How do you self-categorize? Gender and sexual orientation self-categorization in homosexual/heterosexual men and women

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ABSTRACT

Group status influences individuals' identity. Low-status group members identify with their in-group more strongly than high-status group members. However, previous research has mostly analyzed explicit identification with a single in-group.

We examined effects of both double group membership, namely gender and sexual orientation, which are two intersecting categories defining high/low-status groups, and contextual identity prime on both implicit self-categorization and explicit identification. Heterosexual and homosexual men and women ($N = 296$) completed measures of implicit self-categorization and explicit identification with gender and sexual orientation after being primed with gender or sexual orientation. Implicit self-categorization was stronger for low-status than high-status groups: implicit gender self-categorization was higher for women than men, and implicit sexual orientation self-categorization was stronger for homosexual than heterosexual participants. Lesbian participants showed the strongest implicit sexual orientation self-categorization compared to the other three groups. Moreover, homosexual men and women and heterosexual women showed stronger implicit self-categorization with their low- than high-status membership. By contrast, heterosexual men showed equally strong implicit self-categorization with gender and sexual orientation. No differences on explicit identification emerged. Hypotheses on contextual identity primes were only partially confirmed. Findings are discussed in relation to literature about sexual orientation self-categorization and gender stigma.

1. Introduction

Sexual orientation (i.e., SO) and gender are powerful categories that shape self-representation. As these categories are embedded in social hierarchy, they occupy different social status positions, with men having higher status than women, and heterosexuals having higher status than homosexuals (Cadinu & Galdi, 2012; Cadinu, Galdi, & Maass, 2013). Research has shown that belonging to low status groups is related to poorer health and discrimination (Lick, Durso, & Johnson, 2013). As individuals deal with both their gender and SO at the same time, this work examines which identity is more cognitively salient depending on the combined status of these two categories. Studies have addressed how perceivers form impressions of individual targets that can be in principle assigned to multiple categories (Ito & Urland, 2003; Macrae, Bodenhausen, & Milne, 1995). However, studies on inter-sectionality have often adopted an out-group categorization and ste-reotyping perspective (Kang & Bodenhausen, 2015), leaving the question of how multiple memberships shape individuals' self and in-group perception under-investigated.

So far, research (Lou, Lalonde, & Wilson, 2011; Pittinsky, Shih, & Ambady, 1999; Roccas & Brewer, 2002) has mostly used explicit measures of individuals' identity like self-reports, which may involve intentional self-awareness and self-presentation strategies (e.g., monitoring personal answers with the aim of being positively judged). Implicit measures capture instead unintentional mental associations between concepts related to the self and the in-group (Forscher et al., 2017).

Here, we recast the analysis of double membership, namely gender and SO identity, in the area of implicit self-categorization and explicit identification. Implicit self-categorization refers to cognitive associations between self and in-group (Cadinu & Galdi, 2012) measured using Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). This task measures the strength of associations between words referring to the self and words/images representing the in-group. Instead, the

term *identification* indicates the more complex construct that includes affective components of group belonging such as ties with in-group and importance of being member (Leach et al., 2008), typically assessed by explicit measures. Like explicit identification, implicit self-categorization contributes to shape the appraisal of one's membership, and represents the cognitive component of group membership. Implicit self-categorization varies across different status groups, with low-status group displaying higher levels of self-categorization than high-status group members (Aidman & Carroll, 2003; Cadinu & Galdi, 2012). Indeed, group status affects the extent to which these categories are cognitively accessible and shapes the representation of the self (Latrofa, Vaes, Cadinu, & Carnaghi, 2010). Hence, it is necessary to examine whether the more *intentional* explicit identification and the more *unintentional* and spontaneous implicit self-categorization are relevant to in-group membership representation.

We examine how female/male, homosexual/heterosexual individuals implicitly and explicitly process their double membership by analyzing self-representation with respect to these two categories. In so doing, this research fulfills different, albeit related aims. It extends previous research on individuals' self-categorization when multiple memberships are available. We address gender and SO membership as they both include a high-status (i.e., men, heterosexuals) and a low-status group (i.e., women, homosexuals). This peculiarity allows us to test whether group status molds self-categorization and identification differentially in low-status and high-status groups, as well as in groups in which the low-status is highlighted by *one* (e.g., heterosexual women) or *two* categories (e.g., lesbian women).

Also, we analyze whether self-categorization and identification are sensitive to contextual cues that activate either gender or SO membership, and whether the status of the contextually activated memberships moderates self-construal.

1.1. Self-categorizing in low-status vs. high-status groups

Certain groups are continuously reminded of and treated based on their low social status (Goodwin, Gubin, Fiske, & Yzerbyt, 2000). Low-status group members, such as women compared to men (Cadinu & Galdi, 2012) and gay men compared to heterosexual men (Cadinu & Galdi et al., 2013), show stronger implicit self-categorization and self-stereotyping, but also higher explicit in-group identification (Cadinu, Latrofa & Carnaghi, 2013; Simon, Glässner-Bayerl, & Stratenwerth, 1991). Hence, low-status group members have higher propensity to define the self in terms of in-group membership compared to high-status group members, corroborating Cadinu and Galdi's (2012) model of Chronic Accessibility of Low Status In-group Membership (CALSIM).

To our knowledge, no research addressing self-definition construal has taken into account simultaneously two social categories that encompass both low- and high-status membership. By crossing gender and SO, we test whether the low-status in-group is more accessible to women than men, and to homosexuals than heterosexuals. Moreover, we investigate implicit self-categorization and explicit identification in the intersectional group of lesbians, which display low-status both in terms of gender and SO.

Turning to high-status groups, heterosexual men are the epitome of high-status group. Men are more valued at the societal level and their high-status position is reflected onto and maintained by gender role division (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). Also, heterosexuality is thought as social default, and cultural hetero-normative beliefs support the superiority of heterosexual over homosexual orientation. Since being man and heterosexual seem crucial to define the identity of these groups' members (Carnaghi, Maass, & Fasoli, 2011; Vandello, Bosson, Cohen,

Burnaford, & Weaver, 2008), we investigate the accessibility of both gender and SO memberships in heterosexual men.

1.2. Contextual cues

Self-categorization shifts may depend on contextual cues. Gay men engage in stronger self-stereotyping and gay-consistent self-descriptions when cues of homosexuality are salient (Cadinu & Galdi et al., 2013, Cadinu & Latrofa et al., 2013): If reminded of their SO, gays, but not heterosexual men, show stronger implicit self-categorization and self-stereotyping. Compared to heterosexual individuals, gays show stronger cognitive associations between self and in-group when prompted by cues suggesting their low-status group membership. No research addressed whether, in a context of *double membership* based on gender and SO, implicit self-categorization can be shifted from one membership to the other by contextual cues, and whether this shift would equally occur for single and double low-status groups.

This research tests whether priming individuals with their gender or SO affects implicit self-categorization and explicit identification with each category. Priming individuals with a self-relevant identity increased both accessibility of that in-group category at the implicit level and explicit in-group identification (Gaither, Sommers, & Ambady, 2013). Context may affect gender- and SO-based groups differently. Whereas salience of in-group category induced women to self-stereotype regardless of context, in-group category activation led men to self-stereotype only in male-stereotypic contexts (Casper & Rothermund, 2012). Similarly, Cadinu and Galdi et al. (2013) and Cadinu and Latrofa et al. (2013) showed that exposing participants to SO cues induced higher implicit self-categorization and self-stereotyping in gays, but not in heterosexual men. However, no research has explored whether lesbians (vs. heterosexual women) would show the same reaction to gender and SO primes as gay men (vs. heterosexual men).

1.3. Overview and hypotheses

In line with CALSIM model, we predict that implicit gender self-categorization would be stronger for women than men (Hypothesis 1a), and implicit SO self-categorization would be stronger for homosexual than heterosexual participants (Hypothesis 1b). As lesbians are both women and homosexuals, they belong to a group whose social status is even lower than gay men's status, leading to show the strongest implicit SO self-categorization compared to gay men, heterosexual men, and heterosexual women (Hypothesis 1c).

Moreover, since participants were simultaneously members of two categories we test whether gender or SO would be more accessible for each participant. We hypothesize that the low-status category would generally be more accessible than the high-status category. Gay and lesbians are expected to implicitly self-categorize more strongly with their SO (low-status membership) than with their gender category (high-status membership) (Hypothesis 2a). For lesbians, it is possible that not only the SO but also the gender category would be strongly, and equally, accessible since both categories highlight a low-status (Hypothesis 2b). Heterosexual women should implicitly self-categorize more strongly with their gender (low-status membership) than with their SO category (high-status membership) (Hypothesis 3a). With regards to heterosexual men, as in our society they are required to be both masculine and heterosexual, gender and SO implicit self-categorization are expected to be equally accessible to them (Hypothesis 3b).

As previous findings showed that gender and SO low-status groups report higher explicit identification with their low-status group compared to high-status group members (Cadinu & Galdi et al., 2013,