The Role of Ambiguity in Sexual Categorization
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Introduction

- Social categorization on the basis of sexual orientation may be difficult, as self-reported sexual identity and observed behavior can conflict (Pathela et al., 2006).
- This research examined how people categorize the sexual orientation of others on the basis of self-reported sexual identity and behavior.

Hypotheses:
1) When sexual identity and behavior are the same, people will categorize in congruence with the information.
2) When sexual identity and behavior are different, people will differ in how they categorize. These differences will be driven by explicit bias, implicit bias, and the gender of the target.
3) Individuals who are more biased (implicitly and/or explicitly) will rely more on behavior in making categorization decisions.

Methods

Participants
- n = 554 Project Implicit users
- Age: ranged from 18-113; M = 32.59, SD = 15.22
- Gender: Female – 63.7%; Male – 36.3%
- Sexuality: 86.8% Straight, 3.4% Gay/Lesbian, 6.0% Bisexual

Procedures
- Participants completed a self-report questionnaire categorizing another’s sexual identity, followed by a Bisexual-Straight Implicit Association Test, and an explicit attitude questionnaire

Measures
- Sexual Categorization: Asked participants to categorize men’s and women’s sexualities in the following format:
  - Same identity and behavior: A man identifies as being attracted to women, and has had romantic relationships with only women in the last year. How would you categorize this man’s sexuality?
  - Different identity and behavior: A man identifies as being attracted to women, but has had romantic relationships with both men and women in the last year. How would you categorize this man’s sexuality?
- Implicit Association Test (IAT): A Bisexual-Straight IAT was developed for use in this study
- Attitudes Regarding Bisexuality: Explicit attitude measure developed from Mohr & Rochlen, 1999, on two dimensions:
  - Instability of Identity
  - Intolerability of Identity

Results

When a person’s sexual identity & behavior differed:

People are more likely to categorize people as Bisexual rather than Straight

1) When identity and behavior differed, the odds of choosing Bisexual were significantly higher than that of choosing Straight (Odds Ratio = 22.4, CI [2.86, 3.33]).
2) When identity and behavior differed, higher explicit bias on the Instability (Odds Ratio = 0.85, CI [1.77, 2.02]) and Intolerability (Odds Ratio = 0.85, CI [1.67, 1.95]) dimensions were related to higher odds of choosing Gay/Lesbian over Bisexual. Implicit bias and target gender did not significantly predict higher odds of choosing bisexual or gay/lesbian.
3) When identity and behavior differed, higher explicit bias on the Instability (Odds Ratio = 0.83, CI [-0.24, -0.13]) and Intolerability (Odds Ratio = 0.84, CI [-0.23, -0.12]) dimensions, as well as higher implicit bias toward Bisexual people (Odds Ratio = 0.70, CI [-0.55, -0.17], were related to higher odds of categorizing in line with Behavior over Identity.

Conclusions

When behavior and identity were the same:
- people categorized based on what the information said.
- When behavior and identity differed:
  - people were less likely to categorize as straight.
  - more biased people were more likely to categorize as Gay/Lesbian vs. Bisexual.
  - people who were more explicitly or implicitly biased were more likely to categorized based on behavior than identity

Future Directions
- Future studies may look further into the reasons why bias predicted differences in categorization.
- Future studies may also seek to determine if use of behavior over identity in categorization has negative effects on the target of categorization.

References


For a copy of the poster & materials, go to: https://osf.io/lim2h/