



**People of Color Experience Discrimination Within LGBT Spaces** *Elizabeth A. McConnell with Ashley Simons-Rudolph*

Minority Stress Theory has illustrated how experiences of stigma and discrimination cause stress, which translates into health disparities for sexual and gender minority populations. However, intersectionality



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theory tells us that people hold multiple identities, which are mutually constructed and related to power in complex ways. We examine processes of minority stress and

community resilience among racially diverse sexual minority men. Our findings suggest that connection to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community plays a more central role in mediating minority stress processes for White sexual minority men than it does for sexual minority men of color. Although we're not exactly sure why this is, it could be because sexual minority men of color are more accustomed to dealing with experiences of discrimination or because they rely on multiple communities (including their racial/ethnic communities) for support.

"Sexual minority men of color, especially Black men, are more likely to experience racial/ethnic stigma in LGBT spaces on top of LGBT stigma in their neighborhood. At the same time, minority stress and resilience processes may operate differently for people of color than white sexual minority men."

-Nora Charles

**Highlights**

**Historical and current prejudice and discrimination lead many U.S. minority groups to experience a high level of baseline stress. This is called *Minority Stress Theory*.**

**Individuals live with multiple identities. People's experiences of privilege and marginalization are shaped by these multiple identities. This is called *Intersectionality Theory*.**

**We used *Minority Stress Theory* and *Intersectionality Theory* to examine processes of community resilience among racially diverse sexual minority men in the United States.**

Our findings show the importance of understanding intersectionality in community-based research. Previous research has largely focused on sexuality-based minority stress, which may miss the ways that people of color (POC) sexual and gender minorities are also coping with racial/ethnic stress. For example, Black participants in our study reported the highest levels of racial/ethnic stigma in LGBT spaces. Our identities and their relationships to structures of power are complicated, and we should strive to incorporate this complexity into our research questions and methods!

## **Methods**

We used pop-up ads in a geosocial networking application for gay and bisexual men to recruit participants from all over the United States. Participants answered survey questions about their experiences of stigma, connection to LGBT community, and stress.

Data analysis for this study involved two steps. First, we examined racial/ethnic group differences in two forms of stigma: racial/ethnic stigma in LGBT spaces and LGBT stigma in one's neighborhood. Next, we looked at the relationships between stigma, connection to LGBT community, and stress. We were interested in how these relationships may be similar or different for White and POC participants.

## **Results**

- Black sexual minority men reported the highest levels of racial/ethnic stigma in LGBT spaces, and White sexual minority men reported the lowest levels.
- Connection to LGBT community appears to be more important in explaining the relationship between stigma and stress for White sexual minority men than it is for sexual minority men of color.
- POC participants may be more accustomed to dealing with experiences of stigma, or may rely on more diverse community affiliations to manage minority stress.
- Results show how important it is to consider intersectional identities in studying people's experiences of stigma and discrimination.

## **HOW DID A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE INFORM YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE ISSUES, RESULTS, AND IMPLICATIONS?**

Community psychology provided the foundation for this work in several ways. First, from a social justice perspective, we were interested in how sexual and racial/ethnic identities shaped participants' relationships to power. From a strengths-based perspective, we were interested in examining processes of resilience. From a community perspective, we were interested in how connection to LGBT community may operate as a form of community resilience that buffers the impacts of stigma on stress.

## **What Does This Mean For?**

*Practice*— For practitioners working with sexual and gender minorities, findings underscore the importance of considering how clients' intersectional identities may shape their experiences of stigma, stress, and community connectedness.

*Social Action*— Intersectionality Theory highlights the importance of considering interlocking systems of oppression as part of strategies for social action, and our findings support this approach.

*Research and Evaluation*— Our results underscore the importance of taking an intersectional approach to understanding the experiences of the populations with which we work. Although identities intersect in complex ways and it is not realistic to account for every possible combination of identities, it is important to take an incremental approach toward building intersectional research capacity in community psychology.

For more information: <https://isgmh.northwestern.edu/>

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