Intersectional Minority Stress and Alcohol Use among Queer* Latinx and African Descent Women

Alison Cerezo, PhD
Associate Professor, Dept. of Counseling
Affiliate Faculty, Health Equity Institute
San Francisco State University
Step 3 in Trajectory


There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.

Audre Lorde
Choo and Ferree (2010) state that intersectional stigma and/or stress requires...

“an analytic shift from addition of multiple independent strands of inequality toward a multiplication and thus transformation of their main effects into interactions; and a focus on seeing multiple institutions as overlapping in their co-determination of inequalities”
Intersectional Minority Stress

• Minority stress (Meyer, 1995) is experienced at both distal and proximal levels (micro)
  – While also creating barriers to access of supports that would reduce the experience of stressors and responses to those stressors (macro)

• Intersectional experiences of discrimination uniquely impact SGM WoC, thereby placing them at disproportionate risk of facing social and health disparities
Intersectional Minority Stress & Coping...

• Several research studies have linked minority stress and stigma to maladaptive coping mechanisms, such as alcohol use.

• SM women face a heightened risk of substance abuse as compared to heterosexual women (Cochran et al., 2000; Drabble, & Eliason, 2012; Drabble, Midanik, & Trocki, 2005).

• SM women are also more likely to experience adverse consequences related to alcohol and drug use than heterosexual women (Ridner, Frost, and LaJoie, 2006).
Alcohol Use, Specifically

- Drabble et al. (2005) found that LGB women were approximately 6-7 times more likely to meet the diagnosis for alcohol dependence than heterosexual women.
- Lesbians were 11 times more likely, while bisexual women were 8 times more likely, to experience negative social consequences related to drinking than heterosexual women.
- **McCabe et al. (2010) found that while sexual orientation discrimination alone was not significantly associated with substance use disorders, sexual orientation discrimination in combination with racial/ethnic or gender discrimination—and racial/ethnic discrimination alone—was associated with greater substance use disorders among LGB adults.**
What Contributed to Alcohol Use...

- Drinking was an active, known coping mechanism – for several participants it was used as a sleep aid to combat racing thoughts and anxiety.
- Drinking connected to entrance to social life – cultural experience in a couple ways:
  - Very present in family of origin (race, ethnicity)
  - Alcohol was part of queer experience (social; bars)
  - Alcohol helped ease anxiety related to sex with women
- Drinking became a problem/more severe when major stressors appeared – health and social support weren’t available or used as a coping outlet.
Initiation of Alcohol Use:

“"I was away from my very stifling environment. I hung out with guys all the time and that's what they would do, you know, they would go out and drink, so they'd always invite me, because I was used to being their little sister or their wingman and I would just end up drinking.”"
“I drink to numb myself out. I drink because it feels more normal than being sober, especially when something doesn't feel right emotionally. I drink sometimes to get to the point that I know I'm not going to remember anything that I say or do, because I really want to do or say something stupid or hurtful, or self destructive at times. If I didn't have nearly as much stress, I wouldn't have any reason enough or the desire to drink... I didn't really have anyone to talk to or accept me for who I was because they wanted to be whiter than I was. They wanted me to be straighter than I was, and it caused a lot of conflict. I think that that actually played a bigger role in my past than I realized, before this very moment.”
“So, being that I am of Mexican culture at 15, there's like this big celebration called a Quinceanera that would, it's like a sweet 16, welcoming of age, you know introduction to society is what it used to be used for. Like, "Oh, this is my daughter she is, she's 15.” I had a Quinceanera. I didn't really want one, but my mom wanted me to have one and you know, that's just what you do. Because, I didn't want to wear the big dress and she didn't understand why. I remember drinking excessively at that party and that was probably one of the first times I had like binge drank excessively so, I mean to the point where I was like vomiting, and it was just a terrible experience.”

“I do have a lot of alcoholism traits in my family from my dad being an alcoholic and all those things' kind of follow you, you know. So, it's like I feel like if I don't take care of those things and I'm not conscious of it, then I can become like my father, you know, be like a serious alcoholic.”
Methods Notes

• Grounded theory approach
• Modified protocol to include how women understand social support and resilience
  – Particularly what’s the threshold for “stress” and what is considered resilient
  – Several women faced recent homelessness due to familial rejection; Several women described abuse in family – potentially connected to gender presentation…
• Challenge – seeing one’s life as regularly stressful may foster hopeless / not resilience
Thank you!

• College of Health and Social Sciences grant to complete 20 interviews
• SF BUILD grant – step 2 complete
  – Collected 220 surveys with Latinx and African descent women about stigma, stress and alcohol use and dependence
  – Questions had intersectional prompt
  – Used visual scale to capture participants’ perceptions of how discrimination was connected to race, gender identity and sexual orientation