

Committee on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Health Issues and Research Gaps and Opportunities

Mental Health: Stress and Protective Factors

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March 22, 2010

Outline

1. Main findings
 - Areas that require further investigation
2. Gaps in knowledge
3. The place of LGB research in science

Main findings

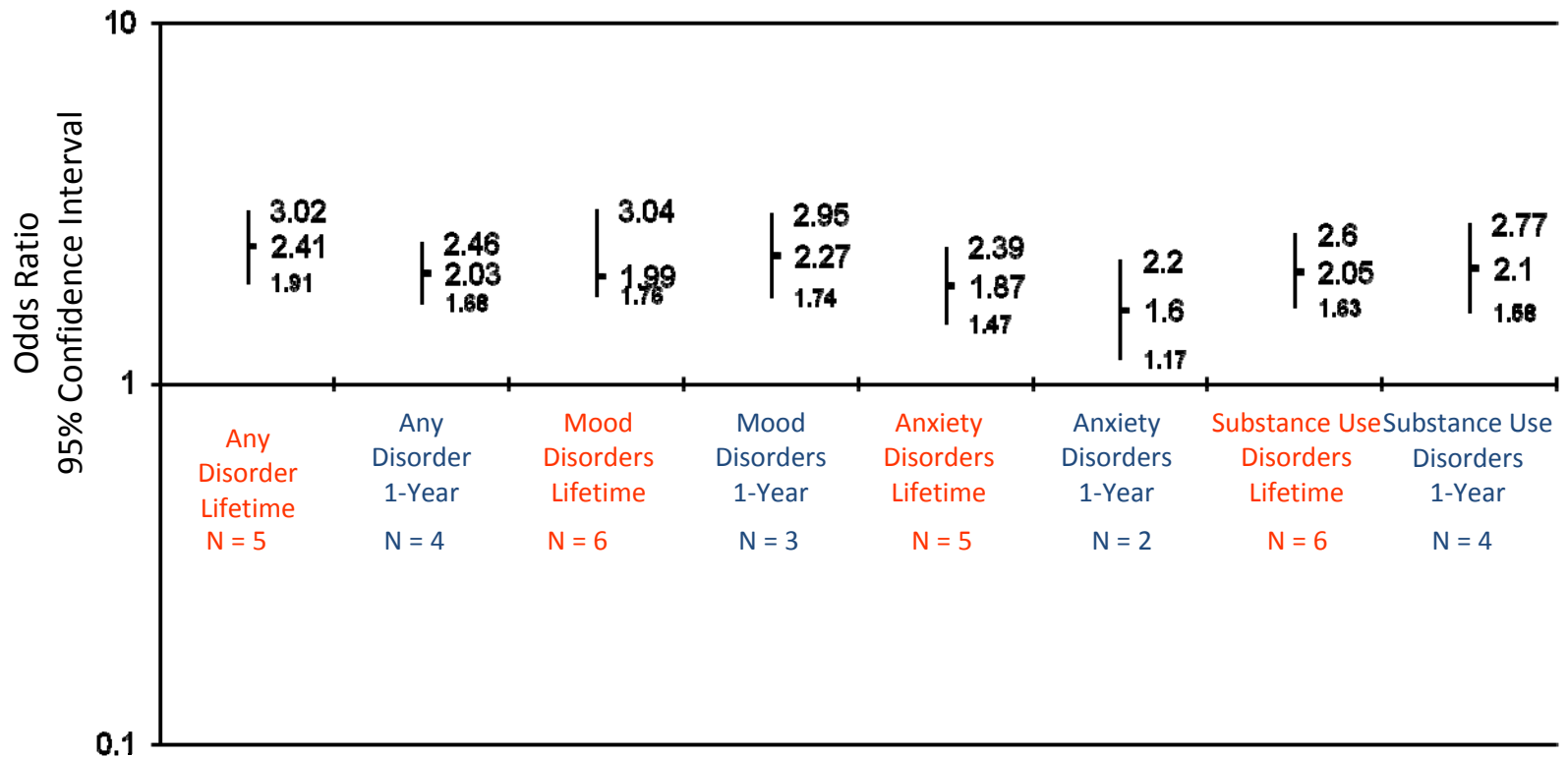
- LGB higher than heterosexuals in all major mental disorders—**anxiety, mood, substance use disorders.**



Figure 2

Prevalence of Lifetime and 1-year Mental Disorders LGB vs. Heterosexuals

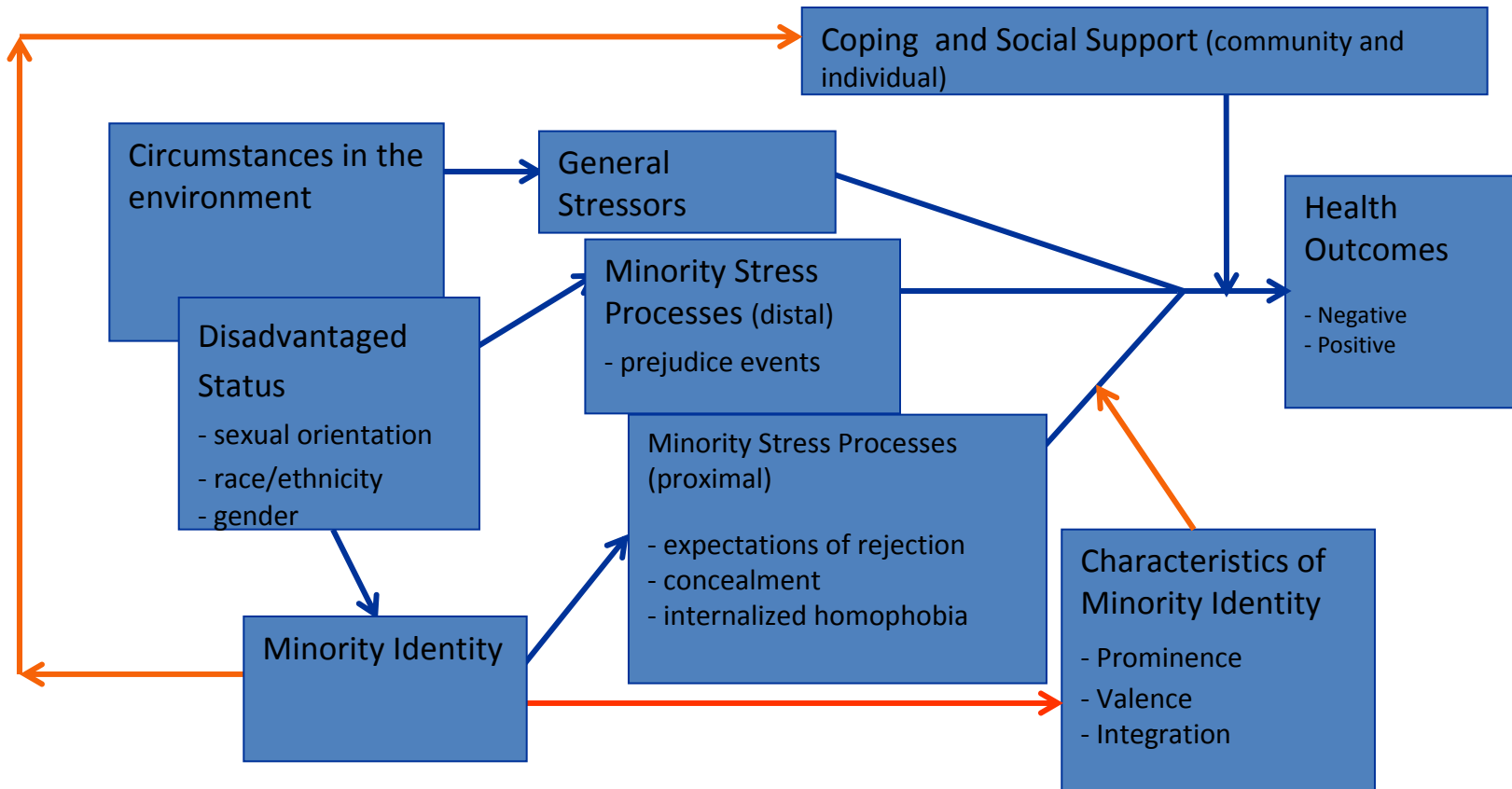
Combined Mantel-Haenszel weighted odds ratio and 95% confidence-intervals



Main findings

- Minority stress is the most compelling (and most often cited) explanatory model for high prevalence of disorders in LGBs.
- Minority stress explains disparities between LGB and heterosexuals.

Minority Stress Processes in LGB Populations



Meyer, 2003

Main findings

- But we need more explicit (and rigorous) challenge of minority stress
 - Study of alternative explanations
 - Use a variety of methods (population, crosssectional and longitudinal, quasi-experimental and experimental)
 - Study pathophysiological pathways

Important observations that need further investigation

- LGB higher than heterosexuals in suicide ideation and attempts.
- This appears to be mostly related to young age and coming out.
- But in the general (non-gay) population, suicide is a greater problem in old and very-old age. We know little (if anything) about aging LGBs and suicide.

Important observations that need further investigation

- Lesbian have as high prevalence as men of drug *and* alcohol use (not just alcohol).
- But study has been neglected because of focus on MSM related to the relationship of drug use and HIV transmission.

Important observations that need further investigation

- Bisexuals may have higher prevalence than gay men and lesbians of substance use and possibly other mental health and behavioral outcomes.
- But often researchers do not or cannot distinguish between gay and bisexual identities because of low number of study participants in LGB samples.

Important observations that need further investigation

- Minority stress predicts that more recent cohorts would fare better than older cohorts of LGBs because of the improving (more liberal) social environment.
- Some indication of important differences by cohort. For example, younger cohort in Stride had lower level of MDD and of suicide attempts.
- Studies are necessary to investigate cohort and period effects on mental health outcomes.

Important observations that need further investigation

- Black LGBs have higher levels of minority stress (related to homophobia and racism) and less coping resources than white LGBs.
- But contrary to minority stress predictions they do not have purportedly consequent more mental disorders or lower well-being than whites.
- These findings echo findings in general (non-gay) population regarding black vs. white Americans.

Black – white differences in minority stress patterns

- Explanation has been that black and other minorities have better coping that reduce the impact of minority stress, but this explanation is inconsistent with minority stress theory (Schwartz & Meyer, 2010)
- Studies of this phenomena in the general (non-gay) population begin to explore the hypothesis that unhealthy behaviors (e.g., eating habits, drinking) moderate the impact of stress on mental health but lead to adverse physical health outcomes (Jackson, Knight, & Rafferty, 2009 ahead of print).

Important observations that need further investigation

- In Stride we found higher levels of suicide attempts around coming out period among black and Latino LGBs despite their lower levels of mental disorders.
- A strong contender for the cause of suicide attempts (in lieu of mental disorders) are traumatic life events—homelessness, rape, violence but we know little about the relationship of non-mental health factors on youth suicide.

Important observations that need further investigation

- Gender nonconformity is an important component of prejudice toward LGB individuals.
- The separation of issues related to transgender and LGBs sometimes leads researchers to overlook the role of perceived gender nonconformity as a cause of prejudice events and rejection, including antigay violence.

Important observations that need further investigation

- Minor events (“everyday discrimination”)—like filling out an administrative form that asks about marriage and other instances that symbolize exclusion and rejection—have significant impact on the lives of LGB individuals.
- Uniquely among minority groups, LGB populations may suffer from prejudice and rejection at home—from family and friends—as well as strangers.

Gaps in research on LGB populations

- A national representative study of LGBs would allow researchers to examine psychiatric epidemiological patterns that are impossible to study now.

Gaps in research on LGB populations

- National study would facilitate study of . . .
 - Psychiatric epidemiology patterns across gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation identification, age cohorts, residential area (rural vs. urban).
 - Analysis of lower prevalence disorders, including lifetime disorders such as generalized anxiety disorder, PTSD, dysthymia, bipolar disorder, and eating disorders and almost all 12-months disorders.

Gaps in research on LGB populations

- Examples are the National Survey of American Life (NSAL) and the National Latino and Asian American Study (NLAAS), which were developed under sponsorship of the NIMH as part of the Collaborative Psychiatric Epidemiology Surveys (CPES) that includes the National Comorbidity Survey Replication (NCS-R).

Gaps in research on LGB populations

- Study of older populations, especially representative and diverse samples.
- Generational issues are always going to be important to consider as sexuality is so much affected by social and cultural context—each generation may see new constructions of identity, new sexual morality and conventions, different technologies, etc.

The place of LGB research in science

- Having methodological challenges is not a unique feature of LGB study.
- Methodological issues related to studying LGB populations are not unique.
- The main challenge is not coming up with research solutions but funding.

The place of LGB research in science

- LGB study has significance beyond “special population” by contributing to knowledge – theory and methods. Scientific contribution to knowledge is an essential element of science.
- But it is hard for LGB research to be recognized for its broader contribution to the scientific community.
- This is because of a form of unrecognized prejudice—it does not involve negative attitudes, but minimizes the significance of research.

The place of LGB research in science

- This affects review of grant proposals, publication decisions, faculty promotions, students' dissertation and thesis (as well as career choice)
- Removing this prejudice is, therefore, central to advancing the health of LGB populations.