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A DUAL-IDENTITY FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING LESBIAN EXPERIENCE

Adam W. Fingerhut, Letitia Anne Peplau, and Negin Ghavami
University of California, Los Angeles

The diverse life experiences of contemporary lesbians are shaped by women's differing ties to two social worlds, the majority heterosexual society and the minority subculture of the lesbian or sexual-minority world. This article presents a detailed conceptual analysis of a dual-identity framework that emphasizes lesbians' simultaneous affiliations with both lesbian and mainstream/heterosexual communities. The usefulness of this approach is discussed, with emphasis on implications for understanding individual differences in exposure to gay-related stress and mental health. Results from a survey of 116 lesbians showed that scores on measures of Lesbian Identity and Mainstream Identity were not significantly correlated with each other. Both lesbian and mainstream identities were significantly related to lesbians' reported experiences of discrimination, feelings of internalized homophobia, and life satisfaction. Limitations of the dual-identity framework and suggestions for future research are considered.

In the United States today, most lesbians have ties to two social worlds, the majority heterosexual society into which they were born and the minority subculture of the lesbian or sexual-minority world. With differing degrees of comfort, lesbians navigate through these worlds as a regular part of daily life. Several observers have commented on this duality. Brown (1989, p. 449) noted that lesbians are "simultaneously participants in both heterosexual experience and lesbian and gay experience." Lindquist and Hirabayashi (1979, p. 90) likened gay people to other minorities and argued that efforts "to understand how gay people cope with their situation must focus upon their relationships not only with the gay community but also with the non-gay world which encapsulates it." Despite these exhortations to conceptualize lesbian identity as an individual's location within both lesbian and heterosexual worlds, psychologists have not yet developed a detailed bicultural analysis of lesbian experience.

In this article we present a new dual-identity framework for understanding identity in lesbian women, one that accounts for connections to both minority and majority communities. Although this framework is also relevant for understanding identity in gay men, this article will focus on its relevance to lesbian women. The dual-identity framework is useful for several reasons. First, it captures the diversity among lesbians better than existing unidimensional identity models that consider connections only to lesbian and gay others. Second, as we discuss in detail below, a more comprehensive perspective on lesbian identity may help to explain important individual differences among lesbians in exposure to prejudice and discrimination and in mental health outcomes. Finally, a dual-identity framework raises questions about lesbians' experiences that can inform a new agenda for research.

Adam W. Fingerhut, Department of Psychology, University of California, Los Angeles; Letitia Anne Peplau, Department of Psychology, University of California, Los Angeles; Negin Ghavami Department of Psychology, University of California, Los Angeles.

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Address correspondence and reprint requests to: Adam Fingerhut, Department of Psychology, University of California, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563. E-mail: awf@ucla.edu

The Creation of a Sexual-Minority Identity in Twentieth Century America

Across time and place, it has been common for women to form loving and erotic relationships with other women (Peplau, 2001). Historically, these same-sex relationships have not had implications for women's personal identity nor have they been associated with a distinctive minority group identity or subculture. In the United States, this all changed during the twentieth century with the emergence of lesbian as a social identity and the redefinition of homosexuals as a sexual-minority group akin to other oppressed minorities (Faderman, 1991). A brief before-and-after comparison highlights these crucial changes.

Throughout history, girls have often formed passionate and physically intimate friendships. In 1929, for example,

Katharine Davis published a survey of 2,200 graduates of women's colleges in the United States. Fully 42% of women said that they had had an intense emotional relationship with another woman at college. Of these, 52% said that the relationship was sexual. In other words, one woman in five reported a sexual relationship with a best woman friend in college. Yet these young women did not adopt a distinctive identity. Similarly, in earlier times when marriage was an economic and social necessity, married women often formed intimate friendships with other women without raising questions about their sexual identity.

During the twentieth century, the interpretation of women's same-sex intimacies changed dramatically in the United States:

> Love between women, especially those of the middle class, was dramatically metamorphosed from romantic friendships [into] "lesbianism" once the sexologists formulated the concept, economic factors made it possible for large numbers of women to live independently of men, and mobility allowed many women to travel to places where they might meet others who accepted the lesbian label (Faderman, 1991, p. 303).

In recent decades, sexuality has become an important basis of both personal and social identity. Today, a college woman who falls in love with her roommate and feels a sexual attraction toward this young woman is likely to question her own sexual identity.

In addition to the creation of lesbian as a social category, two other changes were particularly important. One change was the redefinition of lesbians and gay men as an oppressed minority group, analogous to ethnic minorities in their struggles for civil rights and social recognition (D'Emilio, 1983). After World War II, the increasing visibility of lesbians and gay men was accompanied by increased public hostility including police raids of gay and lesbian bars and efforts to remove homosexuals from government service. Many lesbians and gay men lived in fear that exposure could lead to loss of jobs, housing, or a place in the community. This "common fate" of oppression helped to forge bonds of solidarity among lesbians and gay men based on a shared social identity. The emergence of a gay or lesbian community was less about a geographic space and more about shared vulnerability in a hostile society. To publicly acknowledge being lesbian was and still is to claim allegiance with a socially stigmatized group.

A second change was the gradual creation of lesbian and gay subcultures and institutions. In 1955, for example, the Daughters of Bilitis was founded in San Francisco as the first national lesbian political organization. The last half of the twentieth century witnessed the gradual flowering of lesbian publications, arts, organizations, and social services ranging from lesbian softball teams to women's music festivals and lesbian health clinics. Whereas ethnic and religious groups usually share a long history and well-developed culture, American lesbians had to create a common cultural heritage, and they set about doing so with energy and creativity. Academics, for example, worked to uncover lesbian history, conducted scientific research to refute negative stereotypes about lesbians, and created safe spaces for sexual-minority women in schools and universities.

Today, an important source of diversity among lesbians is differences in the ways women relate to the lesbian community—that is, how they identify to themselves and to others, how they participate in efforts to advance lesbian/gay rights, and how much they immerse themselves in lesbian culture and institutions. At the same time, diversity among lesbians also reflects the ways that women relate to the mainstream society as family members, workers, and citizens. Studies of lesbian identity have typically focused on women's connection to the lesbian community and ignored the fact that lesbians must also find ways to relate to the larger heterosexual society. In contrast, a dual-identity model considers both of these components of identity simultaneously.

Lesbian Identity Patterns: The Intersection of Lesbian and Mainstream Identities

As the twentieth century unfolded, women whose lives centered on other women found differing ways to create a personal and social identity that incorporated their allegiances to the lesbian minority and the heterosexual majority. The patterns of lesbian identity that arise from the combination of these different allegiances bear many similarities to analyses of ethnic identity (e.g., Berry, 1984; LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993) in which individuals vary in the extent of their identification with both their ethnic minority culture and the majority culture. Affiliation with each community has been conceptualized as separate and relatively independent. That is, identification with the majority culture does not preclude identification with the minority culture, and vice versa. The intersection of the two dimensions results in four possible identity categories (e.g., Berry, 1984). As applied to lesbians, these are: *assimilated* (low in lesbian affiliation and high in heterosexual affiliation), *lesbian-identified or separated* (high in lesbian affiliation and low in heterosexual affiliation), *integrated* (high in both), and *marginalized* (low in both). Although these four categories cannot capture the nuanced differences among individuals, they provide a useful way to describe a lesbian's general location along the two dimensions of minority and mainstream identity. In this section, we use historical and social science accounts of lesbians' lives to illustrate the identity patterns that emerge from the intersection of lesbian and mainstream identities.

Assimilation. Some lesbians deemphasize sexual orientation as a basis for personal identity, preferring to be treated as an individual rather than a member of a group and emphasizing the common humanity of all people. The Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) took an assimilationist stance

and worked to "prove the respectability of lesbians and to win acceptance within mainstream society" (Rupp, 1999, p. 163). DOB leaders minimized differences between lesbians and heterosexual women and urged lesbians to conform to conventional feminine social norms in their appearance and demeanor (Esterberg, 1994). They criticized the unladylike behavior of butch lesbians who adopted masculine dress and mannerisms. In an era when even the ACLU was unwilling to defend lesbians and gay men from scrutiny as potential risks to national security (Faderman, 1991), it is understandable that the DOB exhorted lesbians to keep a low public profile. Although assimilationist women formed couple relationships and spent leisure time with other lesbians in private, their public stance was to blend into the broader society.

An assimilationist identity pattern continues today. In a study of British lesbians, Kitzinger (1987) described apolitical women who acknowledge being lesbian but characterize their sexual orientation as highly personal and only one aspect of their total life in the broader society. One woman explained, "I'm me. . . . I'm a social worker; I'm a mother. . . . I like Bach. . . . I enjoy doing a thousand and one things and, oh yes, in amongst all that, I happen to be a lesbian. . . . But that's just a part of me" (Kitzinger, 1987, p. 110). These assimilationist women minimize the salience of a sexual identity in their overall life experience and emphasize fundamental similarities between lesbian and heterosexual women.

Lesbian identification or separatism. Some women consider being a lesbian so central to their personal and social identity that they seek, in some measure, to separate themselves from mainstream society. In the 1970s, radical lesbian feminist groups endorsed separatism as a response to the oppression of patriarchal society and established women's communes (e.g., Valk, 2002). More recently, "Angry dyke in Boston" (1998) posted a comment on a Web site criticizing heterosexuals. She concluded, "You breeders are destroying the world, so we homos will just have to create our own."

A desire to limit contact with the nonlesbian world can take many forms. One lesbian interviewed by Ponse (1978, p. 103) explained that she used to work for a big company making a high salary. Then "I decided I would never work for straight people again—ever." She began working for women as a painter and carpenter. Other women work in heterosexual environments but prefer to avoid heterosexuals as personal friends. Their relations with heterosexuals at work are solely instrumental, and their "real lives" are centered on time spent with lesbians in lesbian settings. Few contemporary lesbians live entirely apart from men or heterosexual society. Nonetheless, some lesbians clearly prefer to spend as much time as possible in lesbian or woman-centered environments at school, at work, or in their leisure activities.

Integrated identity. Some women strive to combine a strong lesbian identification with active involvement in mainstream social worlds. As segments of the general population have become more hospitable to lesbians, it is increasingly possible for some women to be open about their sexual orientation to coworkers, neighbors, and family. Some lesbians welcome the opportunity to bring their two social worlds into contact, for example, by inviting their heterosexual parents to the "lavender graduation" ceremony at college or inviting both lesbian and heterosexual friends to a housewarming party. In many professional organizations, lesbians (often together with gay men) have formed networks designed to provide mutual support, but also to increase the visibility and acceptance of sexual minorities within the profession. Some lesbians view the legalization of same-sex marriage as a way to integrate lesbians more fully into mainstream society. Of course, lesbians who want an integrated life must sometimes contend with the unpleasant social realities of relatives who reject their sexual orientation, prejudiced employers, or conservative communities.

Stein's (1997) interviews with middle-aged lesbians reflected an integrationist theme. When these women first came out as young adults, they were strongly committed to lesbian culture and values, in part as a way to counter the stigma of the dominant culture.

> With time, as their certainty about their lesbian identity grew, they gained flexibility, responding to each situation by placing more or less emphasis on minority group identity as seemed best or most rewarding. They feel at home in the [lesbian community], but also in numerous other contexts in which they participate and with which they feel a sense of identification (Stein, 1997, p. 152).

Work and children took prominence in the lives of many of these women, and contributed to their shifting affiliations. As one woman explained, "I am more and more concerned with who I am . . . as part of the big picture, including heterosexual culture" (pp. 151–152).

Marginalization. Some women who are attracted to women feel marginalized; they lack a comfortable social identity in either the lesbian or majority social world. In the early twentieth century, when lesbian experience was shrouded in secrecy, social isolation was a widespread problem. Some women who recognized an attraction to women felt ill at ease or inauthentic living a heterosexual life, but had trouble finding other like-minded women or positive images of lesbians in the media (Faderman, 1991). D'Emilio (1983, p. 21) suggested that it was often difficult for lesbians or gay men to "stand entirely apart from the abusive [social] definitions that made them . . . pariahs, outlaws, and degenerates in the eyes of the world."

Themes of marginalization continue in the life accounts of contemporary lesbians. On a gay and lesbian Web site, one young woman recently lamented:

> I don't look butch or act so-called gay. . . so a lot of the time I feel as though I don't fit in anywhere—both in the gay community and in the straight community! I feel like I'm dumped in the middle—confused and feeling even more isolated and depressed (Shell, 2000).

Another woman (Femmegal, 2000) also complained, "I don't fit in and can't see how I ever will." She felt distanced from her "majorly homophobic" parents and out of place in the lesbian club scene where she got "nasty looks" from other lesbians because she did not look stereotypically gay. She concluded, "I am now 29 years old, and am soooo isolated it isn't funny."

Conceptualizing the Dimensions of Lesbian and Mainstream Identity

In the previous section we provided anecdotes to illustrate the patterns of identity emerging from the intersection of lesbian and mainstream identity dimensions. In this section, we will focus on the two dimensions themselves, considering how to conceptualize and operationalize each construct. Analyses of ethnic minorities and of lesbians/gay men suggest that each dimension comprises cognitive, affective, and behavioral components (Phinney, 1992; Reyst, 2001).

Cognitive and affective components. Perhaps the most basic cognitive element of affiliating with the lesbian community is labeling oneself as lesbian (or, in the terminology of some sexual-minority settings, as queer, gay, a dyke, etc.). In other words, this step involves defining one's personal feelings and experiences as fitting an available sexual-minority category (Ponse, 1978). A woman's choice among possible sexual-minority labels may provide important information about how she conceptualizes her own sexual identity. An additional cognitive component of identification, suggested by Phinney's (1992) analysis of ethnic identity, is *identity achievement*, which involves exploring the meaning of group membership in one's own life and committing to group membership. Phinney also discussed a crucial affective component, *affirmation*, which refers to feelings of pride in one's group and a sense of enjoying group membership. These elements may be important in understanding a woman's affiliation with the lesbian/gay community. Does the woman feel positively about being a lesbian, does she take pride in the accomplishments of lesbian and gay individuals, and is she comfortable in lesbian/gay settings?

It is more difficult to conceptualize the affective and cognitive components of the mainstream identity dimension. A particularly thorny issue is how broadly to define the majority group. For example, if enjoyment of group membership is a component, does this translate into enjoying being an American, enjoying being a member of a particular profession, or enjoying spending time with one's relatives? Contemporary lesbians will differ in the opportunities available to them to identify fully with mainstream groups. For example, lesbians' identification with their families of origin undoubtedly differs depending on the family's acceptance of their sexual orientation. Professional organizations also provide different opportunities. A lesbian psychologist may be proud to identify with the American Psychological Association, which has adopted gay-affirmative policies on sexual orientation, lesbian/gay adoption, and same-sex marriage. In contrast, a lesbian naval officer may take pride in serving her country but feel angry and threatened by the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy on sexual orientation.

Research is needed to understand more fully how lesbians think and feel about their ties to gay/lesbian communities and to mainstream society. In both cases, a woman's experiences will reflect not only her personal preferences, but also the opportunities available to her and the match between her attitudes and those of her social communities.

Behavioral components. There are many possible behavioral elements of participation in lesbian/gay culture. Ponse (1978) distinguished between two levels of lesbian affiliation: first, having a dyadic relationship with another woman and, second, participating in the broader lesbian community through friendship networks, lesbian/gay institutions, or lesbian/feminist activism. Ross, Fernandez-Esquer, and Seibt (1996) provided a more comprehensive list of features of contemporary public gay culture. As applied to lesbians, these include: lesbian/gay media such as newspapers, magazines, novels, films, and TV programs; holidays such as National Coming Out Day or an annual local gay pride parade; lesbian places including coffee shops, bookstores, or bars; gay symbols such as rainbow flags or pink triangles; and organizations such as the National Center for Lesbian Rights. Ross and colleagues also noted important markers of participation in private aspects of gay culture. These might include social gatherings with lesbian friends or seeking a lesbian or gay-affirmative therapist. Thus, a lesbian who vacations with lesbian friends at a lesbian-run resort, shops at a lesbian bookstore, contributes financially to a lesbian health clinic, and/or seeks the services of a lesbian lawyer would be considered highly affiliated with the lesbian/gay community.

As with the affective and cognitive elements, it is more difficult to conceptualize a lesbian's participation in mainstream culture than in minority lesbian culture. Three approaches may be useful (see also Reyst, 2001). One approach is to consider the extent to which a lesbian retains the ties with majority society that she developed before identifying as a lesbian, such as links to specific "mainstream" activities and organizations. Additionally, mainstream affiliation would be evident in new contacts that a lesbian forms after coming out, for example, with a civic group, professional organization, or the PTA at her child's school.

A second behavioral component is the patterning of a lesbian's social networks. Those who are highly affiliated with the lesbian/gay community may have a relatively

large social network of lesbian women and/or gay men or may include lesbians among their closest confidants. Similarly, those who are highly affiliated with mainstream society may have a relatively large network of heterosexual family, friends, coworkers, or children or a few close heterosexual ties. Because affiliations with lesbian/gay and mainstream/heterosexual communities are assumed to be independent of one another, having lesbians or gay men in a social network does not necessarily preclude having heterosexual ties as well. The dual-identity framework implies that it would be particularly valuable to investigate the overlap between these lesbian/gay and heterosexual social networks. Such information would distinguish between the lesbian whose heterosexual and lesbian friends and relatives know each other and socialize at joint gatherings (i.e., whose social networks are merged) from the lesbian who has both lesbian and heterosexual friends but prefers to keep her social worlds apart from each other.

A third behavioral component concerns the disclosure of one's sexual identity. The dual-identity perspective draws attention to the very different meanings of disclosure within minority and majority settings. For a lesbian to reveal her identity to other lesbians or gay men is a way to signal her membership in the lesbian/gay community and to acknowledge the sharing of a common bond. Disclosure might be a step toward establishing a new relationship. Researchers typically assume that a lesbian is "out" to her gay and lesbian acquaintances and, indeed, seldom assess disclosure to lesbian or gay people. In contrast, disclosure to heterosexuals is potentially fraught with costs ranging from awkwardness to social rejection or discrimination. Whereas a lesbian can usually anticipate acceptance for her identity from other lesbians, the reactions of heterosexuals may be harder to gauge and more variable. Not surprisingly, lesbians often make calculated decisions about when to reveal their sexual identity and to whom (Beals & Peplau, in press). A woman who anticipates losing her job or jeopardizing custody of her children if she reveals her sexual identity may be wise to resort to concealment. Because the actual extent of disclosure to heterosexuals reflects both a woman's desire to be open about her sexual orientation and also her assessments of the likely reaction of heterosexuals, disclosure is an imperfect indicator of a woman's lesbian identity.

More generally, although behavioral indicators of affiliation with lesbian culture are useful, they also have important limitations because the opportunities available to lesbians to participate in lesbian/gay culture and community events vary considerably. Consequently, actual frequency of participation may not reflect a woman's preferences or desires. For example, some women might want to be active in a lesbian community but live in a small, conservative town where there is no lesbian community and where identifying publicly as lesbian would expose the woman to hostility and discrimination. Although the Internet, national publications, and travel may expand opportunities for rural women, their day-to-day behaviors may not reflect the depth of their affiliation with lesbian culture.

THE USEFULNESS OF A DUAL-IDENTITY PERSPECTIVE FOR UNDERSTANDING MINORITY STRESS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING IN LESBIAN WOMEN: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

To illustrate one important application of the dual-identity framework, we conducted a study to examine the associations between the two dimensions of mainstream and minority identity and discrimination, internalized homophobia, and psychological well-being.

Stress Exposure: Discrimination and Internalized Homophobia

Lesbians are vulnerable to stressors related to their minority sexual orientation, most notably discrimination and internalized homophobia (Brooks, 1981; diPlacido, 1998; Lewis, Derlega, Bernd, Morris, & Rose, 2001; Meyer, 2003). Most lesbians experience some form of antigay discrimination in their lifetime. Badgett (1996) reported that, in a variety of samples, between 13 and 59% of lesbian women reported at least one incident of discrimination in the workplace. Lesbians are also vulnerable to "heterosexist hassles"—everyday experiences of stereotyping, exclusion, or hostility due to one's sexual orientation. In a recent daily experience study, lesbians and gay men reported experiencing an average of two heterosexist hassles per week, with reports ranging from zero to eight hassles (Swim, 2004).

In addition to discrimination, lesbians may suffer the stress associated with internalized homophobia—an acceptance of society's negative perception of gay men and lesbians (Meyer, 1995). A lesbian who wishes she were attracted to men or who feels embarrassed by a portrayal of lesbians on television is experiencing internalized homophobia. Psychologists do not agree on how best to conceptualize internalized homophobia: some treat it as a stable personality variable and others treat it as a stressor that can fluctuate over time and in different situations. For the purpose of this research, internalized homophobia will be considered as a potentially fluctuating stressor, consistent with the position taken in a recent review by Meyer (2003).

Who in the lesbian community is most likely to experience discrimination and/or internalized homophobia? Researchers have suggested that connections to the minority lesbian/gay community may play an important role in exposure to gay-related stress, with increases in lesbian identification being associated with increases in discrimination and decreases in internalized homophobia (Meyer, 1995). Our dual-identity framework suggests that this important main effect may be qualified by an interaction between lesbian identity and mainstream identity. As one example, the discrimination experiences of women who are strongly lesbian-identified may differ depending on their connections to the

majority world. Women who are highly identified as lesbian, who surround themselves with lesbian and gay peers and spend time in gay-oriented settings, and who have only weak ties to heterosexual society may limit their exposure to antigay prejudice. In contrast, women who are highly identified as lesbian but who work and socialize in largely heterosexual environments may increase their vulnerability to negative interactions and discrimination. In other words, a dual-identity perspective suggests that the experiences of highly lesbian-identified women may differ significantly depending on whether their ties to mainstream society are strong (integrated identity) or weak (separated identity).

Psychological Well-Being

Many lesbians lead mentally healthy and satisfying lives. Rothblum and Factor (2001) showed, for example, that lesbians did not differ from their heterosexual sisters on measures of mental health and, in fact, had higher levels of self-esteem. Nonetheless, research does find somewhat higher rates of stress-sensitive mental health problems among lesbians. In a national study of midlife development, lesbians were twice as likely as heterosexual women to demonstrate symptoms of major depression (33% vs. 16%; Cochran, Sullivan, & Mays, 2003). In a research review, Cochran (2001) concluded that, compared to heterosexual women, lesbians show significantly higher rates of anxiety, major depression, and substance abuse problems.

The dual-identity framework may prove useful in understanding differences among lesbians in psychological adjustment and mental health. It has been suggested that bicultural competence, that is, knowledge of the skills needed to function successfully in two cultures, may promote psychological health among ethnic minorities (LaFromboise et al., 1993). Research has demonstrated this point: ethnic minority individuals with an integrated identity tend to fare best on mental health outcomes, those with a marginalized identity fare worst, and those who are either assimilated or ethnically identified (separated) show an intermediate pattern (Kim & Berry, 1986; Sands & Berry, 1993; Ying, 1995). Similarly, Lindquist and Hirabayashi (1979) found that gay men who were highly involved with both gay and mainstream communities (in our terms, had an integrated identity) had the lowest levels of psychological distress; men who were involved in neither community (in our terms, had a marginalized identity) had the highest levels of distress. Gay men who would be classified as assimilated or separated experienced similar and intermediate levels of distress.

A similar pattern of psychological well-being may be found among lesbian women because affiliations with lesbian and mainstream communities may independently affect well-being, and together may have an even greater impact. A strong affiliation with the lesbian community can promote psychological well-being in at least two important ways. First, relationships with other lesbians can provide valuable social support that helps to buffer women against the potentially harmful effects of gay-related stress (diPlacido, 1998). Time spent with lesbian friends or attending lesbian/gay social events may provide a valuable respite from the stresses of life in an often heterosexist society. Second, connections with the lesbian/gay community may help to create a sense of group belonging or, as Luhtanen and Crocker (1992) term it, "positive collective self-esteem" that serves to counteract perceived stigma. Research linking identity patterns to psychological well-being among lesbians is extremely limited. In one study, Lewis and colleagues (2001) found that lesbians and gay men who were in lesbian/gay organizations (i.e., high on lesbian/gay affiliation) scored significantly lower on the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression inventory.

At the same time, linkages to mainstream society can also promote psychological well-being. Lesbians who have positive relationships with their parents and family of origin may benefit from continued social support. Lesbians who feel comfortable in mainstream society may have access to resources and opportunities not available to women who, through preference or rejection by society, lead more separate lives. In sum, we predicted that psychological well-being would be associated with stronger affiliations with both mainstream and minority communities.

Method

Sample. One hundred sixteen self-identified lesbians were recruited to complete a short survey regarding identity and experiences with gay-related stress. Participants were recruited through Los Angeles area lesbian/gay organizations and chat groups (47%) and through the annual lesbian and gay pride parades conducted in Los Angeles and San Francisco (53%). Volunteers were not paid, but a small donation was made on their behalf to several lesbian/gay related organizations. Participants ranged in age from 17 to 87 years old ($Mdn = 28$) and were ethnically diverse (5% African American/Black, 4% Asian/Asian American, 69% Caucasian, 10% Latina, 12% other).

Lesbian and mainstream identities. To assess lesbian and mainstream identity, we adapted Phinney's (1992) 20-item Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM). This paper-and-pencil instrument includes a 14-item ethnic identity scale and a 6-item majority identity scale. We reworded MEIM items to be relevant to lesbians. Following Phinney, we included 14 items to assess affective, cognitive, and behavioral components of lesbian identity. Sample items included: "I am happy that I am a member of the lesbian/gay community," "I have a clear sense of my own sexual orientation and what it means for me," and "I participate in the cultural practices of the lesbian/gay community." The 6 original MEIM items measuring Mainstream Identity were also adapted for lesbians. Illustrative items were: "I like meeting and getting to know people who are not gay/lesbian" and "I am involved in activities with people

who are not gay/lesbian." Participants rated the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement on a 5-point scale, with higher scores indicating stronger identification. Scores on each scale were averaged to create a mean Lesbian Identity Scale score ($\alpha = .82$) and a mean Mainstream Identity Scale score ($\alpha = .73$). We refer to this adapted measure as the Dual Identity Inventory for Lesbians.

Based on the dual-identity framework, we predicted that Mainstream and Lesbian Identity would be independent constructs. As expected, the two identity scales did not correlate significantly with one another in this sample, $r = .06$, $p > .05$. On the whole, the sample was highly identified with both communities. On a 5-point scale, the mean score for Lesbian Identity was 3.89 ($SD = .54$). The mean score for Mainstream Identity was 4.06 ($SD = .63$). Despite this positive skew, however, there was variance within the sample, with scores on the Lesbian Identity scale ranging from 2.57 to 5.00 and on the Mainstream Identity scale from 1.63 to 5.00.

Stressors and psychological well-being. Participants completed standardized measures of two gay-related stressors, discrimination and internalized homophobia, and a measure of psychological well-being.

Discrimination was measured using a 5-item scale (Frable, Wortman, & Joseph, 1997). Participants rated how often in their lifetime they had experienced certain forms of discrimination because of their sexual orientation (e.g., "being discriminated against in work advancement," "experiencing difficulty from rental agents or service personnel"). Responses ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very often*). Scores were averaged to create a mean Antigay Discrimination scale score ($\alpha = .79$). This sample had experienced relatively little discrimination, with an average scale score of 1.76 out of 5. Scores ranged from 1.0 to 4.67, but only 25% of the sample scored above 2.

Internalized homophobia was measured with a 13-item scale designed by Martin and Dean (1988) to measure internalization of society's negative messages regarding homosexuality. Using a 5-point Likert scale, participants rated how much they agreed or disagreed with statements such as "I try not to appear to be a lesbian woman" and "I feel that being a lesbian is a personal shortcoming for me." Scores were averaged to create a mean Internalized Homophobia scale score ($\alpha = .88$). Lesbians in this sample reported relatively low levels of internalized homophobia, with a mean score of 1.69 on the 5-point scale ($SD = .73$). Scores ranged from 1.0 to 3.5. Only 5% of the sample scored above the midpoint on the scale, which indicated that they endorsed society's negative messages regarding homosexuality more often than not.

Psychological well-being was assessed with the 5-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). This widely used measure assesses current life contentment with such items as "In most ways my life is close to my ideal" and "The conditions of my life are excellent." Responses range from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Responses were averaged to create a mean Satisfaction with Life Scale score ($\alpha = .90$). This sample was relatively happy: their mean score of 3.64 ($SD = .88$) was above the scale midpoint.

Results and Discussion

To test the associations between identity and discrimination, internalized homophobia, and well-being, three sets of partial correlations were computed. In the first set, we examined the relationships between each identity dimension and each of the other variables. To do this, correlations were conducted separately for lesbian identity and mainstream identity with measures of discrimination, internalized homophobia, and well-being. The second set of correlations investigated the relationships between the combination of identity dimensions and measures of discrimination, internalized homophobia, and well-being. For this set of correlations, a new variable representing the combination of lesbian identity and mainstream identity was created by multiplying the two identity dimensions together. Correlations were then conducted between this new variable and the discrimination, homophobia, and well-being variables. Finally, a third set of partial correlations was computed to examine the interaction of the two identity dimensions beyond the simple combination of the two separate effects examined in the previous set of analyses (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). To do this, the second set of correlations was computed again, this time controlling for the separate effects of each identity dimension. All analyses controlled for age and minority ethnicity.

Identity and discrimination. Results revealed that Lesbian Identity was marginally associated with discrimination, $r = .16$, $p = .10$. Specifically, higher identification with the lesbian community was associated with higher levels of discrimination. That is, women who had a strong sense of belonging to the lesbian/gay community and spent more time in lesbian settings reported more frequent experiences of discrimination at work or in their daily lives. Our correlational data cannot address the direction of causality in this pattern. It is possible that identifying more strongly with the lesbian community exposes women to negative reactions from heterosexual society. It is also possible, however, that women who experience more discrimination choose to bond with other lesbians both as a political statement and as a way to find a supportive community of similar others.

We expected that the main effect of Lesbian Identity on discrimination would be qualified by an interaction with Mainstream Identity. Contrary to expectation, the interaction term was not significantly associated with discrimination experiences. However, there was a significant association for Mainstream Identity, $r = -.27$, $p < .01$. Specifically, greater identification with mainstream, heterosexual

society was associated with lower levels of discrimination. This finding is puzzling if we assume that greater mainstream identification necessarily exposes women to more frequent contact with prejudiced heterosexuals. However, given the variability in heterosexuals' attitudes toward lesbians, some lesbians are likely able to create a mainstream social world populated largely with lesbian-friendly heterosexuals. It is also possible that lesbians who have more supportive heterosexual families and friends are more inclined to identify with mainstream society. Either of these possibilities could lead to a negative association between mainstream identification and levels of discrimination.

Internalized homophobia. Analyses indicated that Lesbian Identity was significantly and negatively associated with internalized homophobia, $r = -.42$, $p < .01$. Lesbians who felt good about the lesbian community, who participated in gay and lesbian activities, and who had explored what being lesbian meant in their lives scored lower on internalized homophobia. Though only marginally significant, $r = -.16$, $p = .10$, the same pattern emerged for Mainstream Identity. Higher identification with heterosexual society was also associated with lower levels of internalized homophobia. This result would be surprising if identifying with the heterosexual community meant identifying with a heterosexist, homonegative culture. This finding makes sense, however, if, as suggested above, strong mainstream identification is commonly found among women who interact with lesbian-affirmative heterosexuals.

Finally, the combination of the two identity dimensions was significantly associated with internalized homophobia, $r = -.36$, $p < .01$, indicating that higher scores on both identity dimensions were associated with less internalized homophobia compared to lower scores on both dimensions. The partial correlation between the combination of the two identity dimensions and internalized homophobia remained significant, even after controlling for the individual relationships between the identity dimensions and internalized homophobia, $r = .22$, $p < .05$.

To interpret this interaction, a median split was used to create a low lesbian identity and a high lesbian identity group. Separate correlations were then conducted between Mainstream Identity and internalized homophobia for each group. Results revealed that for those women high in Lesbian Identity, the relationship between Mainstream Identity and internalized homophobia was not significant. In contrast, for those low in Lesbian Identity, an increase in Mainstream Identity was associated with a significant decrease in internalized homophobia, $r = -.35$, $p < .05$. Thus, while the strength of a woman's connections to heterosexual society had little bearing on internalized homophobia for women high in lesbian identity, mainstream identification was associated with a dampening of internalized homophobia for women low in lesbian identity. This result may once again reflect something about the particular heterosexuals with whom the lesbians in our sample interacted. The internalized homophobia associated with low levels of lesbian identity may be reduced by associating with heterosexuals who are open-minded and lesbian-friendly.

At this point, we cannot provide a definitive explanation for this interaction nor can we say whether it reflects something about the representativeness of our sample or about the measures we used, or whether it reflects something more general about lesbian experience. Regardless, the significant interaction points to the importance of assessing both identity dimensions in our quest to better understand lesbian experience.

Identity and satisfaction with life. Both Lesbian Identity and Mainstream Identity were significantly associated with satisfaction with life, $r = .30$, $p < .01$, and $r = .21$, $p < .05$, respectively, with higher levels of identity associated with greater satisfaction. Additionally, scoring high on both identity dimensions was associated with significantly higher levels of life satisfaction than scoring low on both dimensions, $r = .33$, $p < .01$. Beyond the additive effect, there was no significant interaction effect. These results parallel those described earlier for ethnic minorities in which those who were integrated or high on both minority and majority identification had the highest levels of psychological well-being while those who were marginalized or low on both minority and majority identification had the lowest.

Our empirical study provided a few hints about ethnicity and identity. We might expect that White lesbians would identify more strongly with mainstream society than would lesbians of color. To investigate this possibility, we compared the mean scores on Mainstream Identity of White, African American, Asian American, and Latina lesbians in a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Results revealed only a marginally significant difference among the four groups of women, $F(4,111) = 2.24$, $p < .10$. Our sample size was relatively small, and we were therefore unable to conduct statistical contrasts for each ethnic group. The means indicated, however, that Asian ($M = 3.67$) and Black ($M = 3.69$) participants had lower Mainstream Identity scores than Latina ($M = 4.08$) or White ($M = 4.05$) women.

Significant differences emerged for ethnicity and lesbian identification, $F(4,111) = 5.30$, $p < .01$. Because the pattern of means for Lesbian Identity was similar for African American ($M = 3.62$; $n = 6$), Asian American ($M = 3.53$; $n = 5$), and Latina ($M = 3.66$; $n = 11$) women, we were able to combine these groups and then contrast the mean Lesbian Identity score for women of color ($M = 3.62$; $n = 22$) with the mean score for White women ($M = 4.03$; $n = 80$). White women scored significantly higher on Lesbian Identity than did women of color, $F(1,100) = 10.82$, $p < .01$. These findings suggest that more detailed studies specifically designed to address the experiences of ethnic minority women are needed.

In summary, our results show that connections to both a minority, lesbian identity and a majority, heterosexual identity have implications for exposure to gay-related

stressors and for psychological well-being. Although these results represent only a first attempt to test the dual-identity framework, they provide encouraging evidence for the importance of moving beyond simple unidimensional conceptualizations of lesbian identity.

DISCUSSION

In this article, we have outlined a new dual-identity framework for assessing lesbian identity and have presented evidence to support the value of using this new perspective to understand the experiences of contemporary sexual-minority women. There are many unanswered questions about the dual-identity model and many fruitful directions for future analysis and empirical research. In this concluding section, we highlight a few important issues.

Bisexuality

Our analysis has focused on women who identify as lesbian and has not yet grappled with the complexities of women who identify as bisexual (e.g., Rust, 2000). A dual identity framework is clearly relevant to bisexual women who, like lesbians, inhabit both majority and minority social worlds. However, the connections that bisexual women have with their different communities may be qualitatively different from those of women who are exclusively lesbian.

Two issues illustrate the need for a more detailed examination of bisexual women's experiences. First, bisexual women may have difficulty finding support for the authenticity and validity of their sexual identity. Other people, both lesbian and heterosexual, may view bisexuality as a phase or as a form of short-term sexual experimentation. Although some bisexual women may be able to find support for their identity in bisexual organizations or social networks, these opportunities may not be available to many women. As a result, some bisexual women may feel marginalized both by heterosexual society and by lesbian/gay communities (Rust, 2003).

In addition, the experiences of bisexual women may differ depending on the gender of their current romantic partner. The fact that bisexual women can have other-gender sexual attractions and relationships and can act as heterosexual gives them knowledge of and entry into the larger society that is not available to lesbians. When a bisexual woman is partnered with a man, society at large is likely to perceive and treat her and her partner as heterosexual. In contrast, when partnered with a woman, a bisexual woman may experience a different set of assumptions and expectations from those around her. Research specifically addressing the experiences of bisexual women from a dual-identity or multiple-identity framework is currently lacking and would be a valuable future direction.

Ethnic Identity

Our model has contrasted women's connection to lesbian and heterosexual cultures, but has said little about how other important social identities, such as ethnicity, may affect these allegiances or, more broadly, the lives of lesbians. Two issues highlight some of the distinctive experiences of ethnic minority lesbians that merit detailed investigation.

For ethnic minority lesbians, mainstream society can have multiple meanings encompassing not only the larger heterosexual society but also women's own cultural community. The attitudes and values of a woman's cultural community and family of origin are of central importance (Fukuyama & Ferguson, 2000). As Greene (2000, p. 28) explained,

> Because family and community are important buffers against racism and sources of tangible support, the homophobia in these communities often leaves lesbians and gay men of color feeling vulnerable and less likely to be out in the same ways as their [W]hite counterparts.

Illustrative are comments by a Mexican American lesbian: "[I have] felt like . . . a traitor to my race when I acknowledge my love for women. I have felt like I've bought into the White 'disease' of lesbianism" (cited in Rust, 2003, p. 232). Thus, for some ethnic lesbians, developing a strong lesbian identity may jeopardize important sources of support from one's family of origin and cultural community.

Another issue for many ethnic lesbians is finding acceptance and affiliation with other lesbians. Some ethnic lesbians feel alienated from the general lesbian community, a community that is often perceived as dominated by White women and Euro American cultural values. In a small qualitative study, Loiacano (1989) found that Black lesbians often struggled to find validation within the lesbian community. Instead of identifying with predominantly White lesbian groups, some of the Black women Loiacano studied turned to "niche associations" (e.g., organizations specifically for Black lesbians) that reflected their multiple identities. On some college campuses in recent years, there has been a proliferation of specialized lesbian and gay organizations that address the interests of African American, Asian American, Latina, Jewish, and other lesbian students. The development of the dual-identity framework will be enriched by a detailed conceptual analysis of the issues facing ethnic minority women and other women with multiple social identities.

Methodological Issues

Translating a conceptual analysis of dual identity into empirical research raises important methodological questions. Research is needed to develop and validate a comprehensive dual-identity measure for lesbians. Although our adaptation of Phinney's (1992) measure of ethnic identity provides a useful starting point, a more carefully constructed measure is needed. A critical question in the development of new measures is the extent to which one measure will be applicable to all sexual-minority women or whether separate measures will be needed for bisexuals and/or women

from ethnic minority cultures. Further, although we have not considered the experiences of gay/bisexual men, measures to assess their experiences would also be valuable.

In constructing a new dual-identity measure, it will be important to consider carefully how best to conceptualize and assess the key components of lesbian and mainstream identity. For example, how broadly or narrowly should the lesbian and gay male community be conceptualized? Breadth might range from a national lesbian and gay male community (e.g., large organizations working to advance civil rights or Internet-based chat groups); local organizations that serve both lesbians and gay men (e.g., a gay synagogue or community service center); sex-segregated lesbian groups (e.g., a lesbian support group or coffee shop); or more narrowly still to an individual woman's own social network. Equally challenging is to conceptualize and assess lesbians' experiences with mainstream society. To what extent is mainstream identification influenced by lesbians' perceptions of heterosexual society in general versus lesbians' experiences with their own social network of heterosexual family members, friends, and coworkers? Research using focus groups and other qualitative methods may be especially valuable in mapping lesbians' understandings of these identity issues.

A final methodological issue concerns the distinction between two approaches to studying identity, one that focuses on the four identity categories (integrated, assimilated, lesbian-identified, and marginalized) and one that focuses on the two underlying dimensions (lesbian identification and mainstream identification). This distinction is readily apparent in studies of ethnic minorities in which some researchers have focused on the four distinct identity categories (e.g., Berry, Kim, Power, Young, & Bujaki, 1989) and others have focused instead on an individual's placement along the two core dimensions of minority and majority identification (e.g., Phinney, 1992). In understanding lesbian identity, both a dimensional and a categorical approach may prove useful.

A benefit of the categorical approach is that by highlighting all four quadrants researchers are encouraged to think about the full range of possible lesbian experiences. Although it is a challenge to recruit lesbians not affiliated with the lesbian community into research, they remain a theoretically important population. A dimensional approach, on the other hand, has certain advantages. In particular, a dimensional approach allows for a full range of identifications including those at the extremes and those with moderate levels of identifications. This has practical benefits in that it allows researchers to compare those who are more or less identified with mainstream and lesbian communities without requiring that their sample contains individuals with some absolute level of identification.

Values and Lesbian Identity

As a final note, it is important to recognize that the four lesbian identity patterns we have considered are not equally valued, either by heterosexuals or by lesbians themselves. Views about assimilationist women are illustrative. Some heterosexuals would clearly prefer that lesbians adopt an assimilationist stance, reflected in the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy. Lesbians who are open about their identity may be seen as flaunting their sexuality, and lesbians who work to extend gay civil rights are sometimes defined as seeking special privileges. In contrast, some contemporary lesbians are critical of assimilationist women, whose efforts to publicly downplay their sexual identity and to be treated as an individual are viewed as old-fashioned at best or symptomatic of internalized homophobia at worst. Lesbian activists, recognizing the importance of public visibility in advancing gay rights, may also question the decision of assimilationist women to keep a low public profile, especially if these women live and work in relatively tolerant settings. A challenge for scientific researchers is to investigate these identity patterns in ways that test value judgments rather than assuming their validity.

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