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Identification and Involvement With the Gay Community Scale

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The Identification and Involvement with the Gay Community Scale (IGCS) is designed to measure involvement with and perceived closeness to the gay community among men who have sex with men. Although bisexually and homosexually active men are often considered to be part of the same homogeneous group, there are substantial individual differences in the extent to which these men perceive themselves to be part of a larger gay community and in the degree to which they self-identify as gay (Stokes, McKirnan, & Burzette, 1993; Vanable, McKirnan, Stokes, Taywaditep, & Burzette, 1993). The IGCS was developed to characterize these individual differences. The scale was initially developed as part of a larger research program designed to identify both individual and community level variables associated with HIV risk behavior among a heterogeneous group of bisexually active men (see McKirnan, Stokes, Doll, & Burzette, 1995, for a description). Thus, although the construct tapped by this scale may be equally relevant to women who have sex with women, reliability and validity data have been gathered only for men.

Response Mode and Timing

Respondents are instructed to circle the response that most accurately describes their personal attitudes and experiences. The scale requires 2 to 3 minutes to complete.

Scoring

Prior to computing scale scores, responses to questions 5 through 8 should be converted to numeric values (A = 1, B = 2, C = 3, D = 4, E = 5). Final scale scores are obtained by computing a mean across the eight items. Item 4 must be reverse coded. Higher scores indicate more identification and involvement with the gay community.

Reliability

Reliability and validity data come from a large, diverse sample of bisexual and gay men living in the metropolitan Chicago area (N = 750). African-American (51%) and White (49%) respondents between the ages of 18 and 30 were recruited on the basis of specific sexual behavior criteria. During the first phase of the research, interviews were conducted with men reporting that they had both male and female partners within the past 3 years (n = 536). The remaining 214 men were recruited on the basis of having only male sexual partners in past 3 years. For the complete sample, 43% of respondents self-identified as bisexual, 48% self-identified as gay, and 7% self-identified as being straight (2% refused to provide a label).

The Cronbach alpha for the complete sample was .78. A subgroup of respondents (n = 218) completed a 1-year follow-up interview. Test-retest reliability for this subsample was .74.

Validity

In the sample described above, scores on the IGCS were positively correlated with 7-point Kinsey ratings of sexual orientation (r = .58, p < .0001) such that people with stronger involvement and identification with the gay community tended to rate themselves as more homosexual in orientation. Similarly, scores on the IGCS reliably differentiated between men who variously described their sexual orientation as either gay, bisexual, or straight (Ms = 3.09, 2.38, & 1.51); F(2, 733) = 159.0, p < .0001. In addition, men showing greater identification with the gay community were more “out” to others about their same-sex activity, were...
less self-homophobic, reported that their friends were more accepting of their sexual preferences, and were more oriented toward using gay bars as a social resource, \( r_s = .53, -.35, .56, .47, p < .0001 \). Similar construct validity data are reported by Stokes et al. (1993), using an earlier version of this scale.

Of greater theoretical interest are data linking scores on the IGCS to differences in sexual behavior with men and women, and specific practices that place homosexually active men at increased risk for HIV infection. In our sample, we found that rates of sexual behavior with men and women were directly related to differences in identification and involvement with the gay community, with high scorers on the IGCS reporting more overall sexual behavior with men and low scorers reporting more sexual behavior with women in the past 6 months (McKirnan, Vanable, & Stokes, 1995). In comparison to men who were less identified with the gay community, high scorers on the IGCS were more likely to report having had unprotected anal contact with another man. However, when the sample was restricted to only those men who had any anal sex with men in the past 6 months, these differences were eliminated. These data suggest that men showing greater identification and involvement with the gay community are at increased risk for HIV as a direct function of their being more likely to have anal sex with men at all (for a discussion of related findings, see McKirnan, Stokes, Vanable, Burzette, & Doll, 1993; Vanable et al., 1993). A reversal in this pattern occurs for behaviors with women, with lower scores on the IGCS being associated with an increased likelihood of having unprotected vaginal or anal sex with a woman in the past 6 months. Again, these differences were eliminated when the sample was limited to only those men who had some sex with women in the past 6 months.

Other Information

Support for this research was provided through Cooperative Agreement Number U64/CCU50689-02 with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

References


Exhibit

Identification and Involvement With the Gay Community Scale

Directions: This questionnaire concerns some of your general attitudes and experiences. For each question, circle the response that is most accurate for you personally. Answer the questions quickly, giving your first “gut reactions.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Agree at all</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) It is very important to me that at least some of my friends are bisexual or gay.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Being gay makes me feel part of a community.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Being attracted to men is important to my sense of who I am.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) I feel very distant from the gay community.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For questions 5–7, please think in terms of the last six months or so.

(5) How often do you read a gay or lesbian oriented paper or magazine, such as the Advocate or other local gay/bisexual papers?

A = Never  C = Several times a month  E = Several times a week or daily
B = Once a month or less  D = About once a week

(6) How often do you attend any gay or lesbian organizational activities, such as meetings, fund-raisers, political activities, etc.?

A = Never  C = Several times a month  E = Several times a week or daily
B = Once a month or less  D = About once a week

(7) How often do you go to a gay bar?

A = Never  C = Several times a month  E = Several times a week or daily
B = Once a month or less  D = About once a week

(8) About how many gay men would you call personal friends (as opposed to casual acquaintances)?

A = None  C = 2 gay friends  E = 5 or more gay friends
B = 1 gay friend  D = 3 or 4 gay friends