

ABSTRACT

The existing social work literature has minimally focused on the intra-group differences of subjective wellbeing among the LGB(TQ) members. The lack of research focused on the influence factors such as sexual identity and ethnic-racial identity produced two research questions. The study sought to understand the relationship that sexual identity and ethnic-racial identity have with subjective wellbeing. The original study sample was selected using representative case quota and where asked to complete an in-person interview at two different time points. The current study consisted of participants that identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. The results of the study found that sexual identity of individuals does not significantly affect subjective psychological wellbeing. The results found that ethnic-racial identity affects some domains of subjective wellbeing such as self-acceptance, purpose in life, and personal growth. Important future research directions include an intersectional approach in studies to understand how LGBTQ person's lived experiences influence subjective wellbeing.

INTRODUCTION

Significance of Study

- Approximately 3.5 percent of the United States (U.S.) adult population identify as LGB (Gates, 2011).
- The Adult LGBT Population in the United States (2019) census report found that an estimated 9.946 million adults identify as LGB alone.
- Rates of comorbid mental illness diagnosis are about three times higher when compared to the heterosexual population, ranging from 20 to 24 percent within the LGB community (Cochran et al., 2003).

Purpose of the Study

- The purpose of this study will be to understand the relationship that sexual identity and ethnic-racial identity has on the psychological well-being of the LGB community.

Research Questions

- The research will explore the relationship between sexual identity and psychological wellbeing. That is, the reported differences between psychological wellbeing between lesbian-bisexual women and gay-bisexual men.
- The research presented here will explore the relationship between ethnic-racial minority and psychological wellbeing. That is, the differences in psychological wellbeing between ethnic-racial minority LGB individuals and white LGB individuals.

Hypotheses

- Lesbian-bisexual identifying women live with higher reported rates of psychological wellbeing when compared to gay-bisexual men.
- LGB white individuals live with higher reported rates of psychological wellbeing when compared to their LGB ethnic-racial minority peers.

Literature Review

Minority Stress Model

- The minority stress model emphasizes the importance of added stress factors individuals live with due to their stigmatized, minority position in society (Meyer, 2003).
- This model proposes that the higher rates of mental health illnesses among the LGB population can be attributed to added distal and proximal stressors that compound their daily experiences.

Distal Stressors

- Distal stressors are the acts of violence, discrimination, and rejection that LGB individuals experience because of their stigmatized position in society (Meyer, 2003).

Proximal Stressors

- Proximal stressors are related to an individual's self-identity and subjective experience as an LGB person in society (Meyer, 2003).
- Proximal stressors inform the way LGB individuals are psychologically affected by their own identity as they negotiate their position in society.

METHODS

Research Design and Data Collection

- The current study is a secondary analysis of the data from Project STRIDE: Stress, Identity, Mental Health, New York City, 2004-2005.
- Project STRIDE was a longitudinal study, baseline measures and follow-up measures were collected over a period of a year; beginning in February of 2004 and ending in January of 2005.
- In contrast, the research study presented here used the second wave of data collected by Project STRIDE in 2005.

Sample and Sampling Method

- The participant recruitment of Project STRIDE was guided through the paradigm of ethnographic immersion into communities of interests.
- The Project STRIDE final sample was selected by using a representative case quota sampling method (Meyer et al., 2006).
- The original sample size was of 524 participants (Meyer et al., 2006); the current study consist of 396 LGB participants.
- Participants were categorized according to sexual identity, either as lesbian-bisexual or gay-bisexual
- Participants were categorized according to ethnic-racial minority consisting of African-American, Latina/o, and White.

Measures

- The psychological wellbeing scales were adapted from Ryff (1989) and Ryff & Keyes (1995).
- The participants were asked to rank their response according to the seven-point Likert scale on 18 items; there were six subscales, each subscale consisting of three items.
- Sample items included questions such as "People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others" and "Some people wander aimlessly in life, but I am not one of them".
- Items were scored on a scale of (1) = strongly agree, (2) = agree somewhat, (3) = agree a little, (4) = don't know, (5) = disagree a little, (6) = disagree somewhat, (7) = strongly disagree.
- Higher scores on this measure were associated with a higher psychological wellbeing.

Table 1

Sample Characteristics (N=396)

Characteristic	f	%
Ethnic-Racial Identity		
Black/African American	131	33.1
Latina/o	131	33.1
White	134	33.8
Gender		
Female	198	50.0
Male	198	50.0
Age	<i>M</i> =32.43	<i>SD</i> =9.243
Education		
Any education	2	.5
More than 6 years of schooling but without high school diploma	39	9.8
High school diploma or equivalent	46	11.6
Some college	104	26.3
Associate degree	16	4.0
Bachelor's Degree	119	30.1
Postgraduate work or degree	70	17.7
Employment		
Not Employed	163	41.2
Employed and working	233	58.8
Country of birth		
Born in the U.S.	328	82.8
Born outside the U.S.	68	17.2

Results

Independent t-Test

- There was no significant difference found between the mean score of LB women and the mean score of GB men ($t(394) = .520, p = .603$). The mean positive relations with others of LB women ($M = 5.118, SD = .090$) did significantly differ from the mean positive relations with others of GB men ($M = 5.187, SD = .098$).
- The results of the t-test yielded a significant difference between the two groups ($t(394) = 2.478, p = .014$). The mean positive relations with others of ethnic-racial minority participants ($M = 5.04, SD = 1.34$) was significantly different from the mean positive relations with others of white participants ($M = 5.38, SD = 1.25$).

Mann-Whitney U-Test

- A Mann-Whitney *u*-Test was conducted on five of the subscales to examine the relationship between sexual identity and psychological wellbeing.
- There was no significant difference found between groups in the five subscales, as summarized by Table 4.
- Additional Mann-Whitney *u*-Tests that were conducted on five of the subscales to examine the relationship between ethnic-racial identity and psychological wellbeing.
- Three of the subscales suggest that there is a significant difference between the way that ethnic-racial minority LGB individuals and white LGB individuals experience self-acceptance, purpose in life, and personal growth.
- Summarized in Table 5

Table 5

Results of Mann-Whitney U Test Comparing Ethnic-Racial Identity and Psychological Wellbeing of Participants

Variables	Mean rank	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>
Self-Acceptance		14962.50	.016
Ethnic-Racial	188.61		
Minority			
White	217.84		
Purpose in Life		15050.000	.020
Ethnic-Racial	188.94		
Minority			
White	217.19		
Personal Growth		15044.000	.013
Ethnic-Racial	188.92		
Minority			
White	217.23		

Discussion

Key Findings

- The results of this study is consistent with previous findings that LB women do not statistically differ in their levels of psychological wellbeing, in comparison to GB men.
- The current study found that LGB White participants were more likely to report having positive relationships with others ($M = 5.38, SD = 1.25$) than ethnic-racial minority LGB participants ($M = 5.04, SD = 1.34$).
- This suggests that LGB White individuals have an increased ability to forge positive relations with other members of the community. This could derive from their lower rates of prejudiced acts that promotes their ability to navigate daily activities.
- The study found that White LGB persons ($Mean Rank=217.19$) had higher rates of identifying their purpose in life than their ethnic-racial minority LGB counterparts ($Mean Rank =188.94; U=15,050.0; p=.020$).
- This could potentially be explained by the difference in cultural norms of ethnic-racial LGB persons and White LGB persons.

Implication for Research and Practice

- Future research should recognize that within a minority group, there are varying levels of privilege that affect quality of life.
- That is, a sexual minority positions does not erase the privileges associated with other identities such as ethnic-racial identity, socioeconomic status, generational wealth, among others.
- Likewise, intersections of multiple minority identities can compound the overall distress that minority individuals experience.
- Ultimately, it is imperative that mental health professionals recognize that each LGBTQ person is unique and respect the client's LGBTQ identity.
- Clinicians should advance their efforts to understand how a client's LGBTQ identity is influenced by their gender identity, ethnic identity, (dis)abilities, legal status, and socioeconomic position in society.

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

- Across the research on the LGB(TQ) population, existing literature has predominantly conceptualized psychological wellbeing as dependent on mental illness morbidity, with less attention on aspects of subjective wellbeing.
- Therefore, the holistic lens of this study serves as one of its greatest strengths because it does not perpetuate the notion that every LGB person will be diagnosed with a mental illness or will live with a chronic mental illness.

Limitations

- Not Inclusive of the whole LGBTQ population since the sample is only cis gender people.
- Lack of LGBTQ individual of differing ethnic-racial minorities. That is, the study had no Asian or Indigenous participants. The study sample also did not differentiate between ethnic groups existing within labels such as Latinx or "Black".

References

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- Vosvick, M., & Stem, W. (2019). Psychological quality of life in a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender sample: Correlates of stress, mindful acceptance, and self-esteem. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 6(1), 34-41. <https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000303>