Aunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD2 Christian daughter</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Designer</td>
<td>Cousin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HGM1 Hindu grandmother</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>Counsellor</td>
<td>Mother of family friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HM1 Hindu mother</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Currently not working but had a number of administrative jobs in the past</td>
<td>Family friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HD1 Hindu daughter</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Writer</td>
<td>Daughter of family friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HGM2 Hindu grandmother</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Mother of family friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HM2 Hindu mother</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Currently not working but worked in sales in the past</td>
<td>Family friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HD2 Hindu daughter</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Daughter of family friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MGM Muslim grandmother</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>Various charitable endeavors</td>
<td>Mother of family friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM1 Muslim mother</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Family friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MD1</td>
<td>Muslim daughter</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Designer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MGF</td>
<td>Muslim grandfather</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MF</td>
<td>Muslim father</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Son of family friend</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2: Topic guide for interviews

Homosexuality in relation to the family and intimate relationships

> When you think of a family, what comes to mind? Who constitutes a family?

> Show pictures of different family types – ‘normal’, single parent, same sex parent etc with children and ask which type they think is the ideal family type and why?

> Have you encountered any of these alternative forms of family or any other types?

> Are there any alternative family structures that you see as being bad role models to children? Can they be good role models?

> What do you think about same sex parent families?

> What do children need their families to provide?

> Do you think that same sex parents would be able to meet the above mentioned needs? Elaborate on why or why not?

> If you had a child and he/she confided in you that he/she is gay, how would you feel? What would your reaction be?

> Now imagine that it is not your own child but a niece or a friend’s child. The parents come to you for advice, what would it be? How would you react on hearing it?

Personal understanding of homosexuality

> How do you understand homosexuality/ gay/lesbian? Who is a homosexual?

> Are there any circumstances that could cause one to display a preference for the same sex?

> If you could use one word to describe homosexuality, what would it be? Why?

> Are homosexuals and heterosexuals similar in many ways and/or distinct in many ways? How/why?

> What age were you when you first heard about homosexuality? How did you react to it? Was it difficult/easy to grasp? How did you make sense of it? How did you hear about it?

> Has your conception of it changed from the first time you ever heard about it?

> Have you got any new information about it?

> Would you like more information about it? What kind of information would you like to have?

> Have you discussed homosexuality with other people? Who? Has someone not been willing to talk about it?
> Who should give information about homosexuality to the new generation?

> Have you ever had contact with a homosexual? If yes, how did you know that the person was a homosexual? If no, how do you know what you know about homosexuals?

> If a man engaged in sexual acts with another man would you identify them as homosexuals?

> If a woman engaged in sexual acts with another woman, would you identify them as homosexuals?

> Would you think of men who are married and have families but occasionally have sex with other men as homosexuals? Why/why not?

> Would you think of women who are married and have families but occasionally have sex with other women as homosexuals? Why/why not?

> Is it okay for homosexual couples who are unable to have children to adopt or to have foster children? Why/why not?

> Is it okay for homosexuals to use assisted reproductive technologies? Why/why not?

> What do you see as the main function of an intimate relationship? Is a homosexual relationship capable of fulfilling this function?

**Views on sexuality**

> Is sex important in an intimate relationship? Why/why not?

> What do you see as the main function of sex?

> If procreation is indeed the primary function of a relationship, then should heterosexual couples who are unable to have children also refrain from having sex?

> Is it okay for couples who are unable to have children to adopt? Are there any people who you think should not be allowed to adopt?

> What makes sex morally justifiable?

> Are there any types of sexual practices and relationships that are immoral in your opinion? Are there any sexual practices that should be made criminal offences? Are there any sexual practices you think are not normal?

**Religion and homosexuality**

> How does your religion view homosexuality?

> Are there any sexual practices and behaviours that your religion would consider wrong?
Do your religious texts specifically mention that homosexuality is sinful?

Does religion influence the way you view homosexuality?

**Societal expectations of masculinity and femininity**

When thinking of homosexual couples what image comes to your mind?

What do you perceive to be masculine?

What do you perceive to be feminine?

What expectations exist in society for men? Are they different from the expectations for women?

Does homosexuality incompatible with these ideas of what is typically masculine and feminine?

Show video clip of lesbian couple ad here and see how they react to it. Specifically ask how they interpreted the message, how they judge this message, what they think of the couple represented there

**Legislation, culture and homosexuality**

Are you aware that homosexuality is a criminal offense under Section 377 of the Indian penal code? How do you feel about this? Where do you think the legislation comes from?

Does your perception of it change if you hear that this was a law imposed on Indians by the British in colonial times?

Do you think that the law protects Indian culture in any way?

Do you know that the law criminalizing homosexuality is in the same section as those prohibiting sex crimes such as rape and paedophilia? Do you think this is justified? Do you think homosexuality can be equated to these other sex crimes?

Do you think homosexuality should be criminalized?

Is there any circumstance that can justify the decriminalization of homosexuality?

What do you know about homosexual organisations? Should they be better organized?

What do you think about the Kama Sutra as a piece of Indian history? What does it reflect about our culture and values?

Do you think India was tolerant of homosexuals at any point in history? When do you think this changed?
Khajuraho temples- one of the most visited and famous temples in India. Gandhi considered them an abomination and wanted to destroy them. How do you feel about having this as part of our cultural history?
Appendix 3: Stimuli for interviews

Stimulus 1: Pictures of families


**Stimulus 2: Advertisement**  
Link to advertisement: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ef27m5ocK6Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ef27m5ocK6Q)
Appendix 4: Information Sheet

Information Sheet

This research is undertaken by Keshia D’silva, a master’s degree student in Social Psychology in fulfilment of her thesis at the University of Helsinki. It aims to explore understandings of homosexuality specifically and relationships in general. Confidentiality will be maintained in terms of identity. You are free to ask any questions you need to prior to agreeing to be a part of the study.
Appendix 5: Consent Form

Keshia D’silva  
Master’s Student  
University of Helsinki

Informed Consent Form  
Study of homosexuality

I, the undersigned, confirm that (please tick as appropriate)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I have read and understood the information about the project, provided in the information sheet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>I voluntarily agree to participate in the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalized for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>The procedures regarding confidentiality have been clearly explained to me (no use of names, anonymity, deletion of tapes after transcription)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>The use of the data in research, publication, sharing and archiving has been explained to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>I understand that other researchers may have access to this data but only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the data and agree to all the terms specified in this form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>I along with the researcher agree to sign and date this informed consent form</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Name of participant: ____________________________
Signature: ____________________________
Date: ____________________________

Name of researcher: ____________________________
Signature: ____________________________
Date: ____________________________