CHAPTER 11

Resilience in LGBTQ PoC

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Abstract LGBTQ People of Color (PoC) experience chronic oppression and their ability to survive these experiences is often attributed to their remarkable resilience. This chapter analyzes theoretical models focused on resilience for sexual/gender minority PoC. In particular, how LGBTQ PoC experience individual and community resilience is explored. Moreover, frameworks such as syndemics are discussed, and themes related to intersectionality and religiosity are highlighted as a societal-level factor pertaining to resilience building for LGBTQ PoC. Together, this chapter serves as a summary of findings on resilience in LGBTQ PoC, while also providing a critique and suggestions for future research in the study of resilience with racial/ethnic LGBTQ communities.

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J. J. García (ed.), *Heart, Brain and Mental Health Disparities for LGBTQ People of Color*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-70060-7_11

Keywords Resilience • Individual and community • Intersectionality • Religiosity

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) People of Color (PoC) experience chronic oppression (Nadal, 2019) and their ability to survive these experiences is often attributed to their remarkable resilience. However, a specific examination of resilience within LGBTQ PoC is missing in research. Perhaps the reason for this is that there are complexities inherent with navigating society as a person with multiple marginalized identities (i.e., as a racial/ethnic and sexual/gender-diverse person). In particular, societal stigma and marginalization create adverse social environments that make it difficult for racial/ethnic sexual/gender minorities to exist as social beings (Nadal, 2019). Relatedly, the intersectional experiences of these identities for LGBTQ PoC requires an examination of how resilience is defined, with whom resilience research has been conducted with, and what expectations researchers have with the concept of resilience for racial/ethnic LGBTQ.

This chapter will explore theoretical models focused on resilience for sexual/gender minority (SGM) PoC. In particular, how LGBTQ PoC experience individual and community resilience will be explored. Moreover, frameworks such as syndemics will be discussed, and themes related to intersectionality and religiosity will be highlighted as societal-level factor as they relate to resilience building for LGBTQ PoC. This chapter serves as a summary of findings on resilience in LGBTQ PoC, as well as providing a critique and suggestions for future research in the study of resilience with racial/ethnic SGM communities.

Defining Resilience: Literature and Frameworks

Resilience is often conceptualized as a buffer that lessens the impact of stress in the face of adversity (McConnell, Janulis, Phillips II, Truong, & Birkett, 2018). However, multiple definitions of resilience exist, all of which attempt to capture how resilience works in LGBTQ PoC communities. For example, Wilson et al. (2016) conceptualize resilience as models of *protective*, *compensatory*, and *challenge*. The protective model of resilience states that the individual utilizes psychological resources to minimize or eliminate a threat. Indeed, McConnell et al. (2018) view resilience as a protective model against stressors individuals face, reducing the stress

response in the face of a threat. In contrast, the compensatory model describes resilience as physical, emotional, and psychological actions done to overcome adversity regardless of how high such adversity is. Lastly, the challenge framework posits that level of adversity is related to whether or not there are positive outcomes; if a person faces high levels of adversity, overcoming hardships with resilience may not be possible (Wilson et al., 2016). These models individually attempt to define resilience; however, Freitas, Coimbra, and Fontaine (2017), in a systematic review across 13 studies, found that there is supporting evidence for each conceptualization of resilience. Thus, defining resilience depends on which model is used to accurately represent the multidimensional experiences of resilience for racial/ethnic LGBTQ (Freitas et al., 2017; Woodward, Banks, Marks, & Pantalone, 2017).

While positive psychology research shows that positive emotions can improve a person's resilience (Domínguez, Bobele, Coppock, & Peña, 2015), little research has examined how resilience helps LGBTQ communities overcome or handle adversity. A recent integrative review (De Lira & Morais, 2018) documents what resilience looks like for sexual minorities (i.e., LGB) across 39 studies. In particular, they found that resilience sources for sexual minorities fall into three sources: individual, family, and community-based. Furthermore, main risk factors against developing resilience include homophobia and concealment of sexual orientation, whereas protective factors included emotional openness, family support, and spirituality.

To this end, there is a need for a theoretical framework that captures resilience for sexual minority PoC. Perhaps the positive psychology framework may be useful, given its focus on community relatedness. For example, the LGBTQ relationally-based positive psychology framework (Domínguez et al., 2015) is an example of such a framework that uses a strengths-based perspective, systematic orientation of family resilience, and draws from LGBTQ family literature regarding resilience and community relatedness. Importantly, this framework highlights that heteronormativity impacts how resilience is viewed in non-heterosexual families and couples. Although the positive psychology LGBTQ framework examines resilience for LGBTQ individuals, limitations include no examination of those typically less represented such as Trans and Gender-Non-Conforming persons (TGNC) racial/ethnic persons (Testa, Habarth, Peta, Balsam, & Bockting, 2015). Thus, frameworks that center the experiences of both racial/ethnic and sexual/gender minority identities are much needed.

Individual and Community Resilience

Many factors contribute to the health and well-being of racial/ethnic SGMs, including trauma, internalized homophobia, and coping with everyday stressors (Meyer, 2010). These factors also contribute to both individual and community-level resilience. In terms of defining resilience for LGBTQ PoC, it is important to make a distinction between individual and community-level resilience. Individual resilience is defined as how a person is able to achieve or sustain health and well-being in the face of adversity or avoiding the risk altogether, by taking risk-protective factors into account (Shilo, Antebi, & Mor, 2015). Assessment tools for TGNC communities, namely the Gender Minority Stress and Resilience (GMSR) measure, have been created to explore individual-level resilience for these communities (Testa et al., 2015). In contrast, community-level resilience is operationalized as the resources or attributes that operate as external forces that impact individuals at a community level (Shilo et al., 2015). Community resilience for LGBTQ individuals includes social support and community connectedness from the LGBTQ community (De Lira & Morais, 2018), which provide positive social support and experiences for LGBTQ persons. Support systems, especially at the community level such as LGBQ connectedness with friends and partners or family support, are important to promote well-being and serve as buffers against mental distress in both LGBQ youth and adults (Shilo et al., 2015). Although there is extensive evidence on resilience, both individual and community resilience research does not center the intersectional experiences of LGBTQ who have other marginalized identities (e.g., differing socioeconomic statuses, those who live in substandard housing, race, gender), which makes it difficult to know how people with multiple minoritized statuses use and access sources of resilience at both levels.

A framework that highlights how LGBTQ PoC may experience community-level resilience differently than white LGBTQ is syndemics, which refers to overlapping epidemic or community-level factors that affect an individual (Latkin, German, Vlahov, & Galea, 2013) such as poverty, discrimination, and racism, and other experiences salient to socially minoritized identities. To illustrate this, Wilson et al. (2016) used the framework of syndemics to understand resilience in young Black gay and bisexual men and found different profiles of resilience among these groups, given they are disproportionately affected by increased HIV/AIDS risk and poverty. The framework of syndemics suggests that the combination of these factors act collectively to create higher-risk

environments for those with already marginalized identities (e.g., trans women of color), which result in substandard living conditions that impact their health and quality of life. More importantly, the syndemics framework proposes that resilience is not a "one size fits all" phenomenon, especially when examining individuals with various marginalized identities such as LGBTQ PoC. For example, Black and Native Americans TGNC individuals report connecting with LGBTQ PoC communities but do not find the same connection with the broader white LGBTQ community (Stone, Nimmons, Salcido, & Schnarrs, 2020). As a result, perhaps the syndemics framework provides a nuanced examination of this integral factor for LGBTQ PoC. That is, if the collective totality of risk factors experienced by LGBTQ PoC is not considered, then the resilience frameworks currently available will not accurately capture or represent the true lived experiences of racial/ethnic LGBTQ. Thus, it is necessary to include the syndemics framework when assessing resilience for LGBTQ PoC.

Intersectionality and Resilience

LGBTQ PoC exist at the intersection of their social identities (e.g., race, gender, sexual identity, education, SES). As a result, it is important to acknowledge the influence of multiple sources of social marginalization of their identities that make unique lived intersectional experiences for these groups. Intersectionality theory posits that different aspects of an individual's life intersect and interact with each other, especially with marginalized identities (Crenshaw, 2017). To illustrate the importance of this, McConnell et al. (2018) used both minority stress theory and intersectionality theory to examine stress-related experiences for Black gay and bisexual men and found that a nuanced perspective related to living at the intersections of more than one marginalized identity exposes people to intersectional discrimination as a source of stress. To further illustrate the unique impact of intersectional discrimination, Fattoracci, Revels-Macalinao, and Huynh (2020) developed a scale that measures both racial and sexual minority microaggressions for LGBTQ PoC. Their findings show that solely utilizing minority stress theory to conceptualize resilience in LGBTQ PoC does not capture the combined and unique lived social realities of racism and heterosexism. Thus, intersectionality provides a unique perspective on social identities and coinciding experiences of LGBTQ PoC that fully captures their unique resilience.

Exploring resilience from an intersectional lens has allowed literature to move past individual resilience frameworks and develop theories of community resilience that highlight the importance of community context of TGNC PoC well-being (Singh, 2017; Stone et al., 2020). Intersectional approaches also show that groups like gay Latino immigrants experience specific immigration-related stressors and support that influence their resilience-building from community sources (Gray, Mendelsohn, & Omoto, 2015). Moreover, bisexual PoC who have less social support experience greater binegativity, anxiety, and depressive symptoms (Flanders, Shuler, Desnoyers, & VanKim, 2019). Thus, intersectionality provides an intricate framework that best captures resilience, as it considers societal marginalization in the form of intersectional discrimination for LGBTQ PoC.

A focus on intersectionality in the study of resilience can be even more important for specific groups within LGBTQ PoC (Follins, Walker, & Lewis, 2014), such as Transgender Women of Color (TWoC). Singh and McKleroy (2011) found that TWoC who have survived traumatic life events also experienced high levels of transphobia and racism. Yet, they also reported feeling pride in TWoC identity, which is crucial to developing resilience. These findings support the Transgender Resilience Intervention Model (TRIM; Matsuno & Israel, 2018), which indicates self-acceptance and pride as positive predictors of individual-level resilience. The TRIM also addresses other factors for resilience such as positive role models, community, and family support. More specifically, Singh and McKleroy (2011) found family support was an important part of community resilience when transgender PoC feel acceptance for both of their identities (race and gender). Intersectional frameworks show that for TWoC resilience, adverse conditions and coping resources are important (White, 2013). Perhaps this is most salient in recent dissertations by young scholars in the field. For example, African-American transgender women who reported high levels of violent experiences (systemic, physical, and verbal) counter these experiences by drawing from both individual and community-level resilience and coping strategies (LaMartine, 2020). Similarly, TGNC Latinx immigrants seeking asylum who are detained in the U.S. who experience abuse and transphobia remarkably harness individual and community-level resilience in the form of solidarity and support from other detainees (Minero, 2020). Thus, recent work centering intersectionality with LGBTQ PoC sheds light on the diverse forms of resilience demonstrated by these communities in different contexts.

Religiosity/Spirituality as Resilience

Despite the complicated relationship between LGBTQ PoC and religion (Coley, 2017), racial/ethnic LGBTQ groups often utilize their spirituality and religion as a source of individual and community-level resilience (De Lira & Morais, 2018). Yet, LGBTQ who seek support from a religious institution that does not support their identities experience greater mental health issues (Coley, 2017). Moreover, older LGB adults who grew up in heterosexist faith environments feel inferior and internalize LGB oppression (Bourn, Frantell, & Miles, 2018), particularly gay and bisexual men developing internalized shame and guilt (Lassiter et al., 2017). Although spirituality and religion overlap, spirituality is often described as the ongoing search for the sacred *divine* aspect of life, while religion is described as the search for significance that occurs in institutions that facilitate spirituality (Lassiter et al., 2019). Majority of the research on religion and spirituality as a form of resilience for LGBTQ has used racially mixed samples, and only a few studies have highlighted differences for LGBTQ PoC. Specifically, TWoC use spiritual resilience to counter psychological effects from traumatic life events (Singh & McKleroy, 2011). Additionally, Walker and Longmire-Avital (2013) found that young Black LGB use their religion as a tool to cope, often indicating that religion provides a sense of hope and perseverance. These findings suggest further research on religious/spiritual practices and engagement, as a form of resilience, especially focused on LGBTQ PoC.

A Critique on Resilience and Related Research

As demonstrated, the field is moving toward examining resilience in LGBTQ populations, with some studies specifically focused on LGBTQ PoC. However, it is apparent that critiquing how researchers conceptualize, measure, and operationalize resilience from their theoretical frameworks in literature is needed. To successfully harness LGBTQ PoC resilience to promote heart, brain, and mental health, the field must examine these questions to accurately capture the resilience experience of LGBTQ PoC. Moreover, the gaps in current literature make it challenging to successfully measure resilience and explore what it means to be resilient as a racial/ethnic LGBTQ person.

Although resilience is posited to be an important factor in the lives of LGBTQ PoC, this construct is still largely under-researched (Wilson et al.,

2016). The limitations of resilience frameworks are important when considering the complexities that accompany research involving LGBTQ PoC. Intersectionality theory and minority stress theory (Crenshaw, 2017; McConnell et al., 2018) suggest the consideration of the collective toll of multiple marginalized identities or the influence of systematic oppression from dominant groups when assessing mechanisms of resilience for LGBTQ PoC; however, this is missing from the literature. Another limitation in resilience research pertaining to LGBTQ PoC is the lack of longitudinal studies to examine factors like intersectional stigma and resilience across time, which may shed light on how patterns of intersectional stress are associated with resilience. This longitudinal approach has been preliminarily examined in recent research with Black LGBQ people, where negative experiences of intersectional discrimination were associated with negative affect (as mediated by identity conflict and rumination) over the span of a week using a daily diary method (Jackson, Mohr, Sarno, Kindahl, & Jones, 2020); however, resilience as a variable was not directly tested.

A lack of theory-driven frameworks used, coupled with limited ways to measure LGBTQ PoC resilience, is salient in the research. Indeed, most studies employ qualitative methods as a way of measurement of resilience in PoC because of limited validated scales and measures in the field (Salahuddin & O'Brien, 2011). This leaves researchers to conceptualize the unique experiences of LGBTQ PoC within the confines of broader LGBTQ resilience frameworks. Lacking focus on issues like intersectional stress prevents the discovery of variables that could lead to positive resilience in specific communities like transgender PoC (Breslow et al., 2015). This does a disservice to people who hold multiple socially minoritized identities, by placing limits on the totality of their experiences.

In a broader sense, it is important to discuss what it means to study resilience as coping in the context of intersectional discrimination. In particular, does the literature suggest that resilience is an approach that LGBTQ PoC should use to cope with experiences of intersectional discrimination? If said resilience frameworks suggest that LGBTQ PoC need to develop resilience in the face of racism and discrimination, such a suggestion does not directly tackle systems of oppression and marginalization; rather, this approach places the responsibility of adapting to institutional and systemic racism and heterosexism on LGBT PoC. Although viewing resilience in this way is well intentioned and has practical clinical implications, it is also harmful and problematic, as it misses the opportunity to

tackle the true root causes of racism, heterosexism, transphobia, biphobia, and homophobia experienced by LGBT PoC in societies.

Future Directions

Resilience in LGBTQ PoC is a complex phenomenon that requires greater investigation to accurately represent intersectional experiences. The limited availability of measures, intentional recruitment of LGBTQ PoC in resilience research, and theoretical frameworks specifically designed for LGBTQ PoC impede a strong understanding of resilience for these communities. Though much remains unexplored, some work and theories have contributed to the limited understanding of LGBTQ PoC resilience. Intersectionality theory, minority stress theory, and syndemics are frameworks integral to conceptualizing resilience experienced by LGBTQ PoC. Before harnessing resilience in LGBTQ PoC to promote heart, brain, and mental health, other resilience frameworks salient to LGBTQ PoC must be explored, in order to accurately portray their resilience experience in the scientific literature. This is important, as LGBTQ PoC experience marginalization from society and this is perpetuated by what gets published in the sciences. Therefore, it is incumbent on researchers to provide justice to these communities by accurately assessing and describing their lived experiences and sources of resilience.

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