Measuring self-authenticity in lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people: a novel measure of authentic living

Tim Cartwright, Nick Hulbert-Williams, Lee Hulbert-Williams & Gemma Evans

Centre for Contextual Behavioural Science, School of Psychology, University of Chester

Background

Self-authenticity is defined as knowing one's personal truth and behaving according to self-derived desires, feelings, and values (Harter, 2002; Sheldon & Kasser, 2001; Varga, 2014). This shares obvious theoretical foundations with the psychological flexibility model of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). In instances where personal and societal values conflict, being authentic can be difficult resulting in poorer psychological wellbeing (Sutton 2020). This may be particularly true for sexual minorities who wish to know and be themselves, but might not feel able to do so out of fear of discrimination. Indeed, LGB people tend to report poorer psychological wellbeing than heterosexual people (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; Liu & Mustanski, 2012; Pereira and Rodrigues, 2015; Plöderl & Fartacek, 2005).

To understand the relevance of self-authenticity in LGB populations and to assess the theoretical link between self-authenticity and psychological flexibility, we developed the novel Self-Authenticity Measure (SAM), a methodologically rigorous measures of authenticity than the existing scales (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Wood et al., 2008).

Method

Design and participants: Fifty items were developed from a review and discussion of authenticity literature and were included in two online cross-sectional surveys advertised on Facebook, Reddit, and Twitter. We recruited 1,152 participants (M_{age} = 29.9, SD = 12.0; 524 men, 551 women; 708 LGB, 365 heterosexual, 90% from Europe and North America) at Time 1, of whom 434 participated at Time 2.

Measures: (alphas from present LGB sample):
Time 1
- **Self-Authenticity Measure** (SAM; a = .88)
- **Authenticity Scale** (AS; Wood et al., 2008; a = .90)
- **Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scale-21** (DASS-21; Antony et al., 1998; a = .94)
- **Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II** (AAQ-II; Bond et al., 2011; a = .93)
- **Comprehensive Assessment of ACT** (CompACT; Francis et al., 2016; a = .93)
- **Engaged Living Scale-9** (ELS-9; Trindade et al., 2016; a = .91)
Time 2
- **Self-Authenticity Measure** (SAM; a = .89)
- **Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale** (BFNES; Leary, 1983; a = .95)
- **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale** (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965; a = .94)
- **Nebraska Outness Scale** (NOS; Meidlinger & Hope, 2014; a = .87)
- **Everyday Discrimination Scale** (EDS; Williams et al., 1997; a = .86)
- **Internalised Homonegativity Inventory** (IHNI; Mayfield, 2001; a = .76)

Procedure and analysis: All participants who completed the survey at Time 1 were invited to take part at Time 2 (7 days later). The SAM was developed using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and validated using Pearson's r, hierarchical linear regression, and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Mediation analysis was used to assess the relationships between self-authenticity, sexuality-related constructs, and psychological wellbeing.

Results

SAM development and validation: EFA using only the LGB subsample (n = 683) resulted in a two-factor fifteen-item model (see Table 1), with the first factor (eigen: 5.77) related to understanding what one wants from life and knowing and being one's self (**internal self-authenticity; ISA**), and the second factor (eigen: 1.72) related to being one's self around and not compromising who one is for others (**external self-authenticity; ESA**). Test-retest reliability was excellent (r = .92). The SAM converged with the Wood et al. (2008) authenticity scale (r = .84) and with fear of negative evaluation (r = -.69) and concurred with psychological distress (r = -.61) and self esteem (r = .74). Using stepped regressions, the SAM demonstrated significant incremental validity over the Wood et al. (2008) scale when predicting depression (ΔR^2 = .08), anxiety (ΔR^2 = .03), stress (ΔR^2 = .02), and self-esteem (ΔR^2 = .08). Finally, construct validity was demonstrated through CFA using the heterosexual sample (n = 363; CFI = .92, TLI = .91, SRMR = .05, RMSEA = .07).

Correlates of self-authenticity: As self-authenticity and psychological flexibility share theoretical foundations, it is encouraging to see significant overlap across all key constructs (all p < .001), including experiential avoidance (r = -.69), openness to experience (r = .66), behavioural awareness (r = .63), life fulfilment (r = .75), and particularly valued action and valued living (r = .80 & .83), suggesting that ACT may be potentially helpful in increasing self-authenticity. We also found significant relationships (all p < .001) between self-authenticity and sexuality-based constructs such as disclosure (r = .44) and concealment (r = -.41) of sexuality, discrimination (r = -.28), gay affirmation (r = -.35), personal homonegativity (r = -.54), and morality of homosexuality (r = -.22).

To understand these relationships further, we included self-authenticity as a mediating variable in several models to assess the extent in which self-authenticity explains the relationship between sexuality-based constructs and psychological distress (see Table 2). Although these data are cross-sectional, we have found preliminary evidence to suggest that self-authenticity explains the relationship between internalised homonegativity and psychological distress, and outness and psychological distress. Although there is evidence that self-authenticity helps us to understand the relationship between discrimination and psychological distress, this is weak. These findings are also preliminary and need further examination and clarification.

Table 1. Items and factor loadings of the SAM

Item	ISA	ESA
I do not know what I want to accomplish in my life*	.76	
I know how to achieve my goals	.75	
I pursue what is important to me	.71	
I know how I want to live my life	.64	
I believe my life has meaning	.59	
If I really want something, I can persevere despite problems	.55	
I know what is important to me and what is not	.53	
I am powerless to change my behaviour*	.46	
I pretend to be someone I am not when in front of others*		.74
I conform to others' standards*		.72
Society stops me from being who I want to be*		.67
Other people greatly influence my actions*		.66
Even when I disagree with those around me, I pretend to agree*		.59
I do not care what strangers think about me		.56
I try to be myself in front of people I know		.50

* Reverse score

Table 2. Self-Authenticity as a mediator between sexuality-based constructs and psychological distress

Predictor	Mediator	Total effect	Direct effect	Indirect effect
Outness (n = 253)	ISA	-.372 **	-.163 *	-.208 **
	ESA	-.375 **	-.105	-.270 **
Discrimination (n = 252)	ISA	.459 **	.339 **	.120 **
	ESA	.459 **	.290 **	.170 **
Internalised homonegativity (n = 234)	ISA	.381 **	.167 *	.214 **
	ESA	.392 **	.136 *	.255 **

** p < .001, * p < .05

Conclusions

We have developed a novel measure of self-authenticity which has proven to be valid and reliable and which clearly overlaps with many key concepts within ACT. We have also found preliminary evidence that suggests how self-authenticity mediates the relationships between internalised homonegativity and psychological distress, suggesting a potential route in which ACT techniques may be of some benefit in increasing self-authenticity in LGB people and thus buffering them against the negative psychological effects of internalised homonegativity.