

Evaluating Different Dimensions of Gay and Lesbian Identities: a Comparative Study

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Abstract

Introduction: *This study is based on the fact that developing a positive gay or lesbian identity is a multidimensional process comprised of both individual and social mechanisms that facilitate self-acceptance and assimilation of one's minority identity into the dominant heterosexual social norms.*

Objectives: *The main objectives of this study are to investigate and compare different dimensions of gay and lesbian identities and to set out different identity profiles corresponding to these dimensions.*

Methods: *The methodological instrument used was the LGBIS scale, which was translated and adapted to the purpose of this research.*

Results: *According to the obtained results, the study's hypotheses have been confirmed. As compared to lesbian women, gay men have higher levels of internalized homonegativity, are more concerned about being rejected by others because of their sexual orientation and have a greater need to be accepted by those around them. In addition, people who are confused about their sexual orientation and identity show more negative thoughts and experiences in relation to having a gay or lesbian identity as compared to subjects who have defined their sexual identity as gay or lesbian. The study also underlined the fact that the dimensions measured can structure two identity profiles, which have been grouped around the internalized homonegativity dimension.*

Conclusions: *The study showed that there are significant differences between gay men and lesbian women regarding the acceptance and assumption of their sexual identity. Also, there are significant differences regarding the integration of gay or lesbian identity into a unified self-concept between persons who have clarified and defined their sexual identity as being gay or lesbian and those who are experiencing a state of identity confusion. In addition, the different dimensions of gay and lesbian identities have highlighted two types of identity profiles: a profile with increased levels of self-acceptance and assumption, and another profile with low levels of self-acceptance and assumption of identity.*

Keywords: *self-acceptance, identity confusion, identity profiles, internalized homonegativity*

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Introduction

The process of developing a homosexual identity implies specific mechanisms and dynamics and can be seen as an interactive and multidimensional system (Riggle & Rostosky, 2012; Rostosky, Riggle, Pascale-Hague & McCants, 2010). In the case of gay or lesbian identity, we are actually talking about a process of psychosexual and personal reconstruction, which begins the moment the person realizes he or she is different from others, meaning that his/her attractions, feelings, interests, desires and needs do not correspond to the heterosexual model. In a socio-cultural context dominated by landmarks, models and norms specifically heterosexual, developing a gay identity becomes a demarche in reconstructing the self-concept and reintegration into the dominant culture (King, Burton & Giese, 2009; Riggle & Rostosky, 2012). In addition, gay and lesbian people internalize the negative social attitudes and perceptions regarding homosexuality, which can lead to strong inner conflicts in the process of accepting and assuming one's minority sexual identity (Williamson, 2000; Herek, 2003). Thus, a positive integration of one's gay identity is based on separating from the social and communitarian mythologies regarding homosexuality and developing a sense of personal value in agreement with the person's homoerotic attractions, feelings and desires. Also, we cannot lose sight of the importance of the public aspects of identity, because a harmonious and unified identity is based on a balance between the private aspects of identity and the public (social) ones.

A specific identity challenge in the life of gay and lesbian persons is coming out. There are lots of examples when gay people develop a public identity based on hiding their sexual identity. Similar to heterosexual identity, gay identity is strongly related to a person's roles in society and to the need of belonging to a group. But because homosexuality had been defined in the past as a psychosexual abnormality, even to this day there are still a lot of stereotypes and prejudice which can make a gay person feel unsafe to affirm his/her identity in a social context. The stigma of homosexuality thus creates a psychosocial dilemma for gay men and lesbian women: they can choose to either build themselves a social heterosexual mask which is socially acceptable and this way separate their private identity from their social identity or they can choose to reveal their sexual identity, with the risk of confronting themselves later on with possible situations of rejection, marginalization, isolation or discrimination (Herek, 2003). Though the need to reveal oneself to others is natural in every interpersonal

relationship and coming out as gay or lesbian contributes to building authentic relationships, based on honesty and trust and increasing self-esteem and even changing some negative attitudes towards homosexuality (Herek & Capitano, 1996; Garnets & Kimmel, 2003). As opposed to this, maintaining the secret of one's homosexual identity and often a painful and conflictual experience because it can lead to an inner splitting between a person's personal and social identity (D'Augelli, 1994).

Fassinger (1998) developed a model of homosexual identity formation based on two parallel processes: one process related to individual identity and another process related to group identity. The individual process refers to becoming aware and accepting one's gay identity, while the group process is centered on what it means to be gay or lesbian in society and on the person's role inside the gay community. Both processes develop in four specific phases:

Forming an individual sexual identity

1. Awareness – the person perceives herself and feels different from those around her.
2. Exploration of one's feelings and attractions towards same sex persons.
3. Deepening – the person's feelings related to being gay or lesbian are strengthened and the homosexual identity is defined.
4. Internalizing the erotic attraction and romantic feelings towards same sex persons.

Forming a group sexual identity

1. Awareness of the existence of different sexual orientations besides the dominant heterosexual one.
2. Exploration of one's relationship with other members of the gay and community or with the gay/lesbian community itself.
3. Commitment to the gay and lesbian community and accepting that there are possible consequences related to belonging to a minority social group.
4. Internalizing the group identity in different life contexts.

According to this model, the dynamic of forming a homosexual identity is circular, which implies that a person can come back to a previous stage as a way to respond to inevitable life changes. Also, because personal identity and social identity are separate, representing two different segments of sexual identity, the dynamics of one process are not necessarily simultaneous to the dynamics of the other process. Thus, these identity dynamics are catalytic.

Fassinger (1998) believes that the formation of homosexual identity has two main purposes: the acceptance of one's sexual identity, which had been perceived prior as irrelevant or blamable and assuming one's belonging to a minority group, which had also been perceived as irrelevant or blamable.

Gay people are faced with a social stigma because they "deviate" from heterosexual norms. In addition, both gay men and lesbian women struggle with defining their identity, fear of rejection or discrimination, coming out, internalizing the negative social messages regarding homosexuality and developing a positive social identity (group identity). However, gay men and lesbian women can manifest individual differences in adapting and finding inner resources to cope with these specific challenges, but in general, these psychosocial identity phenomena are the ground for building self and group identities.

Gay and lesbian persons face specific challenges regarding the formation of a positive identity in a social context of stigmatization of homosexual identity and marginalization of people belonging to this minority group. The individual differences in relation to integrating an identity with a strong social stigma has a significant influence towards the psychological functioning of the individual, more precisely towards the person's well-being, the quality of one's interpersonal relationships and the ability to cope with prejudice, discrimination or marginalization (Meyer, 2007). Therefore, it is important to develop means of measuring certain constructs related to the psychological dynamic of accepting, assuming and integrating a gay or lesbian identity.

One important aspect in evaluating homosexual identity is establishing the variables which are going to be measured. Gay and lesbian identities, like other collective identities, including the heterosexual one, are multidimensional. Until now, most research has concentrated on a limited number of variables related to the formation and integration of a gay or lesbian identity. The variable which received most attention from researchers has been internalized homophobia (Williamson, 2000), together with hiding – the secrecy of homosexual identity and heterosexuals' negative perceptions towards homosexuality (Meyer, 2007). The theorists of social identity have identified a large number of variables related to accepting and assuming one's homosexual identity, such as the importance of group affiliation, intergroup comparison or the degree of certainty a person has regarding his/her belonging to a social group (Ashmore, Deaux & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004).

Mohr and Kendra (2011) have defined eight dimensions of homosexual identity:

- Internalized homonegativity, which refers to the degree of negativity that gay and lesbian individuals associate with their minority sexual identity;
- Acceptance concerns, which underlines how unsure gay people feel around heterosexual people and how worried/concerned are they regarding the attitudes and perceptions of others towards their sexual orientation;
- Concealment motivation, which defines the degree of hiding a homosexual identity from other persons and how much gay and lesbian people fear that they can lose control over coming out;
- Identity uncertainty, which refers to how sure gay and lesbian people are regarding their sexual orientation (how they define themselves from a sexual point of view);
- Difficult process, which takes into consideration how difficult or challenging it has been to accept one's sexual minority identity;
- Identity superiority, which refers to what measure gay men and lesbian women feel superior to heterosexual persons, as a result of belonging to a minority social group, which doesn't have the same social privileges as the majority group, but also as a result of the fact that developing a homosexual identity is, in most cases, a difficult process;
- Identity affirmation, which defines the way in which gay people associate positive thoughts and emotions with their sexual identity and their social belonging to a minority group;
- Identity centrality, which refers to the level in which one aspect of a person's self-identity (in this case, the homosexual orientation) represents an essential aspect for the person's self-concept.

Studies have shown that these dimensions are correlated to different psychological constructs, which can help us better understand the dynamic of forming a homosexual identity, especially when working in therapy with gay and lesbian clients. Internalized homophobia has been correlated with ego-dystonic homosexuality, depression, guilt, fear, sadness and hostility (Pharr, 1997; Burn, 2000; Palmer, 2004; Mohr & Kendra, 2011). The difficulty of the process of accepting one's homosexual identity has been

negatively correlated with the person's satisfaction regarding his/her own life, social self-esteem and self-trust (Reich, Zautra & David, 2007; Mohr & Kendra, 2011). Identity superiority has been negatively correlated with the interest in interacting with heterosexual people (Kwon, 2013), while identity centrality was positively associated with how important a person's identity is and social orientation towards the belonging social minority group (Haslam, Jetten, Postmes & Haslam, 2009; Riggle & Rostosky, 2012; Keyes, 1998). Affirming one's sexual identity within interpersonal relationships and in different social contexts was found to positively correlate with an increased level of satisfaction regarding the person's life, as well as increased self-esteem and self-trust (Moradi, Mohr, Worthington & Fassinger, 2009; Higa et al., 2014; Rostosky et al., 2010, Mohr & Kendra, 2011).

Objectives

The **main objective** of this study is to investigate different dimensions of homosexual identity in order to outline the mechanisms and dynamics of accepting and assuming a gay or lesbian identity and the unique way in which these aspects are configuring themselves in a gay or lesbian person's self-identity. Knowing these dimensions is important in the therapeutic process centered on specific gay or lesbian identity issues, because it facilitates a therapeutic intervention oriented towards the unique way in which every individual builds his identity and defines himself, both personally and socially.

We consider that the delimitation of identity profiles according to the different dimensions of gay and lesbian identity has an important psychodiagnostic value that highlights the unintegrated or unacceptable dimensions of sexual identity, as well as the dysfunctional strategies of adapting and assuming one's gay or lesbian identity.

As **specific objectives** we considered the evaluation of possible differences between gay men and lesbian women regarding their identity self-acceptance and assumption, as well as understanding and evaluating homosexual identity in a multidimensional way, including dimensions that relate to both the individual's specificity and the community and social context in which the person lives.

Hypotheses

1. We assume there is a significant difference between gay men and lesbian women regarding the rejection of their homosexual identity.

2. We assume there is a significant difference between gay men and lesbian women regarding acceptance concerns.
3. We assume there is a significant difference between gay men and lesbian women regarding identity affirmation in social contexts.
4. We assume there is a significant difference regarding the difficulty of the process between gay and lesbian persons who have defined their identity and those who are still experiencing identity confusion.
5. We assume there is a significant difference regarding the rejection of their own identity between those persons who have defined their homosexual identity and those who are confused about their sexual identity.
6. We assume that the variation of the different dimensions of gay/lesbian identity will describe specific identity profiles.

Methodological instruments

In order to achieve the objectives and test the hypotheses mentioned above, we have used the LGBIS scale (Mohr & Kendra, 2011). The original version of this scale, aimed at assessing the dimensions of lesbian, gay and bisexual identity, has been translated and adapted to the specificity of the present research, whose main purpose is to evaluate the dimensions of gay and lesbian identity. The scale proved to have a high reliability and in consequence, every item justifies its presence within the scale (Molnar, 2015).

The LGBIS scale was developed as a way of assessing the multiple dimensions and facets of homosexual identity. An important aspect that Mohr and Kendra (2011) took into account in building the scale was conceptualizing and assessing identity in the same way for gay men and lesbian women. The authors of the scale considered that there are more similarities than differences in the process of sexual identification and integration for gay men and lesbian women. All gay and lesbian individuals face a social stigma because of their "deviation" from the heterosexual norms. In addition, gay men and lesbian women are facing common difficulties related to defining their identity, fear of rejection or discrimination, disclosure of their sexual orientation, internalization of negative messages about homosexuality and building a positive social (group) identity. We are considering that although the internal process of sexual identification as gay or lesbian may be similar, gay men and lesbian women may exhibit individual differences in terms of adaptation and internal resonance of these

specific identity challenges. Generally, these psychosocial identity phenomena represent the foundation on which the individual builds his self- and group identity.

The LGBIS scale comprises 27 items, grouped into 8 subscales, designed to measure eight dimensions of homosexual identity: internalized homonegativity, acceptance concerns, concealment motivation, identity uncertainty, difficult process, identity superiority, identity affirmation and identity centrality.

The validity of the LGBIS scale (Mohr & Kendra, 2011) was investigated through two studies: the first study focused on the scale's factor analysis, validity and fidelity, and the second study aimed to investigate test-retest fidelity and the internal consistency of the eight subscales.

In the first study, exploratory factor analysis (N = 297) and confirmatory factor analysis (N = 357) validated a solution that consists in assessing the eight factors related to identity formation, acceptance and integration - acceptance concerns, identity uncertainty, internalized homonegativity, process difficulty, identity superiority, identity affirmation and identity centrality. In order to investigate the construct validity of the LGBIS scale, Mohr & Kendra (2011) had also applied to subjects different other instruments that measured identical or similar constructs to those measured by the LGBIS subscales. Thus, study participants completed scores and questionnaires evaluating internalized homonegativity, identity affirmation and identity commitment, perception of social affirmation of identity, concealment of identity, identity disclosure, and the level of interaction with heterosexual persons.

The correlation coefficients for the LGBIS subscales varied between 0.70 and 0.92 between the first and the second completion of the same instrument. These data highlight the fact that there is a moderate increase in the stability of LGBIS scale scores over time (for a 6-week period). The Cronbach Alpha coefficient values varied for the 8 subscales between a minimum of 0.72 and a maximum of 0.94, indicating a good internal consistency of the measured subscales.

Procedure

The translated version of the LGBIS scale was adapted to the specific of our research (we gave up terms and formulations referring to the bisexual identity and only kept and translated those referring to the homosexual identity, including both gay and lesbian women). The scale was uploaded on an online platform, the administration of the scale taking place only in the online environment.

Participants

The research group included a number of 148 subjects, with the following characteristics:

- 86 of the subjects investigated were lesbian women (57.8%) and 62 were gay men (42.2%);
- subjects were aged between 18 and 64 years old, with the majority between 18-35 years old (85.8%);
- subjects had different levels of training, ranging from middle school graduation (4.8%) to doctoral studies (5.5%), with a majority (48.3%) holding a bachelor's degree;
- in terms of sexual identification, 90.4% of the subjects defined themselves as having a gay or lesbian orientation, and 9.6% considered themselves to be confused about their sexual identity.

Results

Hypothesis 1

To test this hypothesis, we measured the level of the dependent variable, which was the degree of rejection of the homosexual identity (the internalized homonegativity dimension) for the two independent samples. For the female sample, the average was 1.68, the standard deviation being 1.07, and for the male sample, the average was 1.99 with a standard deviation of 1.02.

Between the averages of the two samples a significant difference was obtained at the level of the investigated trait, captured by the Mann-Whitney U test, whose value is -2.95, at a significance level $p = 0.004$, bilateral.

	Score_IH
Z	-2.95
Asimp. Sig. (bilateral)	.004

Table 1. Mann-Whitney Test results internalized homonegativity

Consequently, the tested hypothesis is confirmed, and we assert that there is a significant difference between men and women in terms of the score on the scale of rejection of one's own homosexual identity.

These data show us that homosexual men have a higher level of internalized homonegativity than lesbian women, which implies that gay men face more self-acceptance difficulties than lesbian women.

Hypothesis 2

To test this hypothesis, we measured the level of the dependent variable, namely the negative social perception of homosexuality (acceptance concerns dimension) for the two independent samples. In the case of the female sample, the average was 2.65, the standard deviation being 1.31, and for the male sample, we obtained an average of 3.31, with a standard deviation of 1.24.

Between the averages of the two samples a significant difference was obtained at the level of the investigated trait, the Mann-Whitney U test's value being -3.024, at a significance level $p = 0.002$, bilateral.

	Score_AC
Z	-3.024
Asimp. Sig. (bilateral)	.002

Table 2. Mann-Whitney Test result acceptance concerns

According to the obtained results, the tested hypothesis is confirmed and we assert that there is a significant difference between homosexual men and lesbian women regarding the negative social perception of homosexuality. This data is showing us that, compared to lesbian women, gay men feel more insecure and fearful around heterosexual people and are more concerned about the perceptions and negative attitudes of those around them about their sexual identity.

Hypothesis 3

To test this hypothesis, we measured the level of the dependent variable, which was in this case the tendency to affirm one's gay or lesbian identity in social contexts (identity affirmation dimension) for the two independent samples. For the female sample, the average was 4.74, the standard deviation being 0.98, and for the male sample, the average was 3.90, with a standard deviation of 1.25.

	Score_IA
Z	-3.791
Asimp. Sig. (bilateral)	.000

Table 3. Mann-Whitney Test results identity affirmation

Between the averages of the two samples a significant difference was obtained at the level of the investigated trait, the Mann-Whitney U test showing a value of -3.791, at a significance level $p < 0.001$, bilateral.

Thus, the tested hypothesis is confirmed and we can affirm that there is a significant difference between gay men and lesbian women in asserting their sexual identity in a social context. These results suggest that lesbian women associate to a greater extent than homosexual men positive thoughts and experiences with their sexual identity and their belonging to a minority group. At the same time, it is suggested that homosexual men are less willing than lesbian women to express and manifest their sexual orientation in their interpersonal relationships.

Hypothesis 4

In the sample of the subjects who have defined their homosexual identity we have included those participants scored less than 2 at the identity uncertainty scale (the identity uncertainty dimension) and in the sample of subjects confused about their sexual orientation we have included the participants who had obtained a score higher or equal to 2 at the identity uncertainty scale.

To test this hypothesis, we measured the level of the dependent variable, namely the degree of difficulty of identity assumption (difficult process dimension), for the two independent samples. For the sample of people who defined their homosexual identity, the average was 2.85 and the standard deviation was 1.48, while for the sample of subjects confused about their sexual orientation we obtained an average of 3.47, with a standard deviation of 1.50.

Between the averages of the two samples a significant difference was obtained at the level of the investigated trait, as shown by the Mann-Whitney U test, whose value was equal to -2.17, at a significance level $p = 0.030$, bilateral.

	Score_DP
Z	-2.17
Asimp. Sig. (bilateral)	.030

Table 4. Mann-Whitney Test result difficult process

The results confirm the tested hypothesis and we can say that there is a significant difference between the

persons who have defined their homosexual identity and those confused about their sexual identity regarding the degree of difficulty of identity assumption. These results show that people experiencing a confusion about their own sexual identity have a greater degree of emotional discomfort related to being gay or lesbian than those who have defined their identity as gay or lesbian.

Hypothesis 5

We have included in the sample of people who have defined their homosexual identity subjects who have obtained a score lower than 2 at the identity uncertainty scale (identity uncertainty dimension). We considered people confused about sexual identity to be those subjects who had obtained a score higher or equal to 2 at the identity uncertainty scale.

To test this hypothesis, we measured the degree of rejection of one’s gay or lesbian identity (internalized homonegativity dimension) for the two independent samples. For the sample of people who have defined their homosexual identity, the average was 1.71, the standard deviation being 0.98, and for the sample of subjects experiencing confusion about their sexual identity, we obtained an average of 2.25, with a standard deviation of 1.16.

Between the two samples, a significant difference in the investigated trait was obtained by the Mann-Whitney U test, whose value was -3.195, at a significance level $p = 0.001$, bilateral.

	Score_IH
Z	-3.195
Asimp. Sig. (bilateral)	.001

Table 5. Mann-Whitney Test result internalized homophobia

As a result, the tested hypothesis is confirmed, and so we affirm say that there is a significant difference between people who have defined their gay or lesbian identity and those confused about their own identity. In other words, confused people have a higher level of internalized homonegativity than those who have defined themselves as being gay or lesbian. This implies that identity uncertainty or confusion is associated with negative experiences and concepts about homosexuality, which makes it difficult for individuals experiencing confusion about their sexual identity to

accept their own homoerotic attractions and behaviors. This data confirms patterns of homosexual identity formation (Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1993), claiming that the stage of identity confusion is characterized by mechanisms of rejection or repression of same sex attraction, feelings and behaviors.

Hypothesis 6

To verify if the data collected using the LGBIS scale can lead to identity profiles based on the investigated subscales, we have applied the cluster analysis with IBM SPSS STATISTICS 20.0.0. The eight subscales introduced in the analysis were structured around two profiles. The result of the analysis shows that the 8 variables are suitable indicators for clustering. Regarding the profile structuring, this was developed around the internalized homonegativity variable, which appeared to be the most important grouping factor.

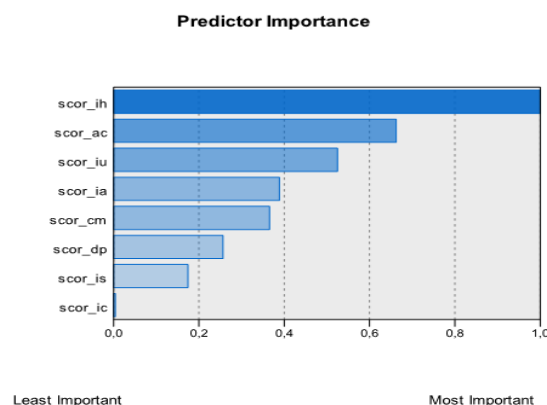


Fig. 1. Cluster structuring

The data shows that, depending on the score in the internalized homonegativity scale, subjects can be grouped into two categories, which outline two distinct identity profiles. Within the same profile, we can find subjects with similar scores for the rest of the variables, and between profiles we can notice differences in scores. Another relevant grouping factor is the variable acceptance concerns, which contributes to the structuring of the scores in the two profiles. The rest of the variables are of minor importance, as can be seen from the graph above.

Thus, we can state that the dynamics of gay and lesbian identity acceptance and assumption outlines two types of identity profiles: a profile with increased levels of self-acceptance and assumption that facilitates a positive integration of homosexual identity into the person’s self-concept and another profile with low levels of self-acceptance and identity assumption that

determines what we have defined as a conflictual identity. It is distinguished that the most important predictor in the evaluation of the formed identity profiles is the level of negativity that gay and lesbian people associate with their own sexual identity.

Further, using cluster analysis, it was determined that between the two delimited clusters there were differences in the average of the measured dimensions. There was also a difference in the size of the two clusters.

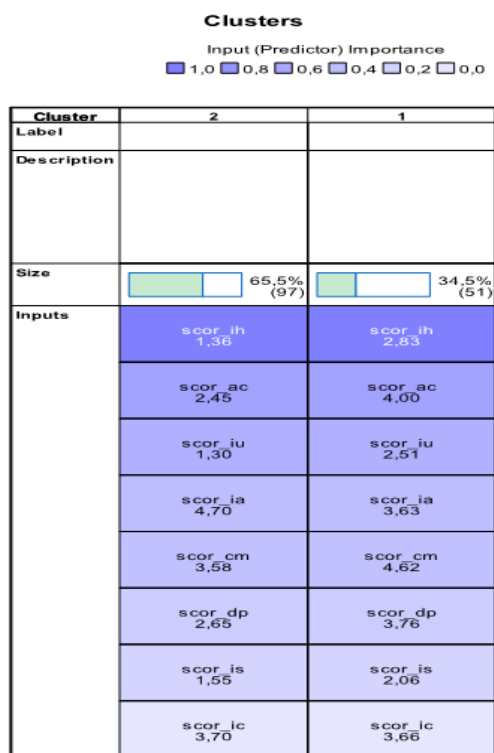


Fig. 2. Score variation according to cluster belonging

The first cluster includes 51 subjects, representing 34.5% of the total sample, and the second cluster consists of 97 subjects, representing the remaining 65.5% of the sample. As can be seen from the graph, there are differences between subscale averages, depending on cluster membership. Subjects in cluster 1, which have a high level of internalized homonegativity, have obtained higher means in most subscales (acceptance concerns, identity uncertainty, concealment motivation, difficult process and identity superiority), except for the identity affirmation subscale, where subjects in the cluster 2 showed higher levels. Consequently, we can assert that the hypothesis is confirmed, which implies that an integrated identity profile is characterized by low levels of internalized homonegativity, acceptance concerns, identity

confusion, identity concealment, difficult process and identity superiority, and an increased level of identity affirmation. The other profile, based on a conflicting identity is characterized by increased levels of internalized homonegativity, acceptance concerns, identity confusion, identity concealment, difficult process and identity superiority, and a low level of identity affirmation. Within profiles, one can see the specific way in which these mechanisms vary in the dynamics of identity acceptance and assumption, which has a relevant psychodiagnostic value.

Discussions

Gay and lesbian people form their sexual identity through the process of coming out both towards oneself and others, a process that is marked by increased levels of emotional distress (Savin-Williams & Cohen, 1996). This study aimed to investigate the dimensions of homosexual identity in a person-centered and multidimensional manner, allowing for the capture of specific individual patterns in the formation of the gay and lesbian identity.

Confirming the hypothesis that the variation in homosexual identity levels will describe specific identity profiles, our findings on homosexual identity dimensions have highlighted the existence of two identity profiles, each of which has specific patterns in measured dimensions. After analyzing the data obtained, most of the subjects in our sample were classified into a pattern of identity integration, while a smaller group of subjects was classified into a conflictual identity pattern. Gay and lesbian individuals included in the profile based on an integrated identity, compared to those included in the conflict-based profile, had lower scores in all the investigated dimensions, except for identity affirmation, where they obtained higher scores.

Subjects included in the profile of an integrated identity have obtained low scores of internalized homonegativity, identity uncertainty and identity superiority, suggesting that they feel more confident in their psycho-sexual identification as gay or lesbian, do not have negative affective reactions related to being gay or lesbian and do not tend to avoid interacting with heterosexual people. In addition, subjects in this profile have obtained average scores in terms of process difficulty and acceptance concerns, which means that in the case of an integrated identity, gay and lesbian people are less concerned and fearful about the negative way in which they can be perceived because of their sexual orientation and have a higher level of satisfaction for their own life as a gay or lesbian person in society.

Regarding the motivation of hiding and the centrality of identity, average scores were high, highlighting the fact that moderate levels of hiding and the need for intimacy are specific to gay and lesbian individuals who have accepted and assumed their sexual identity. The disclosure of homosexual identity is often a personal aspect, and therefore, homosexual men and lesbian women choose significant individuals to disclose their sexual orientation to and less significant individuals to whom they do not want or feel the need to disclose their sexual orientation. Coming out is a selective process, so even with an integrated identity, there are situations where gay and lesbian persons choose to hide their sexual orientation. However, high scores have been obtained regarding identity affirmation, suggesting that the subjects in this identity profile have positive feelings about their sexual identity and their belonging to a minority group. In other words, they have positively integrated their sexual identity into their self-identity.

The profile characterized by a conflicting identity indicates that some gay and lesbian people face difficulties or blockages in positively integrating their sexual identity. Within this profile, there have been obtained average scores of identity uncertainty and identity superiority, average to high scores of internalized homonegativity, identity centrality, process difficulty and identity affirmation, and high scores of acceptance concerns and concealment motivation. This data shows that even gay and lesbian individuals experiencing confusion or conflicts about their sexual identity have somehow clarified and defined their sexual orientation. In this context, it is highlighted that certain identity conflicts depend not only on the state of identity confusion, but may also depend on other factors such as negative expectations regarding being accepted by others, an increased level of internalized homonegativity and concealment, lack of social support etc. Also, the data obtained showed that the subjects included in this identity profile were more worried and fearful about the negative way in which they can be perceived by others because of their sexual orientation, having a low level of life satisfaction as a gay or lesbian person. In addition, increased levels of concealment may reflect their negative feelings related to being gay or lesbian, and emotional discomfort for their sexual orientation and the desire to remain "hidden" in order to avoid contact with these feelings and other people's possible rejection.

Most subjects were included in the integrated identity profile ($N = 97$ vs. $N = 51$), indicating that the majority of the gay and lesbian participants in the study

have positively integrated their sexual identity. However, the existence of the second profile, based on a conflictual identity, even if in a smaller percentage, provides us with empirical evidence that there are vulnerable gay and lesbian individuals in terms of self-acceptance and integration of their sexual identity into a unitary and positive self-concept. Even if most of the gay and lesbian people investigated do not pose a risk to develop a negative self-identity, these results highlight the fact that not all gay and lesbian people can develop their sexual identity in a positive manner.

A study conducted by Bregman, Malik, Page, Makynen and Lindahl (2012) also examined in a multidimensional way a model of gay and lesbian identity based on two identity profiles in relation to parental support. The results of this study showed that parental rejection and respectively parental support were salient links in the classification of the two outlined identity profiles.

There are several factors that can contribute to the variability of the mechanisms and dynamics involved in the process of forming a homosexual identity, some of these factors being related to gender (male / female) and the level of clarification of one's own sexual orientation, as we have assumed in this study. Our findings confirmed that there are significant differences between gay men and lesbian women regarding identity acceptance and assumption of their own sexual identity, and there are significant differences with regard to the identity integration into a unified concept between those who have clarified and defined their sexual identity and those experiencing a state of identity confusion.

The data showed that homosexual men have a higher level of internalized homonegativity than lesbian women, which means that men have more beliefs and negative feelings about being gay. In other words, men face more internal difficulties than women in accepting their gay identity and have more fears about the possibility of being rejected by others because of their sexual orientation. This difference can be explained through the general social expectations of men and women, and also through social attitudes towards gay men and lesbian women. As the results of another study have shown (Molnar, 2015), gay men are more likely than lesbian women to be rejected or aggressed because of their gay identity, and heterosexuals manifest more negative attitudes based on social distancing in relation to gay men. Thus, the increased difficulty of gay men in accepting and assuming their sexual identity can be viewed as an inner expression of social pressures linked

to rigid rules of masculinity, as well as negative attitudes towards gay men and gay relationships (Maddon, 1997).

There are several other studies which confirm this study's results, regarding differences in the process of self-acceptance and identity integration between gay men and lesbian women (Mohr & Fassinger, 2003; Floyd & Stein, 2002; Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000).

The results also indicated that gay men and lesbian women who have clarified their sexual identity are more available to separate themselves from stereotypes and prejudices about homosexuality and assert their identity as compared to those who are still "fighting" to accept their sexual identity. This shows that the state of identity confusion is associated with increased levels of negative feelings about being gay or lesbian and with the rejection of their own homoerotic attractions and emotions.

All this data is helping us understand in a complex and multidimensional way how homosexual identity is structured, its specific mechanisms and dynamics, and it also provides us with psychodiagnostic and clinical information. On the basis of this information we can outline the main directions of assistance and therapeutic intervention in order to help gay and lesbian clients increase their identity acceptance, assumption and positive integration of their sexual identity, especially with regard to the persons with blockages or internal conflicts in defining, accepting or assuming their sexual identity.

However, there are several limitations of this study. Firstly, the evaluation of the gay and lesbian identity included only the eight dimensions evaluated by the LGBIS scale (Mohr & Kendra, 2011). Other studies have also investigated other dimensions of the gay and lesbian identity, such as: self-awareness, authenticity, community, intimacy and social justice (Riggle, Rostosky, Mohr, Fingerhut & Balsam, 2014). As a future direction, these dimensions and several other instruments could be included in the evaluation of gay and lesbian identity to get a broader view of how gay and lesbian identities develop at both a personal and social level. Secondly, the participants in this study were limited only to the gay and lesbian population, but in the future, other studies could also include the evaluation of bisexual identity.

Conclusions

This study's main objective was to investigate the dimensions associated with the acceptance and assumption of the gay and lesbian identities (as defined by Mohr and Kendra, 2011) and the dynamics of these dimensions in the configuration of identity profiles based

on the integration of homosexual identity into the self-concept. In order to achieve these goals, we used the LGBIS scale developed by Mohr and Kendra (2011), whose items are grouped into 8 subscales, measuring 8 dimensions of homosexual identity: internalized homonegativity, acceptance concerns, motivation to hide, identity insecurity, process difficulty, identity superiority, affirmation of identity and the centrality of identity.

The results obtained from the quantitative analysis of the data collected showed that the variability of the mechanisms involved in the process of self-acceptance and assumption of gay and lesbian identities are related to gender and the level of clarification of one's own sexual orientation. Thus, we have outlined the existence of significant differences between gay men and lesbian women regarding the acceptance and assumption of their sexual identity and with regard to the integration of homosexual identity into a unified concept between gay men and lesbian women who have clarified and defined their sexual orientation and those who are experiencing a state of identity confusion.

Through this study, we have also highlighted that the dynamics of acceptance and assumption of gay and lesbian identities outlines two types of identity profiles: a profile based on the integration of the gay and lesbian identity, with increased levels of self-acceptance and assumption, and another profile based on an identity conflict, with low levels of self-acceptance and assumption of identity. Each of these profiles has specific patterns in measured mechanisms / dimensions, the integration of homosexual identity into the person's self-identity largely depending on the level of self-acceptance and internalized homonegativity.

The implications of the study on the dimensions of gay and lesbian identities and their dynamics in the configuration of specific identity profiles have both a psychodiagnostic and clinical value, as well as an applicative value. Based on these psychodiagnostic and clinical data, therapists can set their directions in the therapeutic intervention process in order to help their gay and lesbian clients struggling with their identity to increase the level of acceptance, assimilation, and positive integration of their minority sexual identity.

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