Lesbian Identity Perception Study

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Acknowledgments

- Perry Halkitis, Ph.D.
- Rob Moeller, Ed.M.
- Dan Siconolfi, MPH
- Molly Pappas, MS
- Onnie Rogers
Body Image

- An individual’s perception, imagination, emotions, and physical experience of and about her body

- Societal pressures
  - Thin ideal

- Complicated identity formation

- At risk populations
  - Women
  - Homosexual Men
Media and other cultural outlets emphasize importance of body shape.

Tendency toward body dissatisfaction in American women.

Physical and psychological consequences:
- Disordered eating
- Substance abuse
- Distorted perception of self
- Low self-esteem
- Depression
Body Image in Gay Culture

- Homosexual men
  - Discomfort with sexual identity related to poor body image
  - Low self-esteem related to poor body image

- Homosexual women
  - Comparison to heterosexual women
  - Internalization of mainstream ideals
  - Body silence
Current Study

- **Research Question:**
  - What are the associations between feelings toward a lesbian identity, self-esteem, and body image?

- **Hypothesis:**
  - Positive associations between feelings toward a lesbian identity, self-esteem, and body image
Procedure

Recruitment
- LGBT organizations
  - Colleges/universities
  - Demographic-based groups
  - Location-based groups
- Internet snowball
  - E-mail
  - Social networking websites

Eligibility Requirements
- 18+ years
- Biologically female
- 1+ sexual experiences with a female, or
- 1+ relationships with a female
Measures

Feelings toward Lesbian Identity
- I hate myself for being attracted to other women.
- If I could change my sexual orientation and become heterosexual, I would.
- I am proud to be a lesbian.

Self-Esteem
- I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
- I feel that I do not have much to be proud of.

Body Image
- Physical stamina, waist, thighs, breasts, face, appearance of stomach
Sample Demographics (N = 226)

- **Age**: $M = 26.95$ ($SD = 7.29$)
- **Race/Ethnicity**

![Pie chart showing demographics](chart.png)

- White: 71%
- Black: 9%
- Latino: 3%
- Asian: 6%
- Other: 11%
Sample Demographics (N = 226)

- Age: $M = 26.95$ (SD = 7.29)
- Race/Ethnicity
- Sexual Identification
Feelings toward Lesbian Identity: 5.89
Self-Esteem: 3.19
Body Image: 3.65
## Correlations

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** $p < .001$
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$F(2, 189) = 44.54, p < .001, R^2 = 32\%$

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RESULTS

FEELINGS TOWARD
SEXUAL IDENTITY

SELF-ESTEEM

BODY IMAGE

*b = .19*

*b = .73*

.06, ns

*p < .001

Baron & Kenny, 1986
Summary

- As hypothesized, the associations between feelings toward a lesbian identity, self-esteem, and body image were significant and positive.

- Full mediation effect of self-esteem on the association between feelings toward a lesbian identity and body image.
  - How one feels about being a lesbian impacts her self-esteem which impacts her feelings toward her body.
Implications & Future Directions

- Additional research on feelings toward sexual identity, self-esteem, and body image
- Exploratory approach
  - Qualitative methods
- More appropriate measures
- Participants more representative of target population
- Work with community members
Thank You!