Perceived Stress in Lesbians & Gay Men: Harassment, Self-Esteem & Social Support

Maya West

Mark Vosvick, Ph.D.

Chwee-Lye Chng, Ph.D.

Introduction

- Perceiving stress negatively can lead to both physical & mental health factors that can greatly affect one's quality of life.
- Social support is important for indicating that a person is loved, cared for, esteemed, valued, & accepted (Corning, 2002).
- Studies suggest that minorities who experience oppression from the dominant group in society are likely to experience stress as a result of this oppression (Hamilton & Mahalik, 2009).
- Research studies suggest that minority disparities exist due to discrimination, victimization, & oppression due to a homophobic culture (Marshall, 2009).

Hypotheses

- **Hypo #1**- Lesbian and Gay individuals who experience discrimination due to being out will report higher levels of perceived stress.
- **Hypo #2**-Higher levels of self-esteem & social support will be associated with lower levels of perceived stress.
- **Hypo #3**-Harassment, self-esteem, & social support will be significant predictors of perceived stress.

Theoretical Model

A model based on Meyer's Minority Stress Model (1995)

Methods

- Participants were recruited from various LGBT events in the Dallas/Fort-Worth area.
- Prior to assessment, participants were subject to telephone or in-person screenings to determine lesbian or gay orientation, minimal age of 18, & fluency in English.
- Participants completed the surveys using Questionnaire Development System (QDS) software (Nova Research Company, Bethesda, Maryland).

Measures

Rosenburg Self-Esteem Scale

(Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach, 1989)

10 item, 4-point likert-type scale
 $\alpha = .78$

Measures feelings of self-acceptance, self respect, & positive self evaluation.

"I feel that I have a number of good qualities."

UCLA Social Support Scale

(Dunkel-Schetter, Feinstein, & Call, 1986)

9 item, 4 point likert-type scale
 $\alpha = .89-.94$

Responses 1-5
1 = Never 5 = Often

"How often did you receive support from a friend within the past 3 months?"

Measures Continued

Perceived Stress Scale

(Cohen, Kamarch, & Mermelstein, 1983)

10 item, 5 point likert-type scale

$\alpha = .89$

Responses 0-4

0= Never 4= Very Often

“In the last month, how often have you felt nervous & stressed?”

Heterosexist Harassment, Rejection, Discrimination Scale

(Szymanski, 2006)

14 item, 6 point likert-type scale

$\alpha = .90$

Responses 1-6

1= Never 6= Often

“In the past year, how many times have you been rejected by friends because you are LESBIAN/GAY/BISEXUAL person.”

Demographics N=99

AGE	Mean= 34.43	SD= 13.88	Range= 18-73
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GENDER	n	%
MALE	50	50.5%
FEMALE	49	49.5%

ETHNICITY	
Euro American	61.6%
African American	11.1%
Latina/o	14.1%
Other	13.2%

INCOME	Dollars
Average	39,740
SD	43,847

EDUCATION	YEARS
Average	15.12
SD	4.61
Range	1-33

UNIVARIATE STATISTICS

VARIABLES	MEAN	SD	RANGE	α
Perceived Stress	23.1	8.3	14-56	.87
Harassment	23.2	9.9	14-84	.90
Self-Esteem	34.0	5.6	11-44	.88
Social Support	17.9	4.5	0-36	.82

Correlation Matrix

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 AGE	-									
2 SOCIAL SUPPORT	-.15	-								
3 EDUCATION LEVEL	-.17*	.21*	-							
4 PERCEIVED STRESS	-.30**	-.11	-.12	-						
5 SELF- ESTEEM	.11	.28**	.07	-.67**	-					
6 HARASSMENT	-.21**	-.03	-.06	.20**	-.17*	-				
7 SUPPORT PARENT	-.26**	.77**	.10	-.14	.30**	-.00	-			
8 SUPPORT FRIEND	-.21**	.87**	.16*	-.18*	.32**	-.03	.20**	-		
9 SUPPORT PARTNER	.12	.78**	.07	-.15*	.17*	-.08	.05	.19**	-	
10 AFRICAN AMERICAN	-.07	-.24**	-.03	.22**	-.14	.02	-.05	-.15*	-.18	-

* p<.05 ** p<.01

Analysis

PREDICTORS	β	t	Tolerance	VIF
Age	-.21	-2.8	.92	1.09
African American	.18	2.4	.96	1.05
Social Support	-.14	-1.8	.78	1.23
Self Esteem	-.5	-6.3	.80	1.25
Harassment	.17	2.3	.90	1.11

Results

- ◉ **Hypo #1 Supported**- Lesbian and Gay participants who had experienced discrimination reported higher levels of stress.
- ◉ **Hypo #2 Supported**- Individuals who reported higher levels of self-esteem & social support were associated with lower levels of stress.
- ◉ **Hypo #3 Supported**-Harassment, self-esteem, & social support explained for a significant portion of the variance found in stress.

Discussion

- We find that if a gay or lesbian person has a good social network and has high esteem for themselves then the potential situation of discrimination or harassment may not pose such a threat.
- It is through these avenues that psychologists may want to focus in helping not only sexual minorities but any individual with a minority identity.

Clinical Implications

- Counselors working with sexual minorities want to explore issues of discrimination/harassment, self-esteem & social support with clients to reduce stress in their lives, & improve the quality of life in these individuals.
- Future research is needed to deconstruct perceived stress & other potential factors that contribute to stress development in lesbians and gay men.

Limitations

- The cross-sectional, correlational design limits causal inferences.
- Participants were recruited only from one geographical location
- Data collected was self-report

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