

Zane Ballard, M.S.

MUID: 006134821

Abstract

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer individuals have been shown to experience significantly more negative health outcomes than do heterosexuals, commonly attributed to sexual minority stress. Research to date has insufficiently explained the processes by which stigma exposure becomes felt, internalized stigma and has not accounted for resemblance between presentation of mental health effects of sexual minority stress and of post-traumatic responses. Researchers have posited traumatic invalidation may partially explain the development and manifestations of reactions to sexual minority stress. The current study proposed and tested a measure of traumatic invalidation, conceptualized as instances of interpersonal, identity-based invalidation among sexual minorities. Traumatic invalidation was examined as a potential mediator of the effects of experiences associated with experiences of invalidation—childhood gender nonconformity and heterosexist experiences—on symptoms of PTSD. Additional qualitative analysis (thematic analysis) was conducted to explore the nature of situations rated by participants as invalidating and reactions thereto. Exploratory factor analysis supported the presence of a two-factor solution, and the factor selected for alignment with the traumatic invalidation construct demonstrated associations with theoretically related variables. Childhood gender nonconformity, heterosexist experiences, and traumatic invalidation were associated with PTSD symptoms. Traumatic invalidation showed evidence of mediating the effects of childhood gender nonconformity only among those assigned male at birth. Thematic analysis identified experiences described as most invalidating, as well as trends in reported emotional and cognitive responses. Findings support further investigation of traumatic invalidation as a particularly damaging dimension of stigma experiences.