Positive LGBQ+ Identity and Its Association with Demographics and Depression Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Young Adults

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Background

- A positive identity is a key factor in the lives of young people with a lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or other sexual minority identity (LGBQ+), yet this construct is understudied in the field of LGBQ+ mental health.
- A positive LGBQ+ identity encompasses elements of being authentic (authenticity) and being self-aware (self-awareness) of one's sexual orientation identity, and that one would be feeling a sense of belonging within the LGBQ+ community (community) (Riggle et al., 2014).
- Previous literature has noted the potential benefits of holding a positive LGBQ+ identity for mental well-being of LGBQ+ young adults (Fingerhut et al., 2010; Pereira & Silva, 2021; Rostosky et al., 2018).
- Although there is support for hypothesizing that a positive LGBQ+ identity is inversely related to depressive symptoms, implying a protective effect (Kaniuka et al., 2019; Oginni et al., 2017), the empirical literature is limited and shows inconsistent findings, which necessitates more investigation of this relationship.

Current Study

To foster a better understanding of positive LGBQ+ identity and its potential protective role on LGBQ+ young adult mental health, this study examined how levels of positive LGBQ+ identity varied based on demographic factors and investigated the associations between positive LGBQ+ identity and depression among LGBQ+ young adults.

The research aims for our study were the following:
(1) What are the levels of positive LGBQ+ identity among LGBQ+ young adults in the South?
(2) How do the levels of positive LGBQ+ identity vary based on different demographic factors?
(3) What is the relationship between positive LGBQ+ identity and depression? It is hypothesized that high levels of positive LGBQ+ identity will be related to lower levels of depressive symptoms.

Methods

Recruitment and Participants:

The study was based on cross-sectional data from a sample of 79 LGBQ+ participants (aged 18-28 years) in a Southeastern state. Limited research has investigated LGBQ+ identity issues and mental health in the South, despite the hostile social environments in this U.S. region.

Measures:

Three subscales (self-awareness, authenticity, and community connectedness) from the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Positive Identity Measure (LGB-PIM; Riggle et al., 2014) were modified and used to measure levels of positive LGBQ+ identity of the participants.

We used the Short Mood and Feelings Questionnaire (SMFQ) to measure depressive symptoms of the participants (Angold et al., 2005).

Results

Descriptive results suggest that participants reported moderate to high levels of identity authenticity, identity awareness, a sense of community, and overall positive LGBQ+ identity on average.

Multiple linear regression models were run with positive LGBQ+ identity, depression, and demographic variables.
- Results show that age was inversely associated with and education level was positively associated with positive LGBQ+ identity. No significant differences were found with other demographics on positive identity (**Table 1**).
- Positive LGBQ+ identity was negatively associated with depressive symptoms (approached significant, $p < .06$).
- Community connectedness was significant associated with depressive symptoms ($p < .05$) (**Table 2**).

Table 1 Regression Analyses Predicting LGBQ+ Positive Identity

Independent variable	Overall Positive LGBQ+ Identity			Self-awareness of LGBQ+ Identity			Authenticity of LGBQ+ Identity			LGBQ+ Community Connectedness		
	B (SE)	95% CI	β	B (SE)	95% CI	β	B (SE)	95% CI	β	B (SE)	95% CI	β
Age	-0.22**(0.06)	[-0.34, -0.10]	-.56	-0.15*(0.07)	[-0.29, -0.16]	-.36	-0.19*(0.08)	[-0.36, -0.24]	-.38	-0.31**(0.89)	[-0.49, -0.14]	-.55
Education	0.44***(0.11)	[0.21, 0.66]	.62	0.27*(0.12)	[0.02, 0.52]	.35	0.48**(0.15)	[0.17, 0.78]	.52	0.56**(0.16)	[0.23, 0.88]	.53
Race/Ethnicity	-0.21(0.23)	[-0.68, 0.25]	-.10	-0.36(0.27)	[-0.89, 0.16]	-.15	0.33(0.32)	[-0.31, 0.96]	.12	-0.60(0.34)	[-1.28, 0.07]	-.19
Sex	-0.18(0.23)	[-0.68, 0.25]	-.08	-0.44(0.30)	[-1.03, 0.15]	-.19	0.12(0.36)	[-0.60, 0.83]	.04	-0.21(0.38)	[-0.97, 0.55]	-.07
Gender Identity	-0.17(0.26)	[-0.34, 0.69]	.08	0.18(0.29)	[-0.40, -0.76]	.08	-0.24(0.35)	[-0.94, 0.46]	-.09	0.59(0.37)	[-0.16, 1.33]	.19
Sexual Orientation												
Bisexual/Pansexual	0.19(0.29)	[-0.39, 0.76]	.09	0.59(0.32)	[-0.52, 1.23]	.26	-0.20(0.39)	[-0.98, 0.57]	-.08	0.18(0.41)	[-0.64, 1.00]	.06
Queer or Queer+	0.26(0.29)	[-0.31, 0.83]	.14	0.72(0.32)	[0.07, 1.36]	.34	-0.03(0.39)	[-0.81, 0.75]	-.01	0.10(0.42)	[-0.73, 0.93]	.04
Prob > F	.01			.07			.12			.00		
R^2	.023			.162			.143			.252		
Adjusted R^2	.150			.080			.059			.179		

Table 2 Regression Analyses Predicting Depressive Symptoms

Independent variable	B (SE)	95% CI	β	Independent variable	B (SE)	95% CI	β	Independent variable	B (SE)	95% CI	β	Independent variable	B (SE)	95% CI	β
Positive LGBQ+ Identity	-0.12*(0.69)	[-0.24, 0.00]	-.20	LGBQ+ Self-awareness	-0.42(0.06)	[-0.16, 0.07]	-.08	LGBQ+ Authenticity	-0.07(0.05)	[-0.17, 0.19]	-.17	LGBQ+ Community	-0.85*(0.04)	[-0.17, 0.00]	-.22
Race/Ethnicity	-0.01(0.13)	[-0.27, 0.25]	-.01	Race/Ethnicity	0.13(0.14)	[-0.26, 0.28]	.01	Race/Ethnicity	-0.04(0.13)	[-0.22, 0.31]	.04	Race/Ethnicity	-0.04(0.13)	[-0.30, 0.23]	-.03
Sex	-0.24*(0.14)	[-0.52, 0.05]	-.20	Sex	-0.24(0.15)	[-0.53, 0.05]	-.20	Sex	-0.22(0.14)	[-0.50, 0.07]	-.18	Sex	-0.23(0.14)	[-0.51, 0.05]	-.19
Gender Identity	-0.31(0.15)	[0.02, 0.60]	.27	Gender Identity	0.29*(0.15)	[-0.00, 0.59]	.25	Gender Identity	0.27*(0.15)	[-0.02, 0.56]	.23	Gender Identity	0.34*(0.15)	[0.05, 0.64]	.29
Sexual Orientation				Sexual Orientation				Sexual Orientation				Sexual Orientation			
Bisexual/Pansexual	0.28(0.16)	[-0.03, 0.59]	.23	Bisexual/Pansexual	0.30*(0.16)	[-0.02, 0.62]	.26	Bisexual/Pansexual	0.25(0.16)	[-0.06, 0.57]	.21	Bisexual/Pansexual	0.27*(0.16)	[-0.04, 0.58]	.23
Queer or Queer+	0.38(0.16)	[0.07, 0.70]	.27	Queer or Queer+	0.40*(0.17)	[0.07, 0.73]	.37	Queer or Queer+	0.36*(0.16)	[0.04, 0.68]	.33	Queer or Queer+	0.36*(0.16)	[0.04, 0.68]	.33
Prob > F	.01			.02			.01			.00		
R^2	.219			.185			.207			.223		
Adjusted R^2	.154			.117			.141			.158		

Note. For race, White was the reference group. For sex, male was the reference group. For gender identity, cisgender was the reference group. For sexual orientation, gay/lesbian was the reference group. $^+p < .01$, $^*p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$

Discussion

- There has been promising evidence suggest integrating positive LGBQ+ identity experiences into interventions improves mental health among LGBQ+ youth (Clements et al., 2023). Our research adds empirical evidence supporting this approach in mental health services.
- Laws such as "Don't Say Gay" legislations that restrict open conversation about LGBQ+ identities send a strong message that these identities are considered shameful, which could have a significant negative impact on the development of positive identity for LGBQ+ young adults, and thus contributing to increased depression.
- These potential detrimental consequences highlight the urgent need for policymakers, educators, and community leaders to actively promote LGBQ+ inclusive, accepting, and safe environments, enabling individuals to freely express and explore their identities.

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