



The Correlation Between Sexual Identity Exploration and Psychological Well-Being

Anja J. Svensson

Kandidatuppsats VT 20

Lund University

Department of Psychology

Handledare: Una Tellhed

### Abstract

Within positive psychology, personality trait research has shown that higher levels of openness to experience and self-exploration are generally correlated with a large-range of positive psychosocial outcomes. How does the exploration of sexual identity interact with psychological well-being? The recent emergence of sexual identity research has resulted in an increased understanding of the highly complex process of sexual identity development among heterosexual and sexual minority groups. However, much of the previous psychological research on sexual identity has been focused on the negative outcomes among minority groups (e.g lesbian, gay and bisexual), as well as sexual identity formation within men and women exclusively. This study is a cross-sectional, quantitative study that used data from participants with a variety of sexual orientations, nationalities, and gender identities ( $n=314$ ). The individuals were recruited from online platforms (Reddit and Facebook), where they voluntarily completed a survey to investigate the relationship between sexual identity exploration and commitment (MoSIEC) and psychological well-being (Ryff Scale). Results of a linear regression analysis revealed that there is a positive correlation between the two variables. Suggestions for future research include additional data analysis, expansion of methodology and practical implementations of the implications of the results.

*Keywords: Sexual identity exploration, psychological well-being, ryff scale, MOSIEC*

### The Correlation Between Sexual Identity Exploration and Psychological Well-Being

Since the turn of the 20th century, the Western idea of heterosexual orientation has largely been considered normative (Ambrosino, 2017), which has led to a lack of research focused on the heterosexual identity development and experience. Much of the previous psychological research on sexual identity has been focused on minority groups (e.g. lesbian, gay and bisexual) (Zoeterman & Wright, 2014) and the relationship to, for example, mental disorders and suicide (Bolton & Sareen, 2011), depression and anxiety, (Björkenstam, Björkenstam, Andersson, Cochran, & Kosidou, 2017) and physical health (Sandfort, Bakker, Schellevis, & Vanwesenbeeck, 2006). Other related research has focused on sexual identity formation within men or women (Parent, Talley, Schwartz, & Hancock, 2015) exclusively, rather than across gender identities, as I have done in this survey. Research within sexuality has expanded knowledge surrounding the important consequences of a satisfying sex-life among women. Stephenson & Meston (2013) conducted research examining the link between sexual well-being and life satisfaction in women. The results “extend previous findings by confirming a strong association between sexual well-being and overall life satisfaction within individuals over time.” (Stephenson & Meston, 2013, p.1). The findings of the study conducted by Stephenson & Meston (2013) further amplifies the motivation for the present study by strongly suggesting that there is a correlation between sexuality and well-being. The present study specifically examines the correlation between sexual identity exploration and psychological well-being.

A multitude of studies have focused on the negative effects experienced by those with non-normative sexual orientation identities (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, etc.) (Everett, Talley, Hughes, Wilsnack, & Johnson, 2016), whereas research on the positive effects of exploring one’s own sexual identity (eg. orientation, sexual needs, preferred activities, sexual

values etc.) is more limited. Although trends in psychology, particularly in positive psychology, have led to an increased interest in the positive aspects of sexual exploration. For example, Riggle, Whitman, Olson, Rostosky, & Strong, (2008) conducted research examining the positive aspects of being lesbian or a gay man.

“Positive psychology expands on traditional pathology-oriented research to focus on understanding factors that improve well-being and quality of life, and those that contribute to resilience in the face of stressors (Kobau et al., 2011)” (Stephenson & Meston, 2013, p. 26). Within positive psychology, personality trait research has shown that higher levels of openness to experience and self-exploration are generally correlated with a large-range of positive psychosocial outcomes (Parent et al., 2015); for example, academic performance, mental health, brain functioning, and creativity (Kaufman et al., 2015; McCrae, 1987). Zoeterman & Wright (2014) found that openness to experience had a positive impact on lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) identity development, and was associated with better mental health outcomes. Again, research investigating the benefits of sexual exploration for heterosexuals is very limited. The results from this study could contribute to the growth of a connection between sexual identity research and positive psychology. To my knowledge, there is no present theory explaining the correlation between sexual identity exploration and psychological well-being.

“Over the last 50 years, political rights for lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals have significantly broadened in some countries...” (Bailey et al., 2016, p. 1). This has led to an increasing interest in sexual identity exploration and development. As the research in this field moves forward, it is important to consider and investigate both negative and positive aspects of sexual identity development of all sexual orientations and identities. Based on previous studies, it is apparent that sexual identity plays an important role in general

well-being, therefore a public health concern (Hamilton, 2002; World Health Organization, 2002). Due to the lack of coherent mental health research I hope to contribute information for a new theoretical framework that accommodates the complex multilevel interactions between the subjective experience, biological/physical, and environmental/social factors that contribute to overall health.

In the current study, existing measures will be used to investigate the correlation between sexual identity exploration and psychological well-being. I predict that there is a positive correlation because higher levels of openness to experience and self-exploration were found to be generally correlated with a large-range of positive psychosocial outcomes (Parent et al., 2015). The aim of the present study however, is to test if there is a correlation specifically between sexual identity exploration and psychological well-being.

Hypothesis 1: Higher levels of sexual identity exploration is positively correlated with higher levels of psychological well-being.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The final study population consisted of 314 respondents, of whom 52.2% identified as female, 46.5% identified as male, and 1.3% identified as other. The respondents consisted of 70.7% heterosexuals, 20.4% bisexuals, 2.2% gay/lesbian, and 6.7% other. The distribution of the subjects according to nationality was 43.9% United States, 24.5% Sweden, and 31.5% other. Information about age was not collected. The participants' demographic information can be viewed in Table 1. There were no inclusion criteria required to participate. The study population consisted of users from Facebook, the largest social media platform in the world (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019), Reddit, one of the largest internet forums in the world (Ortiz-Ospina,

2019) and several people via email that answered the questionnaire between the 5th of February 2018 and 17th of July 2018. 314 respondents completed the questionnaire by answering all questions. Respondents who did not answer all questions were excluded from the study.

**Table 1**

*Distribution of Subjects According to Self-Affirmed Gender, Orientation and Nationality*

Gender	Nationality	Sexual Orientation			
		Bisexual	Gay/Lesbian	Heterosexual	Other
Male					
	Sweden	3	2	33	2
	US	7	3	53	2
	Other	10	0	29	2
Other					
	Sweden	0	0	0	0
	US	2	0	0	1
	Other	1	0	0	0
Female					
	Sweden	7	1	24	5
	US	17	1	47	5
	Other	17	0	36	4

## Procedure

Participants were recruited through different internet platforms, mainly Facebook and Reddit. The survey was posted on the following subreddits (a specific forum thread on Reddit consisting posts associated with and dedicated to a particular topic): psychology, sex, lgbt, sweden, mentalhealth and samplesize. Invitations to fill out the online questionnaire were sent through email and posted on the Facebook profile of the author. The invitation included a link to the survey and a short text stating the research goal (how you experience your

sexuality and health), the anonymity of information collected and ways of getting in contact with the researcher. The invitation also encouraged that the invitation be forwarded to as many people as possible. The link of the invitation directed the subject to the online questionnaire. The first page the participants were informed of the research goal, an estimation of how long it would take to complete (10-15 minutes), and the anonymity of information collected.

By pressing 'Continue', the participants were directed to the pages of questions. The first page was compiled of demographic questions including gender identity (male, female, other), nationality (Swedish, American, Other) and sexual orientation (heterosexual, lesbian/gay, bisexual, other). The rest of the questionnaire was composed of two scales: the well-being measure, followed by the sexual identity exploration measure (the names of the measure are found under the "Measures" section). They were required to answer each question before continuing to the next page and were able to go back and change answers before submitting the completed survey. Due to human error, the questions used in the Measure of Sexual Identity Exploration and Commitment were not distributed in the suggested order.

## **Materials**

**Variables.** The variables that were used in this study include gender, nationality, sexual orientation, sexual identity exploration and commitment, and psychological well-being. Gender identity was measured with multiple choice options consisting of Man, Woman, and other. The 'other' option had the following question: "If other, please specify". Adding the option: "If other, please specify", allowed the participants to provide a response if they did not identify as neither male nor female, or if they'd prefer not to respond to the

question. Sexual orientation was measured by respondents choosing the options: Straight/heterosexual, Gay/Lesbian, Bisexual, other. The 'other' option had the following question: "If other, please specify", with the same reasons as stated previously. Nationality was measured with the multiple choice questions: United States, Sweden, and Other. The 'other' option had the following question: "If other, please specify". Sexual identity exploration and commitment and psychological well-being were measured by the following scales.

***Measure of Sexual Identity Exploration and Commitment (MoSIEC).*** The Measure of Sexual Identity Exploration and Commitment (MoSIEC) is a theoretically based multidimensional measure of the processes of sexual identity development. The MoSIEC consists of 22 items within four interrelated, but independent, dimensions underlying the construct of sexual identity, namely (a) *Commitment* (6 items), (b) *Exploration* (8 items), (c) *Sexual Orientation Identity Uncertainty* (3 items), and (d) *Synthesis/Integration* (5 items) (See Appendix A).

"The Commitment subscale assesses the degree of commitment to a sexual identity. The Exploration subscale measures 'a general orientation toward or away from sexual exploration' (Worthington, Navarro, Savoy, & Hampton, 2008, p. 31). The Sexual Orientation Identity Uncertainty subscale assesses commitment or a lack of commitment to a sexual orientation identity. The Synthesis/Integration subscale measures the degree of commitment to a unified, cohesive sexual identity (Worthington et al., 2008). The scale is intended for persons of any sexual orientation identity. The participants respond using a likert-scale from (1) "very characteristic of me" to (6) "very uncharacteristic of me". There



was no previous Swedish translation of this scale. To maintain the meanings and validity, the scale was back-translated by two fluent Swedish and English speakers.

***The Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being.*** The Ryff Scale is a psychometric inventory, measuring six dimensions of psychological well-being (Ryff & Key, 1995). These dimensions include (a) autonomy, (b) environmental mastery, (c) personal growth, (d) positive relations with others, (e) purpose in life and (f) self-acceptance (see Appendix B). The scale includes both positively and negatively worded items selected to retain the conceptual breadth of each of the longer parent scales rather than maximizing internal consistency (Lindfors, 2002).

There are several different versions of the scale varying in length from 18 items to 3 items. For the purpose of this study, a modified 7-item version of the parent 18-item scale was used to measure the participants well-being. The scale is formatted with 7 items from each of the six-dimensions being mixed by taking one item from each scale successively into one continuous self-report instrument. The participants respond using a six-point likert-scale format, rating their answer as: strongly disagree (1), moderately disagree (2), slightly disagree, (3), slightly agree (4), moderately agree (5), strongly agree (6). A previously tested, Swedish translated version of the scale from Lindfors 2002 study of Positive Health in a group of Swedish White-collar workers was used (see Appendix C).

At the top of the page of the Ryff scale, the definitions following concepts were provided to help participants understand certain concepts explored throughout the survey: sexual needs, sexual values, sexual activities, modes of sexual expression, and sexual orientation (See Appendix B).

**Ethical considerations**

The survey was distributed via a link which participants were freely able to decide to participate or not. The aim of the study and contact information of the researcher was provided with the link. No personal data was collected that could disclose the participants identity and the participants were informed that all of the answers were completely confidential.

**Results****Preliminary Testing**

Before running the linear regression analysis, the linearity assumptions for the data were checked to make sure all assumptions were met. Normality and absence of outliers were confirmed, and no violations of the assumptions were detected, therefore all requirements for correlation were fulfilled. Concluding that a linear regression model would provide valid estimates of exposure effects and therefore is a suitable method for analysis of the study's hypothesis.

**Statistical Analysis**

To test the hypothesis of the study, a univariate linear regression analysis was performed. SPSS Statistics, was used to analyze the data. By adding all of the scores of the respective scales, each participant received a total score for both of the scales. Because both variables are numerical variables, linear regression was a suitable analysis to confirm if there was a correlation between the two variables (Kirkwood & Sterne, 2001). A p-value of 0.05 was used as it is a standard acceptable level of significance for social sciences.

**Relationship between psychological well-being and sexual identity exploration.**

A simple linear regression was calculated to predict psychological well-being based on sexual identity exploration. The correlation identified in this study between psychological well-being and sexual identity exploration is presented in Figure 1. A significant regression was found ( $F(1, 312) = 42.350, p < .001$ ), with an  $r^2$  of .120. Participants' predicted psychological well-being total score is equal to  $120.577 + .389$  (sexual identity exploration). The participants' psychological well-being score increased by .389 points for each point of increase in sexual identity exploration score. Therefore, it can be concluded that sexual identity exploration is significantly related to psychological well-being. Figure 1. provides a visual representation of the linear regression equation.

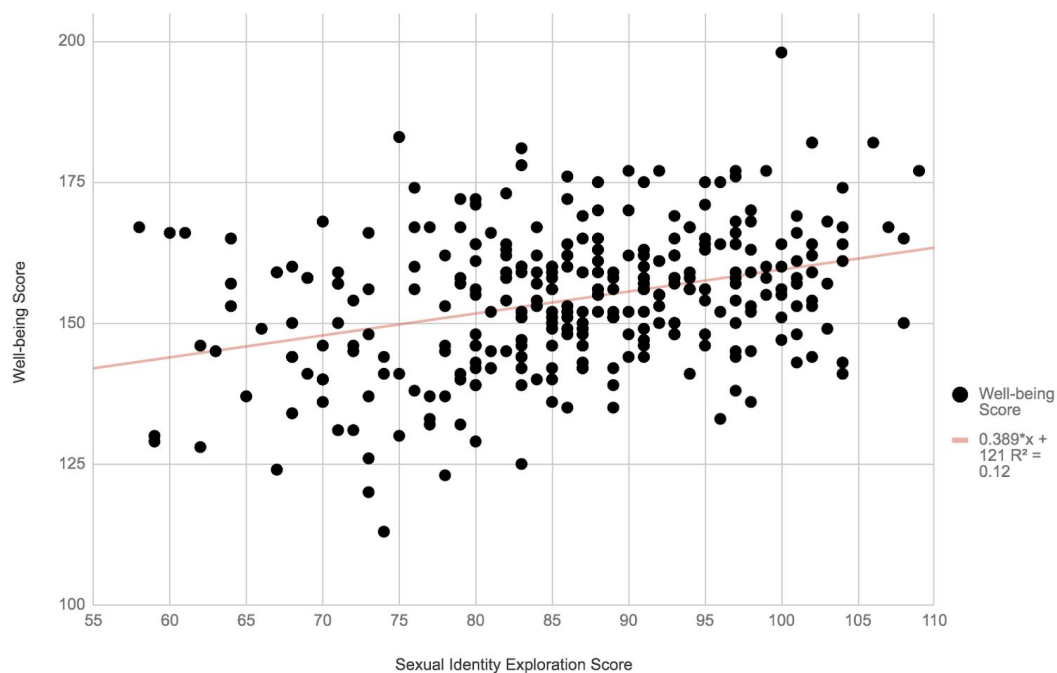


Figure 1. A linear regression with psychological well-being on Y axis and sexual identity exploration on X axis. Each blue point represents a subject's totaled scores for each variable, determining the location on the plot.

## **Discussion**

The main aim of the study was to assess the relationship between psychological well-being and sexual identity exploration. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study that has related these two variables using the Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being and the Measure of Sexual Identity Exploration and Commitment (MoSIEC) on a study population consisting of all gender identities and orientations. The results of the study imply that sexual identity exploration and psychological well-being have a medium-strong positive correlation. Thus, supporting the hypothesis that people who reported to have explored their sexual identity more than others also self-reported to have better well-being.

The study's results speak to the potential benefits of future research and practical approaches of exploring the ways that sexual identity is associated with other components in our lives.

### **Methodological considerations and future directions**

There were several limitations to the study. First, to obtain a broad study population, no exclusion criteria were used for the study, but participants were recruited by using internet posts on several platforms which are primarily used by people under the age of 35 (Shatz, 2016). This limits the study as no means were taken to guarantee random sampling of the study population. Also, this affects the study because it excludes people who lack the technical expertise to operate a computer or have access to internet platforms (eg. older people or simply people who do not have access to a computer or internet connection) where it was distributed. Furthermore, the survey was mainly distributed on reddit. The use of reddit as a recruitment method has several strengths and weaknesses. It was cost effective for recruiting a large variety of nationalities in a very short amount of time.

In regard to gender distribution, studies found either a smaller difference or a near equal representation of both genders (Shatz, 2016). The distribution of male and female gender groups in the study was 52.2% (female), 46.5% (male), resulting in a well-balanced sample, as it is closely representative of the world (male-female) gender ratio (Ritchie, 2019). 1.3% of the study population identified as other. I attempted to obtain a high number of sexual and gender minority participants by posting the survey to relevant subreddits, although not enough were recruited to allow a separate analysis of these groups therefore the subjects with 'non-normative' gender identification and sexual orientations were grouped together. Further research using larger samples are needed to better describe the experiences of participants belonging to different gender/sexual minority groups.

The recruitment process relies on users' self-selection based on the posted selection criteria, which could potentially be an issue, as it opens the possibility that people might choose to participate with dishonest intentions. Or similarly, it might attract people who are particularly interested in the topic of study which might cause a sampling bias or demand bias.

The data collected was cross-sectional. This enabled quick data collection and straightforward statistical analysis. However, data on confounding factors was not included so causation of the two variables cannot be determined. In the absence of a randomized, controlled experiment, causation is impossible to demonstrate. Future research could potentially provide evidence of causal processes through other methods of experimental research.

Lastly, age is considered a standard demographic control variable but due to human error, the control for age was excluded. As the focus of the study did not include age, it may not affect the results. However, it affects the validity of the research as conclusions about

how age correlates to the dependent and independent variables cannot be drawn. A positive aspect of this error is that it could have contributed to a feeling of privacy and anonymity for the participants.

### **Implications**

The results of this study have implications for future research examining the impact that sexual identity exploration has on psychological well-being. Additional analyses of the data could include a multiple linear regression, or even further, a MANOVA, observing the interactions between the variables: nationality, sexual orientation and sexual identity exploration. Also, a hierarchical multiple regression could be performed to determine which variables have statistically significant predictive power.

Future research should replicate the study with improved methodology including adjusting the errors made and should expand the analysis by incorporating other theoretically relevant variables. For example, it would be interesting to observe how income, education and religion are related to sexual identity exploration and psychological well-being.

The study motivates an implementation of practical uses of the results. For example, to motivate people to discuss and explore their sexual identities and to create an accessible way of facilitating this process. This could include implementing this information in already existing sexual education courses or providing information circles at schools or other public spaces.

Due to the design of this study, causality cannot be determined, therefore there is a possibility that causality might be reversed (higher psychological well-being yields to higher sexual exploration). However, I would argue that the topic of sexual identity exploration is still worth pursuing. Though not everyone agrees with Freud's claim that "sex surrounds almost every human action and emotion from infancy", his theories have profoundly shaped

the way we think about the human mind, our behavior and understanding of human development (Hey, n.d.). He introduced an alternative idea that suggested that sexual behavior was something other than ‘sin’, therefore opening up the discourse of sexuality, which we still do not fully understand.

Sexual identity exploration is a complex subjective process that is unique to the individual. Historically, public attention regarding sexuality has been considered in many different frameworks. For example, the repressive hypothesis, where Michel Foucault outlines how the discourse on sexuality was formed in the 18th century as a private, practical affair, that only takes place between husband and wife. During this time, sexuality was repressed and the discourse was silenced, and the same mechanisms are still present in the 20th century (Gutting & Oksala, 2018). However, Foucault also argued that “to free oneself from one set of norms only meant adopting different norms in their stead, and that could turn out to be just as controlling and normalizing.”(Gutting & Oksala, 2018).

So, in light of Foucault, and the implications of the current study’s results, it is important to ask ourselves questions about our own sexual identity, like what role does my sexual identity play in my life: psychologically, culturally, religiously, and socially. And, support for sexual identity exploration should be easily accessible for those who are drawn to the process. However, it should not be stressed or required by those who are unwilling, as it is a process unique to the individual. Following from this, it would be interesting, though challenging given the constraints of historical methods, to examine the historical perspective of sexual exploration by performing an archival study across different time periods. This could provide an understanding of how previous generations have experienced the exploration of their sexual identity in the context of cultural, religious and social conventions

at the time which could be an avenue for fruitful future work regarding the importance of sexual exploration for future generations.



## References

- Ambrosino, B. (2017, March 15). The invention of 'heterosexuality.' Retrieved September 10, 2019, from <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20170315-the-invention-of-heterosexuality>
- Bailey, J. M., Vasey, P. L., Diamond, L. M., Breedlove, S. M., Vilain, E., & Epprecht, M. (2016). Sexual Orientation, Controversy, and Science. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, *17*(2), 45–101. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100616637616>
- Björkenstam, C., Björkenstam, E., Andersson, G., Cochran, S., & Kosidou, K. (2017). Anxiety and Depression Among Sexual Minority Women and Men in Sweden: Is the Risk Equally Spread Within the Sexual Minority Population? *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, *14*(3), 396–403. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsxm.2017.01.012>
- Bolton, S.-L., & Sareen, J. (2011). Sexual Orientation and its Relation to Mental Disorders and Suicide Attempts: Findings from a Nationally Representative Sample. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, *56*(1), 35–43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/070674371105600107>
- Everett, B. G., Talley, A. E., Hughes, T. L., Wilsnack, S. C., & Johnson, T. P. (2016). Sexual Identity Mobility and Depressive Symptoms: A Longitudinal Analysis of Moderating Factors Among Sexual Minority Women. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *45*(7), 1731–1744. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-016-0755-x>

- Fisher, T. D., Davis, C. M., & Yarber, W. L. (2010). *Handbook of Sexuality-Related Measures* (3rd ed.). Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge.
- Gutting, G., & Oksala, J. (2018, May 22). Michel Foucault (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). Retrieved September 15, 2018, from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/foucault/>
- Hamilton, N. M. R. H. (2002, November 1). The Proactive Sexual Health History: Key to Effective Sexual Health Care. Retrieved May 18, 2019, from <https://www.aafp.org/afp/2002/1101/p1705.html>
- Hey, W. (n.d.). Biography: Sigmund Freud: Psychoanalysis and Sexual Repression. Retrieved March 4, 2018, from <https://www.vision.org/biography-sigmund-freud-psychoanalysis-and-sexual-repression-388>
- Kaufman, S. B., Quilty, L. C., Grazioplene, R. G., Hirsh, J. B., Gray, J. R., Peterson, J. B., & DeYoung, C. G. (2015). Openness to Experience and Intellect Differentially Predict Creative Achievement in the Arts and Sciences. *Journal of Personality, 84*(2), 248–258. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12156>
- Kirkwood, B., & Sterne, J. (2001). *Essentials of Medical Statistics* (2nd ed.). Hoboken, NJ, United States: Wiley.
- Lindfors, P. (2000). Swedish Translation of Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scales. Retrieved from email correspondence with Theresa M. Berrie (November, 8, 2017)

Lindfors, P. (2002). Positive Health in a Group of Swedish White-Collar Workers.

*Psychological Reports*, 91(3), 839–845. <https://doi.org/10.2466/pr0.2002.91.3.839>

McCrae, R. R. (1987). Creativity, divergent thinking, and openness to experience. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52(6), 1258–1265.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.52.6.1258>

Ortiz-Ospina, E. (2019, September 18). The rise of social media. Retrieved October 20, 2019, from <https://ourworldindata.org/rise-of-social-media>

Parent, M. C., Talley, A. E., Schwartz, E. N., & Hancock, D. W. (2015). I want your sex: The role of sexual exploration in fostering positive sexual self-concepts for heterosexual and sexual minority women. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 2(2), 199–204. <https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000097>

Riggle, E. D. B., Whitman, J. S., Olson, A., Rostosky, S. S., & Strong, S. (2008). The positive aspects of being a lesbian or gay man. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 39(2), 210–217. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0735-7028.39.2.210>

Ritchie, H. (2019, June 13). Gender Ratio. Retrieved September 16, 2019, from <https://ourworldindata.org/gender-ratio>

Ryff, C. D., & Key, C. L. M. (1995). The Structure of Psychological Well-Being Revisited. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69(4). Retrieved from <http://midus.wisc.edu/findings/pdfs/830.pdf>

Ryff, C. D (1995) 14- Item Instruction. Retrieved from email correspondence with Theresa

M. Berrie (November, 8, 2017)

Sandfort, T. G. M., Bakker, F., Schellevis, F. G., & Vanwesenbeeck, I. (2006). Sexual Orientation and Mental and Physical Health Status: Findings From a Dutch

Population Survey. *American Journal of Public Health, 96*(6), 1119–1125.

<https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2004.058891>

Shatz, I. (2016). Fast, Free, and Targeted. *Social Science Computer Review, 35*(4), 537–549.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439316650163>

Stephenson, K. R., & Meston, C. M. (2013a). The Conditional Importance of Sex: Exploring

the Association Between Sexual Well-Being and Life Satisfaction. *Journal of Sex &*

*Marital Therapy, 41*(1), 25–38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0092623x.2013.811450>

World Health Organization. (2002). *Redefining Sexual Health*. Retrieved from

[https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/sexual\\_health/defining\\_sexual\\_health.pdf](https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/sexual_health/defining_sexual_health.pdf)

Worthington, R. L., Navarro, R. L., Savoy, H. B., & Hampton, D. (2008). Development,

reliability, and validity of the Measure of Sexual Identity Exploration and

Commitment (MOSIEC). *Developmental Psychology, 44*(1), 22–33.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.44.1.22>

Zoeterman, S. E., & Wright, A. J. (2014). The Role of Openness to Experience and Sexual Identity Formation in LGB Individuals: Implications for Mental Health. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *61*(2), 334–353. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2013.839919>

## Appendix A

## Measure of Sexual Identity Exploration and Commitment

Please read the following definitions before completing the survey items:

1. Sexual needs are defined as an internal, subjective experience of instinct, desire, appetite, biological necessity, impulses, interest, and/or libido with respect to sex.
2. Sexual values are defined as moral evaluations, judgments and/or standards about what is appropriate, acceptable, desirable, and innate sexual behavior.
3. Sexual activities are defined as any behavior that a person might engage in relating to or based on sexual attraction, sexual arousal, sexual gratification, or reproduction (e.g., fantasy to holding hands to kissing to sexual intercourse).
4. Modes of sexual expression are defined as any form of communication (verbal or nonverbal) or direct and indirect signals that a person might use to convey her or his sexuality (e.g., flirting, eye contact, touching, vocal quality, compliments, suggestive body movements or postures).
5. Sexual orientation is defined as an enduring emotional, romantic, sexual, or affectional attraction to other persons that ranges from exclusive heterosexuality to exclusive homosexuality and includes various forms of bisexuality.

Please use the following scale to respond to Items 1–22.

Very Uncharacteristic of Me 1    2    3    4    5    6    Very Characteristic of Me

1. My sexual orientation is clear to me
2. I went through a period in my life when I was trying to determine my sexual needs.
3. I am actively trying to learn more about my own sexual needs.
4. My sexual values are consistent with all of the other aspects of my sexuality.
5. I am open to experiment with new types of sexual activities in the future.

6. I am actively trying new ways to express myself sexually.
7. My understanding of my sexual needs coincides with my overall sense of sexual self.
8. I went through a period in my life when I was trying different forms of sexual expression.
9. My sexual values will always be open to exploration.
10. I know what my preferences are for expressing myself sexually.
11. I have a clear sense of the types of sexual activities I prefer.
12. I am actively experimenting with sexual activities that are new to me.
13. The ways I express myself sexually are consistent with all of the other aspects of my sexuality.
14. I sometimes feel uncertain about my sexual orientation.
15. I do not know how to express myself sexually.
16. I have never clearly identified what my sexual values are.
17. The sexual activities I prefer are compatible with all of the other aspects of my sexuality.
18. I have never clearly identified what my sexual needs are.
19. I can see myself trying new ways of expressing myself sexually in the future.
20. I have a firm sense of what my sexual needs are.
21. My sexual orientation is not clear to me.
22. My sexual orientation is compatible with all of the other aspects of my sexuality.

(Fisher, Davis, & Yarber, 2010)

## Appendix B

## Ryff Scale of Psychological Well-being

## Scales/Items:

## Autonomy:

Items: 3 items - Self-Administered Questionnaire, Section E, Question 1 (m, s, kk)

m. "I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions."

s\*. "I have confidence in my-opinions, even if they are contrary to the general consensus." (R)

kk. "I judge myself by what I think is important, not by the values of what others think is important." (R)

\* In MIDUS-I, the wording of this item is slightly different

"I have confidence in my *own* opinions, even if they are *different from the way most other people think.*"

## Environmental Mastery:

Items: 3 items - Self-Administered Questionnaire, Section E, Question 1 (b, h, t,)

b. "In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live." (R)

h. "The demands of everyday life often get me down."

t. "I am quite good at managing the many responsibilities of my daily life."

(R)

## Personal Growth:

Items: 3 items - Self-Administered Questionnaire, Section E, Question 1 (i, aa, gg)

i. "I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world." (R)

aa. "For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and



growth.” (R)

gg. “I gave up trying to make big improvements or changes in my life a long time ago.”

Positive Relations with Others:

Items: 3 items - Self-Administered Questionnaire, Section E, Question 1 (j, bb, hh)

j. “Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me.”

bb. “People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others.” (R)

hh. “I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others.”

Purpose in Life:

Items: 3 items - Self-Administered Questionnaire, Section E, Question 1 (e, oo, qq)

e. “I live life one day at a time and don't really think about the future.”

oo. “Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them.”  
(R)

qq. “I sometimes feel as if I've done all there is to do in life.”

Self-Acceptance:

Items: 3 items -Self-Administered Questionnaire, Section E, Question 1 (f, x, dd)

f. “When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out.” (R)

x. “I like most parts of my personality.” (R)

dd. “In many ways I feel disappointed about my achievements in life.”

Coding: 1 Strongly agree; 2 Somewhat agree; 3 A little Agree; 4 Neither agree or disagree;

5 A little disagree; 6 Somewhat disagree; 7 Strongly disagree.

Scaling: Psychological well-being scales are constructed by calculating the sum of each set of items. Items marked with (R) were reverse-coded so that high scores reflect higher standing in the scale. For an item with a missing value, the mean value of completed items is imputed.

Missing Values: The scales are computed for cases that have valid values for at least one item on the particular scale. Scores are not calculated for cases with no valid item on the scales, and coded as “98” for “NOT CALCULATED (Due to missing data).”

(Ryff, 1995)

## Appendix C

## Swedish Translation of the Ryff Scale

- a. Jag brukar vanligen känna att jag har kontroll över min livssituation. (EM+)
- b. När jag ser tillbaka på mitt liv är jag nöjd med det sätt på vilket saker och ting har ordnat sig. (SA+)
- c. För mig har det varit svårt och påfrestande att upprätthålla nära relationer. (PR-)
- d. Vardagens krav gör mig ofta nedstämd. (EM-)
- e. Jag tar en dag i taget och tänker inte särskilt mycket på framtiden. (PL-)
- f. Jag är ganska bra på att hantera förpliktelser i mitt dagliga liv. (EM+)
- g. Jag tycker att det är viktigt att få nya erfarenheter som utmanar min syn på mig själv och på världen omkring mig. (PG+)
- h. Jag tycker om de flesta dragen i min personlighet. (SA+)
- i. Jag har en tendens att låta mig påverkas av personer med bestämda åsikter. (AU-)
- j. Jag känner mig på flera sätt missnöjd med det som jag har åstadkommit här i livet. (SA-)
- k. Andra människor skulle beskriva mig som en generös person som tar sig tid att umgås med andra. (PR+)
- l. Jag tror på mina egna åsikter, även om de är tvärtemot vad alla andra tycker. (AU+)
- m. Jag har inte upplevt särskilt många varma och tillitsfulla relationer. (PR-)
- n. Vissa människor vandrar planlöst genom livet, men jag är inte en av dem. (PL+)
- o. För min del har livet varit en ständig process av lärande, förändring och utveckling. (PG+)
- p. Ibland känns det som om jag redan har gjort allt som finns att göra här i livet. (PL-)
- q. Det var länge sedan jag gav upp försöken att göra några stora förändringar eller förbättringar i mitt liv. (PG-)

r. Jag bedömer mig själv efter det som jag tycker är viktigt, och inte efter andra människors värderingar om vad som är viktigt. (AU+)

EM = 1, 4rev, 6.

SA = 2, 8, 10rev

PR = 3rev, 11, 13rev

PL = 5rev, 14, 16rev

PG = 7, 15, 17rev

AU = 9rev, 12, 18

(Lindfors, 2000)