



# Trauma, Maladaptive Coping and Self-Esteem in Gay Men and Lesbians

Katie O'Neal, Mark Vosvick, Ph.D., Kyle Deaton, & Chwee-Lye Chng, Ph.D.

University of North Texas

## INTRODUCTION

❖Morrow (1993) suggests that gay individuals passively internalize society's stigmatization of them which results in their poor self esteem.

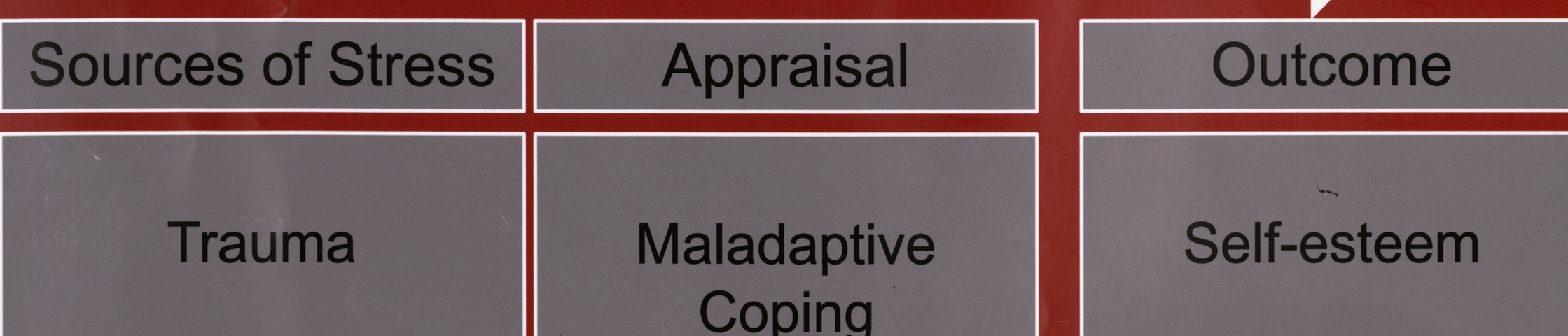
❖The experience of being a member of a sexual minority group may increase stress, lower self-esteem and lead to depression (Zea et al., 1999).

❖Lesbians and gay men are at increased risk of attempting suicide if they identify their same sex preference early in adolescence, experience negative "coming out" reactions from others, experience victimization related to their sexual orientation, or use substances to cope with problems relating to their gay identity (Hammelman, 1993).

❖Low self-esteem was associated with using maladaptive strategies such as denial and behavioral disengagement (Carver et.al.,1989). Research demonstrates that active styles of coping are associated with low levels of depression in gays (Namir, et al., 1987).

❖Additionally, one potential negative outcome of trauma is lowered self-esteem (Cascardi & O'Leary, 1992; Orava, McLeod, & Sharpe,1996). Trauma can affect the ability to cope with stress (Winkel et al., 1994).

## THEORETICAL MODEL



❖According to Lazarus and Folkman (1986), when faced with a stressor, there are two kinds of cognitive appraisal: primary and secondary. In primary appraisal, the person evaluates whether or not the stressor is a threat or a challenge (e.g. whether it is potentially harmful to my self-esteem). In secondary appraisal, the person evaluates resources and selects a coping strategy (adaptive or maladaptive) to reduce the stress. In reappraisal, the person evaluates the effectiveness of the coping strategy. Successful coping is associated with positive outcomes

## HYPOTHESES

❖Trauma will be negatively associated with self-esteem in gay men and lesbians.

❖Maladaptive coping strategies such as behavioral disengagement, substance use, and self blame, will be negatively associated with self-esteem in gay men and lesbians

❖Trauma and maladaptive coping will explain a significant amount of the variance in self-esteem in gay men and lesbians

## METHODS

### Procedures

❖We administered a battery of IRB approved self-report measures that were used to collect demographic, medical and psychological data. Collected demographic, medical and psychological information. Participants were recruited from various events in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area such as Dallas Gay Pride 2008, UNT GLAAD weekly meetings, and by placing flyers around the UNT campus and at the Dallas Resource Center. Participants received monetary incentives for their participation in the study.

### Measures

#### Brief Cope Scale

(BCS; Carver, 1997)

- 28 items on 4 point likert-type scale with 14 subscales.  
1 = I haven't been doing this at all  
4 = I've been doing this a lot
- Reliability:  $\alpha = .90$  get alphas for subscales
- Concurrent validity was established (Carver, 1997)  
"I've been giving up trying to deal with it"

#### Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale

(RSES ; Rosenberg, 1965)

- 10 items on a 4 point likert-type scale  
1=Strongly agree  
4=strongly disagree
- Reliability:  $\alpha = .78$
- Concurrent validity was established (Adler & Stewart, 2004)  
"I feel like I have a number of good qualities"

#### Trauma History Questionnaire

(THQ; Green, 1996)

- 28 self-reported items
- 3 subscales includes crime, physical sexual trauma and general trauma
- Reliability:  $\alpha = .85$
- Inventory Scale: Yes, No;
- "Have you ever seen someone seriously injured or killed?"

## Participant Characteristics

(N=100)

	Mean	SD	Range
Age (years)	34	12.65	18-66
Education	15	4.58	1-33
		n	
Gender	Male	49	
	Female	45	
	Transgender	6	
Ethnicity	European - American	62	
	African - American	11	
	Latino/a	14	
	Other	13	
Religious Affiliation	Christian	57	
	Agnostic	26	
	Other	17	
Sexual Orientation	Lesbian	50	

## RESULTS

### Univariate Statistics

	Mean	SD	Actual/Possible Range	Calculated $\alpha$
THQ	5.25	3.60	0 – 18/0-24	0.76
BCS - SB	4.03	1.74	2 – 8/2-8	0.82
BCS - SU	3.58	1.86	2 – 8/2-8	0.94
BCS - BD	2.86	1.29	2 – 8/2-8	0.83
RSES	17.60	5.82	10 – 34/10-40	0.76
Self blame (SB)				
Substance use (SU)				
Behavioral disengagement (BD)				

### Bivariate Statistics

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	—						
2. Education	.09	—				$p < .05^*$	$p < .01^{**}$
3. African American	-.17	-.21*	—				
4. THQ	.06	.05	-.01	—			
5. Self Blame	-.24*	-.01	-.01	.31**	—		
6. Disengagement	-.15	-.21*	.24*	.25*	.47**	—	
7. Sub. Use	-.24*	.01	-.07	.24*	.27**	.27**	—
8. Self-Esteem	.07	-.06	.07	.42	.52*	.51**	.19

### Multivariate Analysis

Criterion variable = Self esteem

	Gay men				Lesbians			
PREDICTOR S	$\beta$	t	Tolerance	VIF	$\beta$	t	Tolerance	VIF
Age	.06	.51	.94	1.1	-.05	-.42	.77	1.3
African American	-.05	-.35	.92	1.3	.18	1.60	.61	1.1
BCS - SB	.42	2.82**	.65	1.7	.26	1.94	.67	1.5
BCS - BD	.24	1.54	.70	1.8	.34	2.72**	.77	1.3
BCS - SU	.15	1.30	.89	1.1	-.21	-1.70	.75	1.3
THQ	.12	1.00	.80	1.3	.37	3.10**	.83	1.2
	$p < .05^*$	$p < .01^{**}$						

Gay Adj. R<sup>2</sup>= .38, F(5, 44)=7.31, p<.001

Lesbian Adj. R<sup>2</sup>= .41, F(5, 44)=7.32, p<.001

## DISCUSSION

❖Our findings were counterintuitive to our hypotheses; trauma was positively correlated with self-esteem.

❖ Maladaptive coping with self blame and disengagement was positively correlated with self-esteem, while substance use was negatively correlated in lesbians.

❖One possible explanation for negative substance use among lesbians could be other resources that bolster their self-esteem, such as community involvement or social support.

❖Self-esteem may serve as resilience factors and protect people who have gone through traumatic events in their lives (Stein, Burden Leslie, & Nyamathi, 2002; Thompson et al., 2002). With increasing self-esteem people felt less threatened by traumatic events (Spencer et al., 1993.)

❖ Seeing self-esteem as a resource, individuals with high self-esteem have more alternative positive qualities to turn to when threatened (Spencer et al., 1993). If a person can focus on alternative positive qualities, their sense of self-integrity can be reestablished.



## Limitations

❖Generalizability is limited due to our convenience sample.

❖We can not infer causality from our results due to our

❖cross-sectional correlational design.

❖Data were collected via self-report.

## Future Research

❖ Future research should explore other factors which contribute to self-esteem in lesbians

❖Further, future longitudinal examination of these populations would be beneficial, so as to examine the causal relationship of our study variables

## REFERENCES

Please refer to handout.



