Minority Stress for LGB Individuals: Implications for Mental Health

Kathryn L. Zeanah, MA
Kisha M. Radliff, PhD
Amy Bremer, MA
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One Note...
• Why only focus on lesbian women, gay men, and bisexual individuals?
  – “Sexual minority” umbrella is very broad: LGBTQI-2S.
  – LGB are most well-known & have received most attention in research related to minority stress & mental health.
  – LGB often grouped together because of shared challenges as a result of sexual orientation.
  – TQI-2S individuals often face unique challenges unrelated to sexual orientation – more research is needed, but outside of the scope of this presentation.

Introduction
• Compared to heterosexual individuals LGB individuals experience more mental health issues including:
  – Substance use disorders
  – Affective disorders
  – Suicide (Meyer, 2003)
• Researchers proposed that this is attributed to prejudice and discrimination, such as:
  – Hate crimes
  – Housing discrimination
  – Safety and harassment at school (Friedman, 1999)

Discrimination of LGB Individuals
• Of 6,000 incidents of single-bias hate crimes committed in 2013:
  – 22% were motivated by the victim’s sexual orientation, which is second only to racially-motivated hate crimes (FBI, 2014)
• A study conducted by Herek in 2009 estimates that:
  – 1 in 5 sexual minority adults have experienced a crime against their person or property based on their sexual orientation
  – 50% of sexual minority adults have experienced verbal abuse as a result of their sexual orientation
  – More than 10% have experienced housing or employment discrimination

The 2013 National School Climate Survey documents the prevalence of anti-LGBT language and victimization, such as experiences of harassment and assault in school.

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Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer & Boesen, 2014
A hostile school climate affects students’ academic success and mental health. LGBT students who experience victimization and discrimination at school have worse educational outcomes and poorer psychological well-being.

Effects of Victimization

- Compared to those reporting lower levels of victimization, LGBT youth reporting higher levels of victimization experienced higher rates of Absenteeism: More than three times as likely to have missed school in the past month than those who experienced lower levels (61.1% vs. 17.3%)
- Poorer Academic Performance: Lower grade point averages (GPAs) than students who were less often harassed (2.8 vs. 3.3)
- Poorer Attainment: Were twice as likely to report that they did not plan to pursue any post-secondary education (e.g., college or trade school) than those who experienced lower levels (8.7% vs. 4.2%)
- Poorer Mental Health: Higher levels of depression and lower levels of self-esteem
Prevalence Rates of Mental Health: Meta Analysis of the Research

• In 2003, Meyer conducted a meta-analysis of the research examining the prevalence of mental health issues for lesbian women, gay men, and bisexual individuals.
• The meta-analysis found that while significant differences in the prevalence of mental health issues for LGB people and non-LGB people were not always found, whenever there was a difference, LGB groups always had higher prevalence than heterosexual groups.

Prevalence Rates of Mental Health: Meta Analysis of the Research

• Lifetime prevalence of a mental disorder is 2.5 times greater for gay men and lesbian women than heterosexual men and women.
• In randomized studies, LGB groups were at an increased risk for:
  – Mood disorders
  – Anxiety disorders
  – Substance use disorders
• This is consistent with other research:
  – Jorm and colleagues (2002) found that lesbian women and gay men reported more anxiety and depression symptoms and greater suicidality than their heterosexual counterparts.
  – Cochran, Sullivan, and Mays (2003) found that LGB individuals had a mental health comorbidity rate 3 to 4 times higher than heterosexuals of the same gender.

Minority Stress Theory

• What is “minority stress”?
  – “The excess stress to which individuals from stigmatized social categories are exposed as a result of their social, often a minority, position” (Meyer, 2003, p. 675).
  – Conflict between values of minority group & larger culture that impacts social environment of minority group.
  – Chronic stress.

Why more mental health issues?

Minority Stress Theory

• Minority Stress Theory (Meyer, 2003)
  – Built from research on experiences of racial minorities.
• 3 Processes of minority stress:
  – Prejudice events
  – Expectations of rejection/identity concealment
  – Internalized homophobia.

Minority Stress Theory

• Prejudice Events
  – External factors in the environment that occur as a result of an individual’s minority identity (Meyer, 2003).
  – Blatant/overt acts of discrimination/violence.
Minority Stress Theory

• Expectations of rejection/identity concealment
  – LGB learn to anticipate negative reactions from heterosexual culture
  – Maintain vigilance/conceal sexual orientation to protect themselves from negative effects of discrimination
  – Identity concealment is correlated with negative affect, depressive symptoms, and alcohol consumption
  – Identity concealment prevents LGB individuals from social support of identifying with the larger gay community

Minority Stress

• Internalized Homophobia
  – Homophobia = fear & dread of being around lesbians/gay men experienced by heterosexuals (Weinberg, 1972)
  – Internalization of these beliefs by gay men & lesbian women = internalized homophobia
  – Associated with many mental health issues:
    • depression, anxiety, substance use, suicide ideation, HIV risk-taking behaviors, loneliness, decrease self-esteem & less social support (DiPlacido, 1998; Meyer & Dean, 1998; Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010; Shidlo, 1994; Szymanski & Chung, 2008)

Discrimination against LGB individuals has become more subtle, nuanced, and harder to identify.

Minority Stress

• Sexual Orientation Microaggressions
  – “brief and commonplace, daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative LGBT slights and insults to the target group or person” (Sue & Capodilupo, 2008)
  – 3 types: microassaults, microinsults, microinvalidations (Sue, 2010a)

Minority Stress

• Sexual Orientation Microaggressions
  – Microassaults:
    • Deliberately discriminatory actions
    • More common among LGB individuals
    • Ex. Two women holding hands on the street, a car drives by and a person shouts “Dykes go to hell”

Meyer, 2003

Capodilupo & Sue, 2013; Sue, 2010a
Minority Stress

- Sexual Orientation Microaggressions
  - Microinsults
    - Verbal/nonverbal; characterized by an insulting message
    - Often couched in a "positive" statement
    - Example: A female peer in response to a gay male who comes out to her: "I've always wanted a gay friend! Now we can go shopping together!"

Capodilupo & Sue, 2013; Sue, 2010a

- Sexual Orientation Microaggressions
  - Microinvalidations
    - Verbal comments/behaviors that dismiss experiential reality of target
    - Example: A heterosexual person who is confronted as having homophobic bias says, "I am not homophobic, I have a gay friend"
      - Message: I am immune to homophobia because I have a friend who is not heterosexual.
    - Denial of experiential reality of LGB individuals allows heterosexuals to deny the power & privilege they have

Capodilupo & Sue, 2013; Sue, 2010a

Minority Stress

- Sexual Orientation Microaggressions Taxonomy
  ① Heterosexist terminology
  ② Endorsement of heteronormative culture/behaviors
  ③ Assumption of universal LGBT experience
  ④ Exoticization
  ⑤ Discomfort/disapproval of LGBT experience
  ⑥ Assumption of sexual pathology/deviance/abnormality
  ⑦ Denial of reality of heterosexism
  ⑧ Physical threat/harassment

Nadal, 2013; Nadal et al., 2010; Nadal, Issa et al., 2011

- Sexual Orientation Microaggressions & Mental Health
  - Clash of Reality – LGB individuals feel heterosexism/antigay harassment are pervasive; heterosexuals believe homophobia does not exist anymore
    - People in power define what is "normal" in society & can deny the reality of the LGB experience.
Minority Stress

• Sexual Orientation Microaggressions & Mental Health
  – Invisibility of Unintentional Bias
    • For LGB person: “Did that really just happen?”
    • For perpetrator: I am a good person, and I would not say something offensive
    • Very difficult to make perpetrator aware of bias(es) and harm that is inflicted on minority groups by those biases

Capodilupo & Sue, 2013; Sue, 2010a

Minority Stress

• Sexual Orientation Microaggressions & Mental Health
  – Perceived minimal harm
    • Microaggression is acknowledged, but target is encouraged to “let it go” – it’s not that big of a deal, it’s just one comment
    • For minorities who experience microaggressions, they are cumulative and ongoing
    • Depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, self-destructive behaviors, & PTSD reported in LGBT individuals as a result of sexual orientation microaggressions

Nadal, 2013; Shelton & Delgado-Romero, 2011; Sue, 2010b

Promoting Positive Mental Health for LGB Individuals

• General Strategies
  – Educate others about minority stress, microaggressions, and their impact on LGB
  – Validate experiential reality of LGB individuals (listen & empathize)
  – Encourage students who experience microaggressions/ minority stress to talk about it with people who share the same minority status
  – Increase self-awareness of your own biases, prejudices & fears
  – Become an ally – commit to personal action against bias & discrimination. Do something when you witness discriminatory acts.

Nadal Wong et al., 2011; Sue & Capodilupo, 2008

Practice Implications

• Practitioners
  – Identify role of minority stress in professional relationships/every day interactions
  – Use appropriate strategies to help students combat minority stress in their lives
  – Seek out opportunities to enhance multicultural competence (for staff and students)

• Trainers
  – Promote multicultural competence in students (LGB-inclusive curriculum, inclusive program climate, etc.)
  – Develop students knowledge, skills, and awareness of minority stress and microaggressions

Kosciw et al., 2014
Questions?

Additional Resources

- Information for guidance and support in developing a Gay Straight Alliance: http://www.gsanetwork.org/
- Free Your Mind: The Book for Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Youth-and their Allies by Ellen Bass and Kate Kaufman (book for parents/guardians or adolescents)

Resources

- The Microaggressions Project http://www.microaggressions.com/
- That’s so Gay! Microaggressions and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community edited by Kevin L. Nadal
- Microaggressions In Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation by Derald Wing Sue
- Counseling the Culturally Diverse: Theory and Practice (6th Edition) Edited by D.W. Sue & D. Sue

References


