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Gay Community Stress in Sexual Minority Men and Women: A Validation Study in the Netherlands



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BACKGROUND

- The sexual minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) is leading in explaining health disparities between **sexual minority groups** and the heterosexual majority: Above general stressors, sexual minority groups are exposed to unique stress related to society's prejudice and stigma directed at sexual minorities. Consequently, sexual minority individuals experience more mental health problems.
- Seeking support and resources from the lesbian/gay community serves as a protective factor in coping with these problems. However, stress may particularly come from the community itself given its unique normative rules and values. This intraminority stress is referred to as "**gay community stress**" (GCS) and predicts mental health symptoms over and above minority stress and general life stress (Pachankis et al., 2020).
- Pachankis et al. (2020) developed and validated the Gay Community Stress (GCS) scale to measure stress in gay and bisexual men stemming from status-based social and sexual competition in a male community with clear status hierarchies. This scale captures **four intra-community stress forms**: (1) a strong focus on hypersexuality and risky sex, (2) strongly valuing wealth and prestige, (3) social competition, and (4) exclusion of diversity. The GCS scale was developed and validated in the US, and **cross-national validation research is limited**.

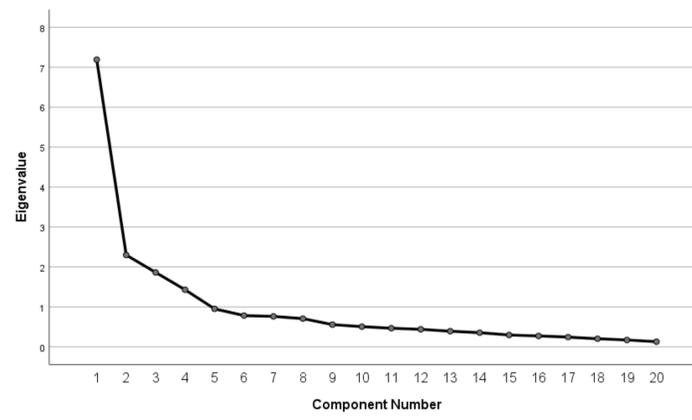
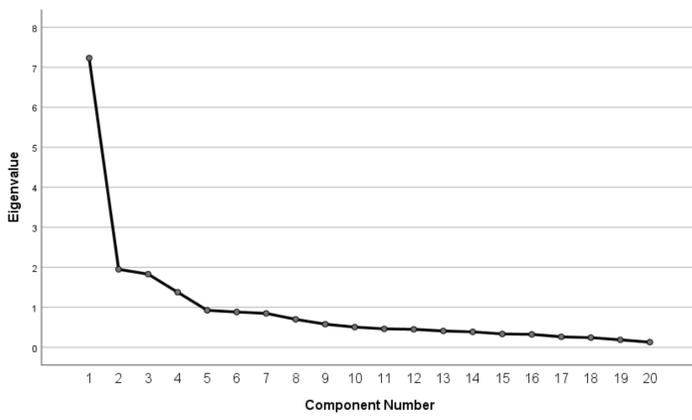
STUDY AIMS

- To **validate the Dutch translated GCS scale in the Netherlands** that differs from the US in cultural norms and values of the society in which sexual minority groups reside.
- To seek evidence for the psychometric quality of the Dutch translated GCS scale in **gay/bisexual men and lesbian/bisexual women**.

PROCEDURE

- Internet-based recruitment in March and April 2022 through sexual minority organizations' websites and social media accounts.
- Lesbian, gay and bisexual participants** could participate if they were 16 years or older.

(Sub)Scale	<i>M (SD)</i> of scale scores		Cohen's <i>d</i>	Reliability (α)		Correlation with PSS (<i>r</i>)	
	Females	Males		Females	Males	Females	Males
GCS – Sex (6 items)	2.25 (0.79)	3.12 (0.95)	1.00***	.809	.849	.148 ⁺	-.060
GCS – Status (4 items)	2.01 (0.89)	2.77 (0.99)	0.81***	.828	.831	.053	.186*
GCS – Competition (7 items)	2.31 (0.83)	2.92 (0.92)	0.70***	.856	.870	.186**	.258**
GCS – Exclusion (3 items)	2.32 (1.03)	3.09 (1.09)	0.73***	.840	.827	.171*	.230**
GCS – Total scale (20 items)	2.23 (0.67)	2.98 (0.74)	1.06***	.904	.903	.186*	.191*
Perceived Stress Scale (14 items)	2.97 (0.61)	2.61 (0.66)	-0.57***	.890	.897	-	-



PARTICIPANTS

- 222 sexual minority individuals (113 females and 109 men)** who participated in an online survey on the mental health of people identifying as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, including other-identified people who are sexually attracted to same-sex individuals.
- Participants were on average **28.5 years old** (*SD* = 12.7), **mostly lesbian, gay or homosexual (*n* = 145) followed by bisexual (*n* = 77)** and identified with a male gender identity (*n* = 108), female gender identity (*n* = 101), or non-female-male identity (*n* = 6).
- Most participants were **Western (*n* = 196)**, involved in an ongoing relationship (*n* = 123; Mean duration = 4.6 years), and with a high level of education (*n* = 176).

MEASURES

- Demographics**: age, sex assigned at birth, gender identity, sexual orientation, education level, race/ethnicity, relationship status and duration.
- GCS: A Dutch translated version of the GCS Scale** (Pachankis et al., 2020).
- General Stress**: A Dutch translated version of the Perceived Stress Scale.

DATA ANALYSES

- Factor structure: Principal Component Analysis (PCA)** was performed separately in males and females (cf. Pachankis et al., 2020).
- Reliability: Cronbach's alpha** was calculated for the total scale and four subscales.
- Convergent validity: Pearson correlations** were calculation between the GCS scales and a measure for general stress.
- Sex differences: Independent samples t tests** were conducted, and Cohen's *d* values calculated.

RESULTS

- PCA revealed four components in the male (left screeplot) and female sample (right screeplot) explaining 61.9% and 63.9% of the variance. **Both in males and females the four intra-community stress dimensions were reliably identified** with alpha's ranging from .849 to .903 in males and from .809 to .904 in females (see Table).
- The Dutch translated GCS scale seems convergent valid.** In females, the total scale as well as the social competition and exclusion subscales of the GCS were positively associated with the general stress scale. In males, only the GCS sex subscale was not associated with the general stress scale (see Table).
- Males scored higher than females on all GCS scales** with Cohen's *d* ranging from 0.70 to 1.06, but females scored higher than males on the Perceived Stress Scale (*d* = -0.57; see table).

DISCUSSION

- As in the US, **GCS is clearly present in Dutch gay and bisexual men, and can be validly and reliably assessed with the Dutch translated GCS scale.** The components sex, status, competition, and exclusion of diversity were all identified in the Netherlands.
- Dutch lesbian and bisexual women also experience gay community stress**, though less than gay and bisexual men. **The Dutch translated GCS scale is valid and reliable to assess GCS in women.**
- Compared to the US, the Netherlands are thought to be more progressive which may imply that social connectedness to the gay community is less important for the well-being of sexual minority individuals. However, GCS is substantially present in sexual minority men and women in the Netherlands and may particularly be experienced when sexual minority individuals have romantic relationship desires or actively seek a romantic partner.
- Exploratory factor analyses** in men and women generally confirm the PCA results presented here.
- Confirmatory factor analyses** should be performed with new male and female samples to verify the construct dimensionality of the Dutch translated GCS scale.