

## Special Section on LGBT Resilience Across Cultures: Introduction

Christopher R. Beasley · Richard A. Jenkins ·  
Maria Valenti

Published online: 8 January 2015  
© Society for Community Research and Action 2015

**Abstract** This special section addresses a gap area of resilience and LGBT well-being. Although comprehensive global diversity regarding LGBT resilience was challenging to find, the special section includes representation from outside the US (Israel and Hong Kong), ethnic/racially diverse domestic populations, immigration, and one population for which LGBT identities might be considered marginalized—Christians in the US. The full range of LGBT identities are represented in the issue along with persons identifying as queer or questioning, although transgendered people were less well represented than lesbian, gay or bisexual identities.

**Keywords** LGBT · Resilience · Culture · Prevention · Promotion

This special section evolved from discussions in the LGBT Interest group session at the Chicago Society for Community Research and Action meeting in 2011. The interest group session had highlighted the Institute of Medicine (IOM) report on LGBT health (IOM 2011) which recently had been released. Shortly after this meeting, a large conference was to be convened by the Fenway Institute in Boston on the potential role of resilience for HIV

prevention among gay and bisexual men, which built on ideas advanced by Ron Stall and colleagues (Herrick et al. 2011). The Biennial interest group meeting included a member of the IOM panel and several people who were participating at the Fenway meeting the following week. Therefore, there was great enthusiasm about the IOM report but also concern that its emphasis on disparities, despite their importance, meant a deficit perspective dominated with less attention given to areas of strength, resource, and resilience. The interest group endorsed the idea of a special section of *American Journal of Community Psychology (AJCP)* to address this gap area of resilience and LGBT well-being. Gary Harper who had co-edited the first LGBT special issue in *AJCP* (Harper and Schneider 2003) was part of the meeting and endorsed the idea that it was time for another special issue; he was extremely helpful in the working with us in the formative stages. Jack Tebes, the *AJCP* editor, was supportive and helpful, as well.

The call for papers for this special section requested “original empirical manuscripts highlighting cultural strengths and other factors that contribute to the resilience of LGBT persons and families from diverse cultures in the US and around the world” with an initial request for summary proposals rather than completed manuscripts. This generated a large number of responses, which represented a variety of LGBT identities and different cultures including submissions from outside North America. A large number of proposals presented findings that documented deficits, disparities and/or disadvantages but did not examine mitigating or averting factors; they presented their deficit-oriented findings as evidence their populations of interest were resilient. The authors of these proposals were not asked to submit manuscripts. We had several authors who were invited but chose not to submit, as well

---

C. R. Beasley  
Washington College, Chestertown, MD, USA  
e-mail: cbeasley2@washcoll.edu

R. A. Jenkins (✉)  
Department of Behavioral Sciences and Health, National  
Institute on Drug Abuse, Bethesda, MD, USA  
e-mail: jenkinsri@nida.nih.gov

M. Valenti  
Education Development Center, Waltham, MA, USA

as papers that were not retained through the editorial review process.

The resulting special section lost some of the breadth that was present in the initial submissions but has continued to have representation from outside the US (Israel; Shilo et al. 2015 and Hong Kong; Chong et al. 2015), ethnic/racially diverse domestic populations (Kosciw et al. 2015; Zimmerman et al. 2015), one focusing on Latinos (Gray et al. 2015), and one where the population was one where LGBT identities might be considered marginalized (Christians in the US, Foster et al. 2015). The full range of LGBT identities are represented in the issue along with persons identifying as queer or questioning (Shilo et al. 2015), although transgendered people were less well represented than lesbian, gay or bisexual identities.

### What is Resilience and How Does it Occur?

Because resilience was the major theme as well as a parameter for publication, it is helpful to review what it means. The term resilience has its origin in child development research which observed that many children who grew up under highly challenging circumstances (e.g., chronic material or social deprivations) developed into highly functional, often high achieving adolescents and adults (Garmezy 1973; Masten et al. 1990). The major factors and concerns of resilience research overlap with those of research on stress and coping (Lazarus 1966) and research related to competence and normative human development (White 1959), as well as psychiatric epidemiology's concern with risk and protective factors (Rutter 1987). Coping research evolved out of laboratory experimental settings with often very discrete time limited stressors (Lazarus 1966), while normative development research drew from longitudinal cohorts and efforts to integrate theories such as psychoanalytic personality theory and drive-oriented models of behaviorism, within a longitudinal, developmental framework (White 1959). All of research areas have taken advantage of exposure to various types of challenges posed by the environment or intra-individual factors such as chronic disease.

These different areas of research all began by focusing on traits or other highly patterned types of behavior but eventually evolved to encompass more social-ecological and phenomenological areas of inquiry. Resilience research is now characterized by a mix of person and environmental/social system factors with increasing emphasis on situational, contextual perspectives over time (Luthar and Cicchetti 2000). More recently, resilience has been paired with work epidemiological research concerned with syndemics (multiple epidemics growing out of common etiological circumstances) in LGBT populations (e.g., Herrick et al. 2011).

### How is Resilience Different for LGBT People?

Given the state of the literature on LGBT health and well-being, there is a need to delineate where resilience processes common to the general population apply as well as the circumstances that elicit more LGBT-specific processes. Similarly, there may be ways in which resilience-promoting processes that occur in the general population may have limitations or complexities in their effects. For example, interventions that have shown efficacy in preventing psychiatric disorder and substance use (IOM 2009) have targeted processes like emotional regulation may have relevance across populations, while other intervention targets such as family, school, or community bonding may be problematic for many LGBT young people because parental, school, or community rejection occur in ways that these intervention approaches cannot address (Jenkins 2013).

These patterns were evident in a number of this section's papers. Connections in the LGBT community (Zimmerman et al. 2015) were found to compensate for parental rejection or provide an important adjunct to family support (Shilo et al. 2015), and virtual communities appeared particularly important for cultivating these LGBT social ties where immediate family roles make it difficult to integrate sexuality and sexual identity with traditional social expectations (Chong et al. 2015). It is also worth considering that resilience may not be shown in all areas of LGBT persons' lives. Gray et al. (2015) intersectional approach helps illustrate some of this complexity wherein different aspects of identity (being gay or being Latino) may be challenged depending on the environment. Acceptance in a "gay" environment may be conditioned on how behavior comports to a larger culture's notion of "gay". Foster et al. (2015) paper shows how religious beliefs, practices and affiliations believed to be important to one's identity may sometimes need to be reconciled with the reception given to LGBT people by particular denominations or congregations. Clearly, what is salient to one's identity may guide the willingness to endure, confront, or attempt to change social responses to one's sexuality or sexual identity.

Further consideration of the papers in this special section can be seen in Frank Wong's (2015) commentary, which bookends this introduction. Our hope in providing this special section is that it will stimulate more work in this area. Our experience suggests the effort to document disparities has sometimes failed to provide a foundation for understanding resilience, while it also is clear that taking a largely normative approach to resilience will miss what is important to LGBT communities, in general, and what matters in particular contexts. The varying roles of obligations to family or community (e.g., Shilo et al. 2015), as well as the varied identities carried by individuals (Foster

et al. 2015; Gray et al. 2015) suggest social/ecological and phenomenological perspectives need to be addressed in ways that do not simply view these factors as residual otherwise tangential to more normative processes.

## References

- Chong, E. S. K., Zhang, Y., Mak, W. W. S., & Pang, I. H. Y. (2015). Social media as social capital of LGB individuals in Hong Kong: Its relations with group membership, stigma, and mental well-being. *American Journal of Community Psychology* (this issue).
- Foster, K. A., Bowland, S., & Vosler, A. N. (2015). All the pain along with all the joy: Spiritual resilience in lesbian and gay Christians. *American Journal of Community Psychology* (this issue).
- Garnezy, N. (1973). Competence and adaptation in adult schizophrenic patients and children at risk. In S. R. Dean (Ed.), *Schizophrenia: The first ten dean award lectures* (pp. 163–204). New York: MSS Information Corp.
- Gray, N. N., Mendelsohn, D. M., & Omoto, A. M. (2015). Community connectedness, conflict, stress, and resilience among gay Latino immigrants. *American Journal of Community Psychology* (this issue).
- Harper, G. W., & Schneider, M. (2003). Oppression and discrimination among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people and communities: A challenge for community psychology. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 31, 243–252.
- Herrick, A. L., Lim, S. H., Wei, C., Smith, H., Guadamuz, T., Friedman, M. S., & Stall, R. (2011). Resilience as an untapped resource in behavioral intervention design for gay men. *AIDS and Behavior*, 15(Suppl. 1), 25–29.
- Institute of Medicine (IOM). (2009). *Preventing mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders among young people: Progress and possibilities*. Washington: National Academies Press.
- Institute of Medicine (IOM). (2011). *The health of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people: Building a foundation for better understanding*. Washington: National Academies Press.
- Jenkins, R. A. (2013). Supplemental issue on does early intervention prevent health-risking sexual behaviors related to HIV/AIDS: Commentary on effects. *Prevention Science*, 15, S84–S86.
- Kosciw, J. G., Palmer, N. A., & Kull, R. M. (2015). Outness as resiliency: Openness about sexual orientation/gender identity and its relationship to well-being and educational outcomes for LGBT students. *American Journal of Community Psychology* (this issue).
- Lazarus, R. S. (1966). *Psychological stress and the coping process*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Luthar, S. S., & Cicchetti, D. (2000). The concept of resilience: Implications for interventions and social policies. *Developmental Psychopathology*, 12, 857–885.
- Masten, A. S., Best, K. M., & Garnezy, N. (1990). Resilience and development: Contributions from the study of children who overcome adversity. *Development and Psychopathology*, 2, 425–444.
- Rutter, M. (1987). Psychosocial resilience and protective mechanisms. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 57, 316–331.
- Shilo, G., Antebi, N., & Mor, Z. (2015). Individual and community resilience factors among gay, bisexual, queer, and questioning youth and adults in Israel. *American Journal of Community Psychology* (this issue).
- White, R. W. (1959). Motivation reconsidered: The concept of competence. *Psychological Review*, 66, 297–333.
- Wong, F. Y. (2015). In search of the many faces of community resilience among LGBT individuals. *American Journal of Community Psychology* (this issue).
- Zimmerman, L., Darnell, D. D., Rhew, I., Lee, C. M., & Kaysen, D. (2015). Resilience in community: A social ecological development model for early adult sexual minority women rejected by family. *American Journal of Community Psychology* (this issue).